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Communication inside the LRA: Militarization of Acoli Language, a Cultural Patriotism or mere Rebel Indoctrination?

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In an ideal situation, there should be no positive effect of the LRA war in Northern Uganda, but what of the real testimonies that the LRA war brought in many development partners with school fees scholarships through institutions like Acoli Education Initiatives, Invisible Children, Windle Trust Uganda among others. But where are they going to pay for school, the northern children in ‘war affected areas’, and others up to universities, if it were not because of the devastating effect of the war on Education? This is still without the many successful grants and PhD projects completed within Uganda and around the globe based on LRA attachment to spirituality, transitional justice or interrogating the Acoli traditional justice system versus international laws. A debate can be constructed, if necessary, that the authorities on the LRA scholarships are from the global north -meaning the war pulled scholars from their comfort zones. Secondly, what do we owe this to? For lack of a better word, other scholars would call it the ‘unintended’ positive effect of the war. This journal paper borrows the philosophy that if you are telling a story, it should be told up-side-down. Chimamanda Ngozi, the Nigerian writer, baptised it as a one-sided story and called it the danger of a single story (Adichie 2009). Schulz, Apio et al (2024) tell us about the ‘Love and Care in the LRA’, which this paper calls bravery, with all the horror stories of the LRA! This paper is grounded in some of these philosophies of Adichie (2009) and Schulz, Apio et al. (2024) of telling all sides of the story, attempting to reconstruct the LRA use of Acoli language throughout their military operations as a demonstration of Acoli cultural attachment, loyalty and depiction of Acoli cultural patriotism or activism argued by this paper. This was through using secondary data review and holding in-depth purposive interviews with four former LRA returnees plus two cultural chiefs, including extracting the archival journalistic records of the first author, who was an active journalist in northern Uganda for over 10 years between 2010 and 2021. This journal paper, however, does not underscore the pain and sufferings, the LRA brought on the people of Uganda and other neighbouring countries. However, this paper just gives an ontological side of the LRA, which is hard to find in terms of their particular role in promoting Acoli culture by using Acoli language as their military operational medium of communication.

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INTRODUCTION

For this paper, we argue that Acoli Cultural patriotism is the protection at all costs, attachment, pride and love for Acoli cultural interest, which interest could be cultural preservation or exhibition for the world to appreciate and adopt. And where possible, act as the cultural tourism strength of the Acoli people and *Mato Oput's* concept of the Acolis is one of the most exhibited traditional justice systems in the world that partly presents the richness of Acoli culture and tradition (Allen, 2007; Tshimba, 2015; Oomen, 2016). The authors root that global attempt or use of art and culture among other mediums to popularise Acoli Culture by an Acoli personality without fear, favour or shame, including grounded profiled history of classical leaders, tribes from the Acoli setting deemed at the promotion of the Acoli cultural pride, history, supremacy like the Lamogi-Rebellion of 1911, the paper identifies such as Acoli cultural patriotic display (Otunnu, 2016).

Meanwhile, many foundational scholars of culture and linguistics agree that communication is the building block of patriotism (Carey, 1989; Dewey, 1927). Hence, communicating in a particular language also brings people together and can connect them for social, political, and economic interests faster than when using a foreign language. This paper further advances the

handful of distinguished personalities from Acoli land who have promoted Acoli language or culture on the international scene; for instance, Okot Pa Bitek, Acoli legendary writer, philosopher and poet, turned the universe upside down with his school of songwriting style - painted with vivid imagery in *Wer Pa Lawino* or *song of Lawino* (Lo Liyong, 1997). This book by Okot was originally written in the language of the Acoli people; however, later, it was translated into English (Lo Liyong, 1993). The book also presents Okot as one of the Acoli patriots who successfully created literary debate based on Acoli proverbs, idioms deeply attached to some of the cultural beliefs of the Acolis (P'Bitek, 1983; Okumu, 2021).

Such a personality is also exhibited by Geoffrey Oryema, an Acoli musician who was exiled in France. Oryema, who fled Uganda after the brutal death of his father, Erinayo Oryema, the then Inspector General of Police during the Presidential term of Iddi Amin Dada in Uganda, is an Acoli global cultural icon through his lyrics that were majorly in Acoli Language, notably the *land of Anaka, Omera John, Kel Kweyo, Lapwony* among others, these, sold him as one of the contemporary biggest Acoli cultural exports through his tunes with Acoli touch (Lagace, 2023). This paper is also sensitive to acknowledge that the musician's will of cremation after his

demise, contrary to Acoli culture of proper burial rites, doesn't completely remove the cultural patriotism he exhibited on international stages, playing Acoli traditional instruments (Lukeme, Adungu) and making his lyrics in Acoli dialect to exhibit and interest many people in knowing and taking an interest in Acoli Culture (Iheka, 2023).

The paper also draws the debate from the historical ontology of colonialism in Uganda that the famous Rwot (Chief) Awich of Payira, who was a thorn in the colonialist feet, shaped the debate for cultural attachment and pride as he defied the British rule in his chieftdom by refusing to sign a treaty with them and rather accepted to be imprisoned by the British (Otim, 2020; Otim, 2022).

Having briefly profiled the above personalities, this journal paper regards Acoli cultural patriots for their work in protecting at all costs, as well as promoting the culture using various forms of art and classical, patriotic leadership style in any way, provided the goal is protection in all costs, preservation, promotion, and exhibition of Acoli Culture to the world. In this flow of argument, the authors advance the debate that even the Lord's Resistance Army rebel (LRA) led by warlord Joseph Kony, still among the most wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), including other world police agencies for alleged war crimes against humanity and accusations of mass murder and all sort of atrocities including violation of international laws is also still found by this paper to have demonstrated Acoli cultural patriotism. This is in the context that he commanded the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to only use the Acoli language as a rebel communication medium, although scholars have placed the use of Acoli language in the LRA operation as pure indoctrination. The authors find it scholarly appropriate in this context to discuss the ontology of Joseph Kony side, which is hard to find in the protection, preservation and promotion of Acoli Culture through the militarisation of Acoli language that cultural prism may ontologically discuss.

Statement of the Problem

The National Defence Forces in the traditional East African block that comprises majorly Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Rwanda majority use Swahili or Kiswahili as the operational language of the military, meaning instead of using other languages, all military command and drills are done in Swahili (Soi, 2020). The literature reviewed also confirms that the LRA operated in many countries, including Central Africa Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, South Sudan speak very many local languages or local dialects ranging from *Swahili*, *Lingala*, *Arabic*, local dialects of the Zande tribe in CAR and South Sudan in Wau region, Dinka tribe in South Sudan among others, despite all these possible influences on LRA operational communication medium, the LRA never adopted any language to use in military operation apart from their native Acoli dialect (Kelly et. al ,2016)

Joseph Kony, the Commander in Chief of the LRA, is reported to have directed that no other language should be used in the LRA and maintained his native language, Acoli, as the military language of the LRA and those who were abducted from other countries who didn't know Acoli, were also commanded to learn Acoli as the rebel military operational medium of communication in the LRA. However, scholars have termed this indoctrination (Kelly et al. 2016). This paper objectively argues that the indoctrination perspective on using Acoli language as a communication medium in the LRA leaves out the cultural prism that Acoli Language belongs to the Acoli people and not just the LRA. The study also aims to give ontological views on Acoli cultural protection, promotion, and contribution of the LRA through the impact of their actions and operations, which others are deemed violent but ironically ended up putting Acoli culture and language in the international scene for research interest (Nistor, 2023).

This study, therefore, through reviews of secondary data and four in-depth interviews with former junior commanders of the LRA plus two

Acoli cultural chiefs, attempted to reconstruct cultural patriotism according to this journal paper on the use of Acoli language as a communication medium of the LRA from the ontological cultural prism.

Objective of the Study

The study aimed to reconstruct and discuss the use of Acoli language as a communication medium in the LRA operation from the ontological cultural prism of contextualising cultural patriotism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Annexing Joseph Kony, the LRA warlord, as a cultural patriot in this context is ontologically appropriate because many scholars agree objectively that Joseph Kony told the Acoli elders during the peace talks that one of the reasons why he waged war was in protests of male sexual rape on the Acoli people commonly known as *Tekgungu* in Acoli language, considered dehumanising, and at times it was reportedly done in front of the family members of the victims as part of the weapon of war (Baines, 2014; Esuruku, 2012; Finnstrom 2009:64)

A recent study investigation on male sexual rape reportedly done on the Acoli people by the National Resistance Army (NRA) between the 1980s to 1990s while pacifying Acoli subregion when they (NRA) had taken over the government by 1986 revealed little knowledge on the extent and scale of *tek-gungu* (male sexual rape) including the difficulties experienced in quantifying the numbers of victims, but is evidenced that the men in northern Uganda suffered male sexual rape (Schulz, 2021).

Amone-P'Olak (2018) and Baines (2014) note indoctrination and the mass murder carried out by the Lord's Resistance Army, including rape and forced marriages within the LRA, which contravenes Acoli cultural courtship rule of *cuna*, slow courtship process between the woman and the man including dowry payment to the family of the woman, the jungle bush life didn't value this. Baines (2014) also discusses Kony interest of the new- Acoli (Acoli Manyen) which this paper

highly acknowledges and forms part of the reviews. To be specific, Joseph's Kony views of the new Acoli (Acoli Manyen) based on the benefit of the in-depth interviews this study carried out reveals that Kony said Acoli people who were not in support of his rebellion were already brained washed by the National Resistance Movement of President Yoweri Museveni Kaguta and all deserve to die at some point because the only Acoli 'seed' which is original and shall preserve the true Acoli forever in the face of civilisation and attack on the Acoli Race, is the LRA, the army, *tipu maleng*, good spirit has chosen to defend the Acoli interest.

Gaps in Literature.

Having reviewed this literature, there is a gap to demonstrate the wilful inmost spirit of Joseph Kony in alledging protection of his culture for instance, his stand on male sexual rape, a big taboo in Acoli culture is never linked to his patriotic view on Acoli culture but watered as one of the reasons he started the LRA. And his insertion that he is not a 'rebel' but rather a military 'opposition' confirmed by this study with the former LRA returnees interviewed is also scanty in many LRA war scholarship, yet it could go in-depth illustrating his other perspective on rebellion not profiled by writers and scholars. This study addresses this gap by presenting ontological side of the LRA in using Acoli language as a military communication medium.

However much literature claims indoctrination of the LRA on Abductees, still there is scanty literature to show how this affected the returning LRA of Acoli origin within the community of CAR, DRC and South Sudan. This study addresses this gap by raising concern that some former LRA combatants, majorly of Acoli origin successfully escaped from the LRA captivity but met their death in the hands of Communities of CAR, DRC and South Sudan. Some of these returnees even Joseph Kony, the LRA Chief Commander, may not account for them directly.

METHODOLOGY

The study used secondary data from different journals and books, desk research and carried out in-depth purposive interviews with four former officers of the LRA, where two were females, including two Acoli cultural chiefs, to reconstruct the notion of cultural patriotism of Joseph Kony's LRA to this very study context, elaborately explained in the introduction of this work. The interviews were transcribed from Acoli into English and since all the authors are of i Acoli native, there was no need to use a translator. The study was also sensitive to the saturation nature of qualitative study since it is meant to just get the in-depth perception of the respondents on whether Joseph Kony exhibited cultural patriotism or if his approach to communication within the LRA was just for indoctrination purposes and also queried why the LRA kept their native language and refused to adopt any medium of communication for military operation apart from Acoli. This study also enjoys the rich journalistic archival records of the first author who practised journalism actively in northern Uganda for over 10 years from 2010 to 2021, with profound notes referrals of his visit to Obbo in Central African Republic (CAR) in 2014 to expand limited scholarship on the implication of the popularised indoctrination of the LRA on Acoli people as a tribe and the other communities the LRA operated in line with the use of Acoli Language as a communication medium.

Methodological Constraint

The author couldn't have interviewed Joseph Kony, the LRA Chief Commander, directly, who could have been very instrumental in this study. The two cultural chiefs sampled purposively may not represent the conclusive position of the over 50 cultural chiefs in Acoli subregion who form the Council of Chiefs, headed by the Paramount Chief (Lawii Rwodi), but for the ontological perspective, the sample and secondary evidence from literature was enough to create the debate on LRA choice of Acoli language as a communication medium in the LRA operations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Acoli Language or Dialect as Militarized Language of the LRA

Chilton (1987) notes that to qualify a language as militarised, there should be evidence to adduce, especially on the ideological, militaristic effect on that particular language. In this context, the journal paper stretch that the Lord Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony whose home area is in Odek sub-county, part of the greater Gulu (now Omoro district), fought with the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF, Uganda government forces) in the northern part of Uganda for over 20 years and later moved in the neighbouring countries of DRC, CAR and South Sudan but was still pursued by the same forces with an amalgamation of African Union and United States of America Forces who were stationed at Obbo, CAR.

There is scholarly evidence and reports, including records from the International Criminal Court (ICC) Proceedings, that Joseph Kony, a native of Acoli land, who runs the LRA on the ideological presumption of spirituality extended abduction of children, killing and raiding villages to these other countries like CAR and DRC but maintained his native language as the medium of communication inside the LRA with express instruction that nobody should speak a language other than Acoli, inside the LRA camp and when on 'operations'. The newly 'recruits' through abduction, of course, were forced to learn Acoli within weeks or months' time as training in handling a gun and other rebel military tactics was commanded in the Acoli dialect; this forced many people who were arrested, conscripted in the LRA from the DRC and CAR to forget their mother languages or dialects but rather adopts LRA language of operation (Nistor, 2023; Kelly et al. 2016).

The militaristic effect is that speaking the Acoli language in CAR or DRC directly links one to the LRA rebels and the community exercised a lot of stigmas on Acoli Language. Kelly et al. (2016) report that many children and individuals who returned from captivity from these countries to their local villages had forgotten their local

dialects but were blatantly speaking Acoli Language and were highly stigmatised and clearly associated with the violence the LRA exhibited on their community. This stigma made families again take time to teach them (LRA returnees) their dialect afresh. It's from this that the study draws the Acoli language ideological orientation of the LRA and militarily links the association of Acoli language as a symbol of war in these countries, making the journal paper grounded that, indeed, the LRA militarised Acoli language since hearing Acoli in these countries was hearing rebels or armies coming for abduction or call it forceful recruitment and conscription into the LRA.

Acoli Cultural Patriotism Through the Use of Acoli Language by the LRA

Grove (1919) puts down into detail the customs, traditions, and norms of the Acoli People, including childbirth initiation rites of children and also goes in-depth to talk about spiritual attachment at the homestead level, among others. For tracing Joseph Kony, the LRA warlord, as an Acoli boychild, this scholarship adds that the rites of keeping a boy child in the house for three days after birth before exposure outside are strictly followed, that within this period, the bathing of the child normally is done by another person, not the biological mother, either the uncles or any of the grand-mothers (Paternal or maternal or any elderly woman in the neighbourhood well versed with the rites) because Acoli tradition dictates that if the biological mother in the process of bathing the boy child within this period, touches even by mistake, the genitals of the boy, there is confirmed the likelihood of him being impotent for life, to date- this is non-negotiable rite practised and followed cautiously in most Acoli homesteads. This is the same rite that Joseph Kony, as an Acoli boy child, went through in his childhood, and one can draw and understand it. Indeed, the claim of spirituality and cultural attachment to the LRA is definitely not abstract because it is grounded in Acoli traditional culture (Grove, 1919).

For this journal paper, our take is that Acoli cultural patriotism is the protection, attachment,

pride, and love for Acoli cultural interests, which could be for cultural protection at all costs, preservation, or exhibition for the world to appreciate and adopt. And where possible, act as a cultural ambassador to strengthen Acoli cultural tourism with the intent and mission to lure many people outside Acoli region of different cultural orientations to love the culture of the Acoli people or to sell it for enquiries of its richness.

This paper adopted cultural patriotism or activism because in-depth interviews with the cultural chiefs for this very paper reveal that Acoli council of chiefs headed by the Paramount Chief of Acoli (Lawii Rwodi) never gave authority to Joseph Kony and his LRA to promote Acoli culture, agenda or fight the war he is involved with, on behalf of the people of Acoli. This comment by the Acoli chiefs for this study detaches LRA warlord Joseph Kony from being the official ambassador, spokesperson of the Acoli people, but his actions as an Acoli are personal to him, despite international alert of Acoli culture by his way of origin and operations. Therefore, it means the ideological and deliberate use of Acoli language by the LRA in the context of our argument is purely because of the invention of Joseph Kony from his innermost patriotic or activism will as an Acoli that the majority of his former followers or LRA returnees, adore him for. As an Acholi cultural patriot, because of his constant lecture on Acoli culture reported by the returnees while in the bush, this paper picks the use of Acoli language as the epitome of justifying his cultural patriotism to keep the LRA intact in communications. Despite roaming in other countries, which could have distorted their native dialect (Acoli language) or identity because of the language pluralism they had encountered in the different countries they operated.

Using Acoli Language to Keep Communication Intact

In-depth interviews with the LRA returnees revealed that Joseph Kony loves Acoli culture and, from time to time, reminds his combatants to uphold their (Acoli) culture so they (LRA) would not lose their ways in the jungle. One of the

returnees shared this during in-depth interviews conducted in May 2024 from Gulu City.

Kony said the moment we allow other languages and cultures to take over us, we shall lose our ways and directed us to constantly use Acoli in our operations. He said even the people we arrest must be taught Acoli for easy communication and to keep the team intact since many languages shall divide and scatter the team.

Using Acoli Language to Evade the Enemies

The study also found out that the LRA had a philosophical directive from their commander-in-chief that translating some of the Acoli words, like idioms, is very difficult in any language, including English, so to evade being noticed, his troops are better off using Acoli language.

We used Acoli language as the military language to evade foreigners and it worked in our favour because they would not understand our communication, with the exception of some areas in South Sudan like Pajok and others that had Acolis; I hope you know the Acolis came from Bahrel-Ghazal in South Sudan.

Lo Liyong (1993) confirms this former LRA returnee narrative, somehow, in a literary debate when he said the English version of *Wer Pa Lawino* waters down the meaning of strong idioms and proverbs Okot Pa Bitek used in the Acoli version; hence, this literary analysis marries this respondent's submission on the matter at hand. Many scholarly writings have constantly carried out glaring crude Acoli words used in the LRA war scholarships, such as *ting-ting*, *Tekungu*, *Acoli Manyen*, among others, to keep their fresh originality for effect on the subject (Baines, 2014; Schulz, 2021; Finnstrom, 2009:64)

The respondent added that this tactic worked so well earlier in Uganda when the rebellion had just started because the LRA had intelligence that the UPDF had few Acolis in the forces and the majority were not at the Intelligence strategic level.

We later learned that the UPDF was using fellow Acolis to tap our Radio messages because if they were to use other tribes, they would get nothing completely later. Joseph Kony also learned that the international community (USA) were recruiting Acoli personnel because they had sent troops in CAR

A former female combatant said that sometimes learning Acoli language becomes natural as upon joining the group (LRA), one shall only find people conversing in Acoli and naturally, one must take personal initiative to learn and be part of the group; according to her, this happens in areas that hostility is low and she acknowledges that the Arabs when in Khartoum didn't know Acoli but since they were friendly forces, some LRA leaders including Joseph Kony himself could talk to them in Arabic although that was more external for relationship and support.

Using Acoli Language to Preserve it as the Next National Language of Uganda.

The LRA returnees also said Joseph Kony had a dream of leading Uganda and always gave hope to his fighters that when they took over Uganda, Acoli language would be the national language of Uganda and everybody would be taught the language. One of the cultural chiefs interviewed said the LRA warlord might not be a hero for the many bad things associated with him, although upon mirroring what he did on Acoli Language and seeing how many Acoli parents contemporarily including the ones in the diaspora don't bother to teach their children, Acoli, makes him wonder what would happen to Acoli language in 20 years from now.

Although we didn't send him to be an Acoli Ambassador, he did well in encouraging Acoli language. The children that returned knew Acoli. Look now, Acoli children, when they come for holidays, only speak English and other Local Languages, like Luganda, which is very common in my village during Holidays. Their parents are not even bothered. This is not captivity!

LRA Rebel Alleged Indoctrination Implication on the Acolis and Sub-Cultured ‘Acolis’

The concept of indoctrination of the LRA has been raised by many scholars, which in their perspectives is right and indeed, the scholars report that the people in CAR, DRC had associated Acoli language with violence and isolated their native children who had returned from the LRA Captivity and were speaking Acoli. This journal paper acknowledges but adds that the scholarship around indoctrination of the LRA of other tribes from (CAR, South Sudan and DRC) conscripted in the LRA highly popularised had limited linking on the Acoli people as a tribe and its direct implication on the LRA returnees who were of Acoli origin.

This journal paper adds (attached in appendices) that the Acoli leaders learned of this and, in 2012, joined a high-level meeting in Bangui in CAR. The meeting brought together peace-loving actors in the name of the *Regional Civil Society Taskforce* that comprises members from Uganda (majorly Acoli leaders), South Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Notably, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ALPI), the body that had united all the religious leaders in the Acoli-Region for peace, Gulu District Reconciliation and Peace Team, majorly comprising of Gulu district leaders and Ker-Kal Kwaro Acoli, the traditional institution that brings the council of traditional Chiefs together to forge a way out.

This journal paper also reports that an undocumented number of LRA returnees who were major of Acoli origin were killed by the local community in CAR and DRC as they had successfully escaped from the LRA captivity, but because the local community, symbolised Acolis to violence, they were reportedly killed with worst scenarios in CAR. By 2014, April, it took the intervention of Acoli Paramount Chief (Lawii Rwodi), Rwot David Onen Acana II and Oyella

Betty Bigombe, a peace icon on the LRA War, to go to Obbo, Central Africa Republic and apologies to the CAR community, requesting them to spare the returning Acoli Children who might pass through their homes since they were never the mastermind of LRA but rather victims as their children.

The LRA Came here as Acoli community; we never sent them anywhere to commit this atrocity. And because of this, on my own behalf and on behalf of the Acoli . I am apologising to the people of Central Africa for the suffering that they are undergoing, even if it's not our making; I think it's right because, as a community of Acoli, most of the LRA are our children and we take this responsibility (first author's journalistic soundbite archival record as of 2/April, 2014, Obbo, CAR)

The journal paper with the first author's note as of 2014 also reports that the killing of the LRA returnees of Acoli origin was neutralised by the United States of America Forces who deployed together with the African Union (AU) Force that included the UPDF in CAR pursuing Joseph Kony further with intent to completely end the war (Forest 2014). The American forces, commanded by a colonel, introduced motivational incentives where, through the local communities, whoever brings an LRA returnee alive to their headquarters in Obbo gets some dollars per declaration of a fugitive LRA rebel. This neutralised the local community and coupled with the apology of Rwot David Onen Acana II and Betty Bigombe, many defections were reported afterwards. This journal paper on the above draws the attention of the people that Dominic Ongwen, the only LRA Chief convicted and imprisoned at the ICC, was also got by these standing forces who were in CAR <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30705649>.

Below the author provides some of his journalistic records to support the above submission.

Plate 1: The leaders who attended the Bangui meeting in 2012



Plate 2: The first author on the right in 2014, pose with the then commander of the USA standby force to end the LRA war from Obbo, in Central Africa Republic.



Plate 3: African Union and UPDF stand by force display to Rwot David Onen Acana and Betty Bigombe what they had recovered from the LRA in April 2014.



Plate 4: Betty Bigombe on the left and Rwot David Onen Acana II on extreme right being walked by Now, Brigadier Michael Kabango Chief of staff of the UPDF Land forces, who was then a Colonel and contingent Commander of the UPDF in Obbo, CAR



CONCLUSION

This paper argues that there is evidence to show that Joseph Kony, the LRA warlord, loves and prides himself in his culture, and the use of Acoli Language as a military operational language of the LRA was strategic to keep his team intact. The atrocities that resulted in forcing people he conscripted to learn the Acoli language by force, termed as part of his indoctrination and control tactics, can be appreciated by this paper as the practice of war for survival since he feared, according to the interviews of the returnees that the integration of another language would keep the team off guard and the implication of the alleged indoctrination equally impacted on the Acolis who had successfully escaped from the LRA.

On this note, the paper calls for proper profiling of the LRA returnees, whether of Acoli origin or not, with scanty visibility in the international media or scholarly records but met their fate in the hands of communities in CAR, DRC and South Sudan due to the violent symbolic nature of the LRA on them. This is because many families in the Acoli subregion or these other countries the LRA operated in are still waiting for their children to return, especially those who have not heard about the death of their children in the LRA captivity and were told by other returnees that

their children had escaped successfully from the LRA. The journal paper painfully predicts that they could be waiting for shadows without these in-depth investigations into this death.

This paper also notes that the spiritual attachment of the LRA caused a big debate at the International Criminal Court (ICC) during the trial and conviction of Dominic Ongwen, the former top Commanders of the LRA, elaborately reported by Nistor (2023); this journal paper notes with pride that Dominic Ongwen spoke Acoli language throughout until his sentencing. The International Criminal Court was also compelled to hire Acoli language speakers as translators. The international media covering the court live was washed with crude Acoli language as Dominic Ongwen was speaking his mind. Consultation was also high for Acoli to English translation of documents by many media organisations and institutions of justice nationally and internationally beyond the ICC court. Because one of the proponents and agents of Joseph Kony, the Acoli cultural patriot, was at the international court dock to answer queries about war crimes and gross human rights violations. Therefore, the trial ended up bringing unintended positive effects as it exposed Acoli culture through other lenses and got over ten northerners employed at the ICC, directly and indirectly, both in Uganda and the Netherlands.

On the argument of the LRA contravening Acoli culture by staying with females for free without paying dowry as formed by Baines (2014), we want to say the Bible that many people believe in, like in Genesis, in chapter 19 verse 31 talks of the Lot, who after his wife had turned in to salt, was lured into sex through wine by his daughters because there were no men and their father according to the story was the hope of procreation, a great incest to fulfil the procreation story, this scriptural allusion, juxtaposes the action of the LRA warlord, Joseph Kony, the LRA war chief with the dream of *Acoli Manyen* (the New Acoli) wanted continuity of the Acoli race in his own personal philosophy and ended up with desperate measures that cost the abductees and their whole community which he has not escaped since he is still needed at the ICC (Kutz, 2005; Peterson, 2016; Clark, 2010)

In conclusion, this journal paper does not underscore the pain and suffering the LRA took to the people of Uganda and other neighbouring countries. However, this journal paper just gives an ontological side of the LRA, which is hard to find in terms of their particular role in promoting Acoli culture by using the Acoli language as their military language. Joseph Kony, as the commander in chief of the LRA, if he weren't a cultural patriot to this argument, could have chosen *Swahili*, the dominant of the East African Region for most Forces or Arabic since he spent a lot of time in South Sudan and Sudan but he rooted for his native Acoli language, as the military operational language to keep his force intact.

The journal paper finds this appealing to Acoli cultural scholarship. Hence, this study agrees with Schulz, Apio et al. (2024), who acknowledge that most of the writings on LRA are full of horrors, and yet there are things that could be painful but necessary to reconstruct a smile from some part of it. This, Chimamanda Ngozi, the Nigerian writer, calls *the danger of a single story* (Adichie (2009)). Ontologically, we argue that just like Schulz, Apio et al. (2024), this is another second story of the LRA.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: RESOLUTION Of the Regional Civil Society Task Force (RCSTF) meeting held in Bangui, Central African Republic

3rd to 6th September 2012

We, the Religious, Traditional and Civic leaders, and Civil Society Organisations hailing from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army conflict, gathered at JM Residences Hotel in Bangui, CAR for the 5th Regional Civil Society Task Force meeting;

Guided by our desire to;

- Share appropriate experiences and information in order to understand better and appreciate the circumstances in the respective countries affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict;
- Obtain a deeper understanding of the LRA local dynamics in the affected areas;
- Discuss the peace building perspective and implications for consensus action in the region and the numerous roles that can be played by various stakeholders in the LRA context;
- Continue to pursue strategies and efforts to mitigate the disastrous effects of the LRA conflict in the region and eventually find a lasting solution;

- 4) Call for response to the needs of the affected communities in terms of humanitarian support, psychosocial services and income-generating activities.
- 5) Commit fully to our moral obligation to save the lives of many innocent children abducted against their will and do what it takes to facilitate their safe return and reintegration in their respective communities.
- 6) Call on national governments and international communities to support community centres that can contribute to the psychosocial healing of returnees and the affected communities, particularly women and young people.
- 7) Impress our respective governments to put in place the necessary legislation to grant Amnesty to the defectors and promote reconciliation.
- 8) Recognise the intertwined nature between the Mbororo and the LRA conflict and contribute to addressing this issue peacefully on a regional scale.
- 9) Undertake activities in our respective countries and regionally to:-
 - a) Collect pertinent information relating to the LRA conflict, document it, disseminate it, and archive it for posterity.
 - b) Reach out to the LRA to encourage their safe return to the communities.
 - c) Reach out in solidarity to the affected communities;
 - d) Contribute to the issue of protecting civilians in a holistic way. Ensure that it becomes central to response strategies.
 - e) Continue Advocacy efforts at local, national, regional and international levels.

We Resolved as follows;

- 1) To continue a collective pursuit to engage policymakers in the respective countries and advocate for peaceful strategies for resolving the conflict.
- 2) Engage our Governments and Parliaments to be more present in LRA-affected areas that are isolated and far from the capitals with negligible services, security and communication infrastructure.
- 3) In light of the LRA's known record of reprisals, we call for no offensive operations against the LRA without effective measures taken to protect civilians.

The Struggle Continues!!

Severally:

- 1) JUPEDEC (Jeunesse Unie pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le developpement Communautaire) – Central Africa Republic
- 2) The Interchurch Commission – for Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.
- 3) SAIPD–Solidarite Assistance Integrale aux Personnes Demunies, DRC
- 4) CDJPR – ARU, Commission Diocesaine de Justice Paix et Reconciliation, DRC.
- 5) APRU - Association pour la Promotion Rurale, DRC
- 6) ROFU – Reseau des Organisations Feminines des Ueles, DRC
- 7) Toto Chan – South Sudan
- 8) Acholi Religious Leader's Peace Initiative (ARLPI) - Uganda
- 9) Gulu District Reconciliation & Peace Team (DRPT) -Uganda
- 10) Justice and Peace Commission – Gulu (JPC)
- 11) Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) - Uganda
- 12) Invisible Children
- 13) Conciliation Resources - UK