

Reintegration of former child soldiers

The reintegration process in Gulu, Uganda,
from an ecological perspective

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Abstract

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Child soldiers are one of the major problems in modern society. In the case of northern Uganda, child soldiers (or formerly abducted children) have been used for decades in the conflict between the government and the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army. Uganda is now facing a great challenge rehabilitating those children. The purpose of this study has been to describe and analyze the reintegration process of formerly abducted children from an ecological perspective with focus on networks surrounding the child. I aimed to increase the understanding of reintegration with the children's backgrounds as a starting point. This has been achieved through contacts with a local rehabilitation center. The information has been collected through eleven qualitative interviews with formerly abducted children, their guardians, social workers and culturally well-informed individuals. It has been analyzed from the perspective of the Ecology of Human Development. The results show the importance of local culture in the reintegration process, as well as the importance of networking and keeping a holistic perspective. Although much is being done today, a lot more could be achieved through an increased capacity of different networks surrounding the children.

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Preface

For two and a half years, I have been in contact with NGOs in the war-affected district of Gulu in northern Uganda. I got in touch with these NGOs while traveling in Gulu and have, since then, been cooperating with some of them through a Swedish NGO. I would now like to take this opportunity to deepen my knowledge about the effects of this conflict and to examine the rehabilitative work in this district. I think that studies about this conflict are very important, since there is a lot to be done in this area and since few people in the world know about it. As a future social worker, I am aware that children are very important to work with. I know the significance of providing these war-affected children with support as early as possible. This is not only an issue in northern Uganda, although this study aims to increase the knowledge of reintegrational aspects regarding former child soldiers in this region. In order to prepare myself for this study, I attended a short course in treatment of traumatized refugees, which provided me with important basic knowledge.

I would like to thank all of the respondents, who willingly availed their time and knowledge to this study, the staff at Gusco, my supervisors Bodil Rasmusson from the School of Social Work at Lund University and Stephen A. Lamony from the Ugandan Coalition for the International Criminal Court, Geoffrey from Gulu District NGO Forum, my interpreter Francis, and last but not least the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for their assistance. Their assistance was very helpful and without it, this study would not have been possible.

1. Background and problem description

1.1 The history of the conflict and the social consequences¹

The conflict in northern Uganda has been called one of the most forgotten conflicts of today and that is no doubt a correct description. The conflict between the rebel group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government started more than 20 years ago. The LRA is headed by Joseph Kony, who has been said to want to rule the country according to the Ten Commandments of Christianity. However, some people say that the religious aspect is of secondary interest. Kony also claims that he's possessed by spirits who guide him and that he wants to wipe out the evil powers in the world. It has also been said that he wants to produce a new, clean generation of Acholi that would rule the country. By fighting for the LRA, the children would become clean and free of sin, and especially the children born in captivity were considered to be clean. All together, the real agenda of the LRA has been debated for long (Behrend, 1999; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2003).

A central part of the conflict is that the LRA has been killing its own people, the Acholi. The LRA's strategy has been to abduct children and force them to participate in the conflict, thus, often forcing the children to kill people in their surroundings and sometimes even their families. Children have been forced to perform various brutal acts in order to indoctrinate them into the rebel group and keep them from escaping. Many stories tell of children who have escaped, but who have been caught again, resulting in the other children being forced to collectively kill the child who escaped. During their time with the LRA, the boys have been used as combatants and the girls have mainly been used as sex slaves for the rebel leaders, but even they have participated in combat. Many girls have given birth to their own children while with the LRA. Recent numbers state that about 30 000 children have been abducted and forced to combat for the LRA since the beginning of the conflict (Holmgren, 2006). The age of the abducted children ranges from as young as five years up to eighteen years and the time they spend with the LRA ranges from a couple of months up to more than a decade.

¹ Because of my general knowledge obtained through my time in Gulu, parts of section 1.1 and 1.2 are written without references.

Because of the conflict, there are a lot of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in northern Uganda working with children and the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. One of these is Gulu Support the Children Organisation (Gusco – see section 5.1 for more information), which provided the base for my study. Fortunately, many children have managed to escape from the LRA. Arriving at the rehabilitation center does not mean the end of the children's problems, however. One of the greatest challenges is to reintegrate the children back into society. Because of the children's history and acts during their time with the LRA, many people in the community have problems accepting them back. It is especially difficult for girls with children, so called child mothers. Even though they still are very young, they have left childhood and involuntarily entered into womanhood.

Not only the abducted children are affected by the conflict, but so is the rest of the community. Estimates show that up to 95 % of the population in the North has been living in internally displaced people camps (IDP camps). The health conditions in these camps have been very poor, depending on a lack of resources as well as on crowdedness. The lack of teachers, doctors and medicine has been obvious. The inhabitants of these camps have had very restricted movements, since the outskirts of camps were very insecure. If people left camps to cultivate or such, they risked being abducted, raped, mutilated or killed. As a result of this, people have been completely dependent of food deliveries from the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), as well as of other non-food items such as blankets from other humanitarian organizations. At the same time, they depended on cultivation in order to get enough food, since the food rations from WFP wasn't enough (Pham et al., 2005; Suarez and St. Jean, 2005; Weeks, 2002).

The state army, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), has been responsible for protecting the people in the IDP camps. However, soldiers have often committed atrocities and abuses on camp inhabitants and restricted people's movements in and out of the camps greatly. Soldiers also represent a majority of the sex buyers in the camps, contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The fear of the UPDF has by many people been as great as the fear of the LRA has been (ibid.).

1.2 The current situation

During the summer of 2006, peace negotiations between the LRA and the Ugandan government were initiated by the government of southern Sudan. On the 29th of August, a ceasefire took effect (BBC News 060829). The Ugandan government has promised the LRA leaders amnesty. However, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will not withdraw their arrest warrants for the rebel leaders, causing the rebel leaders to put a halt to the negotiations (Daily Monitor 061113). Even though the negotiations are proceeding slowly, the situation in the region is more peaceful than it has been in the past twenty years. Kony has addressed the people on radio and told them that they are free to leave the IDP camps and move back home; the LRA will not do anything to harm them (Sunday Vision 061119). The government set a deadline for everyone to leave the IDP camps by the 31st of December 2006, but many people feel that it isn't safe for them to return home until the peace agreement has been signed. However, some people have started returning home.

1.3 Child Soldiers and policies

Child soldiers are not only a problem in northern Uganda; they constitute one of the major problems in modern time. According to numbers from UNICEF, more than two million children were killed in armed conflicts during the decade before the millennium shift. Around 300 000 children, or more, are active in armed conflicts around the world. Some are as young as seven years old (Hägström, 2001). Article 1 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 2 and 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006) all set 18 years as the minimum age to be a soldier. This view is called the Straight 18 position (Rosen, 2005). This is also the definition that I will use throughout this study.

Article 39 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of; any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

These principles put great responsibilities on the Ugandan government to help the war-affected children. Many organizations working with war-affected children also use this convention as a foundation of their work. Other than this convention, the issue of child soldiers in northern Uganda is also addressed by a number of other policies. Some examples are the governmental Resettlement Plan and the Good Practice Principles for Working with Formerly Abducted and Other Vulnerable, War-Affected Children in Uganda (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Development, 2006).

There are many words to describe former child soldiers. In northern Uganda, they normally say returnees, abductees or formerly abducted children. From now on, I will use the denominations used in northern Uganda, with the section of previous research being one exception since the researchers use the denomination child soldiers.

1.4 Purpose and questions

The conflict has deprived many children of their childhood and caused them immense suffering. A whole generation has grown up living in and participating in war. Naturally, this affects the children deeply and the situation puts great challenges on the Acholi society. My interest is in the rehabilitation process, particularly in the methods used in the reintegrational work; for example, how to prepare a family to take back its child and how to help the child and the family to handle feelings of betrayal and guilt. The word reintegration in this study represents the time from the child's first meeting with his or her parents after the return from the LRA, to the reunion with his or her family and finally the reintegration into the community and its institutions. It could take several years until full reintegration has been achieved and perhaps in some cases, full reintegration is never achieved.

My purpose was to describe and analyze the reintegration process of formerly abducted children from an ecological perspective with focus on networks surrounding the child. I aimed to increase the understanding of reintegration with the children's backgrounds as a starting point.

My main questions were the following:

- How do different networks affect and support formerly abducted children in the re-integration process, from the children's, the families' and the professionals' perspectives?
- What capacity do different networks have to give formerly abducted children the support they need?
- How does Gusco work with the families and other networks of formerly abducted children in the reintegration process?
- What meaning do formerly abducted children and their families assign to the work of Gusco and World Vision?

2. Methodology

2.1 Choice of method

Before I traveled to Gulu, I contacted organizations working with war-affected children. I asked for materials, such as reports and policies, regarding the conflict and the situation of former child soldiers. I did this to get a source of knowledge to start from.

Considering the detailed and personal material I was looking for, I chose to do a qualitative study. I used qualitative, semi-structured interviews consisting of guiding questions. These provided me with enough flexibility, but also with the basic foundation for my interviews (Denscombe, 2000). See appendixes A to C for the interview guides. Three of my interviews were carried out without guiding questions. I also asked the respondents to draw maps of the children's networks, in order for me to get an overview. A network map puts the child in the middle and identifies all important persons and networks surrounding the child (Klefbeck and Ogden, 1996). Most interviews were carried out with an interpreter.

I would have liked to practice group discussions with youths, regarding topics such as culture. However, due to a family emergency my trip had an abrupt end, and I only had

half of the expected time to collect the empiric material. I therefore had to leave this part out.

I recorded the interviews, so that I could listen to them carefully at home. This has been a great help in my analysis. When analyzing the material, I have had to limit the contents quite a lot. After transcribing the interviews, I summarized the contents and used that information as a starting point in my analysis. I then looked for similarities and differences in the interviews in order to draw conclusions. Finally, I made a judgment regarding at which level the different networks have the greatest impact.

2.2 Target population and selection method

My primary target population in Gulu was former child soldiers who had undergone rehabilitation at Gusco and had been reunited with their families. I chose respondents who were in their teens, as close to the age of 18 as possible. The choice of age was based on an ethical consideration regarding interviewing children and on the fact that I believe that it is easier to talk to older youths. I also chose one girl and one boy because the conditions can vary quite a lot depending on gender. A secondary target population was the families of these children, since my main questions also concerned the family network and its involvement in the reintegration process. I would have liked to interview all family members, but because of the limited time I focused on the parents or guardians. Another secondary target population was Ugandan professionals working with rehabilitation of former child soldiers. I interviewed two social workers at Gusco, who told me about their work, and a counselor and member of a child protection committee (CPC) working in an IDP camp. Since the culture plays an important role in the lives of the children, I also interviewed a traditional healer and three elders with knowledge of cultural impacts on the reintegration process. Two of these elders perform traditional rituals and I interviewed them together. All together, I conducted eleven interviews with a total of twelve people.

Due to lack of personal contacts with former child soldiers, I had to let Gusco and another organization called Gulu District NGO Forum do the selection for me. Gusco was the most natural choice, since I wanted to interview individuals who have undergone rehabilitation at Gusco. However, choosing all respondents this way would

give Gusco quite a lot of impact on my study. The youths could also be hesitant in stating their opinions about Gusco, since Gusco knows who I have interviewed. However, since Gusco had gained the youths' trust already, it was also an advantage for me to go through Gusco. The youths may find it easier to trust me if I was introduced by Gusco. In the end I got in contact with one of my youth respondents through Gusco and one through NGO Forum. The social worker who was supposed to introduce me to my second youth respondent didn't find the time to do it. Therefore, I chose to turn to NGO Forum in order to get started with my interviews. I already had contact with NGO Forum from before. I gave certain criteria to consider in the sampling. These criteria focused on age and sex of the child as well as where they lived and that they had guardians. I wanted to interview one person living in an IDP camp and one living within the municipality. There was a misunderstanding regarding the youth who NGO Forum chose; she had undergone rehabilitation at World Vision rehabilitation center instead of at Gusco. However, this gave me a new perspective, and my opinion is that it didn't damage my study.

2.3 Ethical considerations

Before engaging in any data collection, I sought permission from relevant Ugandan authorities and from the respondents. To ensure that the respondents felt as comfortable about the interviews as possible, I explained to them the purpose of the study and gave them an introductory letter about my study as well as about the issue of confidentiality (Appendix D). I guaranteed anonymity for all my respondents, even if they would have agreed on me publishing their names. This is because there is always a risk that someone would abuse them in the future. Another risk is that the respondents may change their minds about their anonymity in the future. The respondents will be offered to read the study.

As mentioned in the section above, I chose to interview youths who were in their teens in order to avoid exposing young children. I considered only interviewing professionals, in order not to expose any children at all. However, I believe that it is important to make the voices of the children heard and show them that their opinions matter. Talking to children and not only to professionals also gave me a better understanding. From the

course about traumatized refugees, I have also learnt that in general it is not bad for children to talk about their experiences. On the contrary, it is often good for them.

2.4 Discussion

An important question that I considered concerns the interpreters. Most of the returnees and their families don't speak English. I chose not to aim for children and families who speak English, since that could have given me a target population that belongs to the less unfortunate in society. Because of this, I needed interpreters. My field supervisor assisted me in finding one male and one female research assistant, quite young in order to create an antiauthoritarian and equal interview situation. The choice of gender was based on the fact that some issues may be gender sensitive to discuss. I chose to obtain the interpreters through my supervisor, who is not part of Gusco, in order to maximize the objectivity. In the end, circumstances led me to only use the male interpreter and the female respondents seemed comfortable with him. There is also a risk that the interpreter's opinions could influence my results and the translation might not be correct. I had this in mind during the interviews. In some cases I asked for clarifications of who said what and what words were actually used.

One disadvantage with the qualitative method I chose is that it only covers the stories of two returnees and their families, which makes one doubt how representative my study is. I believe that the depth was necessary in gaining a better understanding of the background though. On the contrary, the professionals have worked with a large number of returnees. Their answers could therefore be considered to be more representative, even though some of them naturally are their subjective opinions. Depending on which organization a social worker comes from, his or her views can be influenced by the values of that specific organization. Another problem that I met was with network maps. They were successful with the professionals; however, it didn't work out with the other respondents. At least one respondent was illiterate, which I anticipated. In these cases, I took notes myself instead. An aspect to consider regarding network maps, and all other choices of method for that matter, is culture. Network maps were given shape in a western society, and that may cause difficulties implementing them in a country like Uganda.

Since I depended on an interpreter, it was difficult for me to know if the respondent had been asked in a way that made him or her feel free to decline or not. A factor that sometimes made my process difficult is the fact that I am white. It makes it impossible to remain unseen or anonymous in the IDP camps. There are always groups of children following you, which decrease the anonymity of the respondents too. It is also difficult to get a private and calm interview environment. In addition to that, a white person is often associated with aid organizations and support. This could lead the respondent to reply in a certain way. Despite all of this, I feel that the interviews went well.

3. Theory - the Ecology of Human Development

The theory I have used is the Ecology of Human Development. The reason why I chose this theory is that the networking systems surrounding former child soldiers are, according to my beliefs, the key to the children's successful reintegration. When implementing this theory in a Ugandan context, it is important to keep in mind that the theory was developed in a completely different societal environment. However, I believe that the theory can be used to understand the reintegration process. I have used three sources in order to get an as complete picture as possible of the theory.

The Ecology of Human Development generates from the general systems theory and was originally outlined by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The theory describes the context in which a child lives and grows up. It describes the changing and interacting surroundings as well as the child's role as a subject within them. The theory consists of four systems surrounding each other like different layers. An important aspect is the processes that take place within and between the different systems or networks that a child belongs to or is affected by. The inner system is called the micro system, followed by the meso system, the exo system and finally the macro system. The theory aims to see beyond the pure description of the systems and to create an understanding of the interaction between the child and its surroundings. Development of an individual takes place in a context. The theory can serve as a means of discovering connections (Andersson, 2002; Klefbeck and Ogden, 2003; Lagerberg and Sundelin, 2000).

Klefbeck and Ogden (2003) further describe the Ecology of Human Development as a cornerstone in the work with families and their social networks. They use the theory as

a starting point and combine it with different network methods, such as network meetings and maps of networks.

The micro level is a (smaller) system or network around the individual, for example the family, school or friends. The individual has a specific role and interacts in mutual relationships within the micro level (Lagerberg and Sundelin, 2000). In this study, an important micro system is the family, having a key role in the reintegration of the child. During the child's rehabilitation, he or she is also integrated into the micro system of Gusco, the rehabilitation organization.

The meso level is when different networks at micro level interact. This interaction is considered to be very important (Klefbeck and Ogden, 2003). It could be exemplified by the way the family interacts with Gusco during the child's rehabilitation. The different values of the child's biological family and the LRA could constitute a conflict at meso level. The interaction between the family and the neighbors could also be of great significance.

Systems at exo level affect the individual, but the individual is not part of the systems. However, the individual may interact with the exo system in some way. These kinds of structures could be authorities, media, and health care, etc. (Lagerberg and Sundelin, 2000). In the case of former child soldiers in Gulu, an exo system could be NGOs.

The last level, macro, includes values of society, ideologies, laws and policies. It's an abstract system applied at inner levels. The macro system provides a way of understanding and interpreting society (ibid.). The political situation in Uganda, the country's views on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as national and international laws and policies affect the children's situation and possibilities of rehabilitation.

4. Previous research

In order to get a general picture of child soldiers as a phenomenon, I have read a number of books. It is relatively easy to find literature about child soldiers in general; however,

it is more difficult finding qualified research about the Ugandan context. To receive information about the Ugandan cases, one should rather turn to organizational reports.

One of the books I have read is called *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (2005) and is written by David M. Rosen, a professor in anthropology and law. Rosen writes about different roles and definitions of child soldiers. Some issues he discusses are what makes somebody a child soldier and if all child soldiers really are victims in war, or if they are active subjects. Another book is written by Cole P. Dodge and Magne Raundalen (1991), a child psychologist and an anthropologist respectively. The title of the book is *Reaching Children in War* and they have written about their encounters with child soldiers in Uganda, Sudan and Mozambique, as well as about the effects war has on children and how to understand and work with war-affected children.

I have also read two books about treatment of traumatized refugees, written by Anders Hjern (1995) and by Per-Olof Michel, Tom Lundin and Ulf Otto (2002). These present different diagnosis and treatments of traumatized refugees. The books give an overview of problems and methods within this area. I have also read the *Child Soldiers Global Report* published by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2004), which presents the situation regarding child soldiers around the world. In order to get a short introduction into the area of child soldiers, one can also read Haggström's report (2001) in Swedish. Last, but not least, I read a book about Acholi culture called *Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi* (2006). This book has been written by Caritas in cooperation with Acholi individuals. I will now give a short summary of the information retrieved through the mentioned literature, describing why and how children become child soldiers as well as how to treat them.

Although children always have been used in combat, the use of child soldiers has increased the past decades. Children are attractive to use in combat, since they are easier to manipulate than adults. Children listen to adults and they are tricked into believing things that aren't real. For example, some children are tricked into believing that they can't be hurt because of rituals they have gone through. The armies then use the children as shields in order for themselves to avoid being hurt or killed. Another important factor in the increase of child soldiers is the development of light and easily

operated weapons. Children are also cheaper to use than adults (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004; Häggström, 2001; Rosen, 2005).

Recruiting children by force is common. In order to keep them in the army, they are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own families. However, all child soldiers are not recruited by direct force. Many children join the army because they don't have anything else left. Their parents might have been killed and the children have no money for food. Joining the army could then be a way of survival and getting a small income and somebody to identify themselves with. Other reasons to join the army could be revenge or ideological belief. It could also be to escape from domestic violence. In Uganda, however, most children are recruited by physical force and threats. One argument that armies with child soldiers use to defend themselves is the fact that many children don't know their real age and don't have valid birth certificates. This opens for the use of children younger than 18 years of age, since the children (or someone else) could claim that they are 18 years old even if they might be younger (ibid.).

Children exposed to violence may experience many different symptoms, such as fear, anxiety, aggression, depression, guilt, isolation, nightmares, sleep disturbances, difficulties concentrating, and physical problems, etc. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one serious reaction to trauma, which contains the mentioned symptoms. There is no proved method that can be used to treat PTSD, but different methods combined or separately could have some effect. These are, for example, psychological support through individual or group sessions, pharmacological treatment and crisis intervention (Dodge and Raundalen, 1991; Hjern 1995; Michel et al., 2002).

In order for the rehabilitation to be successful, the community needs to be involved in the process. When rehabilitating these children, it's important to work with the children's view on violence and their ability to solve conflicts in peaceful ways. It's also important to work with the attitudes of the community and families. Cultural aspects need to be paid attention. These could include activities such as cleansing rituals (Häggström, 2001). It is also important to make the child understand his or her reactions and put things in a context (Hjern, 1995; Michel et al., 2002).

In Acholi culture in northern Uganda, the cleansing rituals traditionally played a very important role for reconciliation and solving conflicts. The culture has weakened due to different factors, with one important being the displacement of people as a result of the conflict. Another factor is the British colonization, which has deteriorated Acholi traditions. In spite of this, the traditional rituals of Acholi culture still play a significant role in the reintegration process of former child soldiers in northern Uganda. There is a ritual performed to welcome the children back home, which is called “stepping on the egg”. Apart from the welcoming, the purpose of this ritual is also to cleanse away spirits that an individual may have contracted during a period away from home. The ritual is carried out by letting the returnee step on an egg and walk across a stick from a certain tree before entering the homestead. This ritual is important in order to make the child feel free of his or her sins and be accepted back into the community. Performing this ritual will make the evil spirits leave the returnee’s body. “Stepping on the egg” is commonly combined with other symbolic rituals. Another important ritual is called “mato oput”. This ritual was traditionally used to reconcile two clans after somebody had been killed and it consists of members of the different sides participating together in symbolically important activities. It can sometimes be combined with a ritual called bending the spears, which is a symbolic ritual where the bending of a spear symbolizes how two clans will stop fighting. It has been debated if and how mato oput could be applied in the current situation (Harlacher et al., 2006).

5. Results and analysis

In this section, I have chosen to first present some interviews more thoroughly because of their importance. I will then present my analysis from micro level to macro level. The networks will be presented by the network level they best correspond to, although some of the networks belong to more than one level. I have added some networks, which the respondents didn’t directly mention in their interviews, but which I have received information about through informal discussions and my working process. Sequences without any given source are my personal reflections. Throughout the analysis, the social workers will be called social worker A and B in order to separate them. The member of the Child Protection Committee will be called the CPC. The youths have been given fictive names.

5.1 Gusco

Through interviews and informal discussions with staffs at Gusco, I have received the following information. Gusco is a local NGO working with war-affected children in Gulu. It was founded in 1994 and about 8000 children have passed through the center. The aim is to keep a child at the center for three weeks, but many children stay for a few more weeks than that. Their rehabilitation program includes psychosocial support and counseling, drawing as part of therapy, teaching to prepare the children to go back to school, and cultural activities such as dancing, etc. In order to give the children a sense of routine, they also include daily tasks in the rehabilitation. An important part in the reintegrational work is the family support talks taking place when parents visit the center. The purpose of these is to make the parents understand the reactions and needs of the children. Children at Gusco show a lot of different symptoms, such as nightmares, illusions, eating disorders, aggressiveness, memory loss, isolation, and passivity. Follow-ups are supposed to be made four times during the first year after reintegration; however, this goal is not reached, according to social worker B. The biggest reason for this is that many children move and the social workers don't know where to find them.

One of the greatest problems in working with the families is, according to social worker B, that the parents often expect material support. They don't seem to value or understand the importance of psychological support by the social workers. Instead they ask for material support or money, but social worker B then argues that interaction and encouragement are vital factors in order for any material support to be useful in the long run. If material support is provided without any guidance or psychological support, then the situation will just be the same as before when the material has been finished.

5.2 Case one

5.2.1 Interview with a boy

The boy I interviewed is sixteen years old and he spent three years in captivity with the LRA. I will call him Okwera. Okwera is taken care of by his paternal grandparents. The grandfather teaches Okwera about Acholi culture through storytelling, which has given Okwera a limited knowledge about their culture. However, Okwera doesn't feel that all aspects of the culture are part of him. An example of this are the traditional rituals.

Although he continues to say that, he doesn't have any bad feelings about them and that considering what he has been through, they need to be performed. Okwera underwent the ritual called stepping on the egg when he returned from Gusco. He says that since then, he hasn't been disturbed by anything, but neither was he disturbed by anything before he underwent the ritual. When asked how he thinks that his life would have been if he hadn't undergone the ritual, he replied "I can't tell, could be that it was going to be terrible on my side".

Before he was abducted by the LRA, Okwera lived with his parents in a village outside of town. He sometimes feel the pain from the injuries he received when he was abducted. According to what he told me during the interview, those are the only symptoms he still has from his time in captivity. He doesn't mention any psychological symptoms and claims not to have any need to talk about his experiences. He looks at his future as bright. He only had some problems around the time of reintegration, as stated, "I had a lot of fear at the beginning because sometimes back when I recalled back what happened in the past, gives me a lot of fear."

During his time with the LRA, he said that "they killed a lot of people" and burnt houses, among other things. He didn't use the word "we" when he talked about this, but talked about it as if it only applied to someone else. Other than that he's "forgotten most of it because I didn't put much of my thinking towards that".

After he escaped from the LRA, he was escorted to Gulu by the UPDF and finally taken to Gusco. Okwera appreciated the teachings and counseling at Gusco, which consisted of advice on how to live in harmony and how to behave. The counseling didn't consist of any discussions about Okwera's feelings; he says that the social workers didn't ask him about it and that it also wasn't necessary for him to tell them about it, since the staff lives in the same reality as him. The counseling was mainly one-way, where the social worker gave Okwera advice or asked him specific questions. He stated that, "I appreciate they gave me good advice how to live a good life, probably if they hadn't given me that kind of counseling or advice, I would have done something bad."

He really enjoyed playing soccer, which was one activity at the center. The only cultural activities at the center were traditional dances; other than that, they didn't talk about

culture or cleansing rituals at all. He was not informed about any common reactions to traumas, neither was he given any explanation to other children's reactions at the center (although he mentioned other children having terrible nightmares). Since he was reunited with his family about a year and a half ago, he has only met with the social worker at Gusco once about a year after his reintegration. The meeting took place in the home of the social worker. The only thing that Okwera thinks Gusco could have done differently is to pay for his school fees and for some more food.

When Okwera returned home, he was warmly welcomed by his family. He specifically mentioned his parents and his grandmother as important for him in his reintegration, although the grandmother was the most important person because of the far distance to his mother. Okwera doesn't want to talk about his time with the LRA, and people in general don't even know of his background as an abductee. He has contact with one person from his time with the LRA, but they live far apart and only meet once in a while. His friends from school and church are very important to him. He has received some small support from Amnesty International. Other than that, he doesn't know of any organization, person or institution he could turn to for help.

Okwera finds school very important, but his main hobby is prayers and church. He feels that prayers help him to dissolve bad feelings and to forgive. His dream is to become a driver after finishing school, although school fees are one of his major problems.

5.2.2 Interview with the grandfather

Okwera's grandfather is the father or guardian of fourteen children, although some of these are above the age of eighteen. He considers the most difficult part in his life to be getting food for everyone. The reason why the grandfather is taking care of so many children is because he lives within the municipality where the risk of being abducted is smaller than in the villages where the children come from. That is also how Okwera was abducted; the father and grandfather of Okwera had a fight and Okwera and his parents left the municipality to live in a village, from where Okwera was abducted by the rebels. When Okwera returned from captivity, the grandfather heard the message on the radio. A radio station sends these kinds of messages, where the children themselves get to go on the radio and tell their families that they have returned.

The grandfather values Okwera's school highly and encourages him to work hard in school. He tries to guide Okwera in doing the right things. Okwera and his grandfather don't talk about Okwera's time with the LRA at all. The grandfather finds it very difficult to talk about and avoids the topic completely, "I do not even want to touch anything about that. It pains me so much [...] that if he was not really to be abducted, this boy would have been in senior four or five (in school)". The grandfather values the school so highly that he discourages Okwera from participating in certain casual activities with his friends because it will confuse Okwera.

The first thing the grandfather helped arrange after Okwera's return was the ritual to step on the egg. The grandfather considers the ritual to be of great importance, "That traditional ceremony, if it's not done, that would be the biggest mistake people would have made". He knows of other returnees who didn't undergo the ritual and who ran mad. The grandfather never saw any signs of evil spirits in Okwera and he explains this by Okwera's immediate participation in the ritual after he returned home. The grandfather also tried to ensure that Okwera didn't spend too much time at Gusco, since he then could have caught the evil spirits from the other children at the center. The grandfather feared Gusco very much because of rumors he heard about Gusco, "What I hear from the public outside that these people who return back from the bush and they are in Gusco, they can even kill you, they can chop you with pangas, so I got the fear when I was there. They are very violent". However, he never feared his grandson, since Okwera underwent the ritual at an early stage. Apart from the fear he had, the grandfather appreciated Gusco's work a lot. He praises the teachings and the traditional dances, which were part of the activities at Gusco. The only thing he believes that Gusco could have done differently would have been to give them some more money.

The grandfather identifies himself as the one single important person in the reintegration of Okwera. He could not identify anybody else who had been important and he doesn't know anywhere he or Okwera could turn for support. Other than himself, school, the traditional ritual and Gusco's teachings, he only added one more important thing for Okwera: religion (Catholicism).

5.2.3 Interview with the grandmother

Okwera's grandmother struggles a lot with money, mainly to pay the food and school fees of the children. She told me that Okwera was forced to kill three people during his time with the LRA, which immediately led her to arrange for Okwera to undergo the ritual stepping on the egg. She finds this to be the first priority in reintegrating formerly abducted children, "because if that one is not done, in most cases these people come back, they run mad". Apart from this, she also believes that school is very important and she explained that Okwera wanted to go back to school right after his reintegration.

The grandmother engages Okwera in physical work, such as digging on her fields and laying bricks for building a new house. He's a very hardworking boy. The grandmother identifies herself as the only important person for Okwera, and since he left Gusco they haven't received any help from any organization either. According to the grandmother, Gusco helped in them by providing some limited material support, such as kitchenware, upon Okwera's return. She can't think of anything else that Gusco could have done for Okwera; all she wanted was to have her child back. She got the message that he had returned through an acquaintance who had heard about his return.

The grandmother states that she doesn't have any thoughts on or plans for the future, "I leave everything in your hand".

5.3 Case two

5.3.1 Interview with a girl

The girl I interviewed is eighteen years old and has a few-month-old son, who has been sick almost since his birth. She spent thirteen years in captivity with the LRA and was reintegrated with her family a few months ago. She has no memory of her life before she was abducted. I will call her Cathy. I believe that the best way to make someone understand her story is to tell it through her own words. Therefore, I have attached parts of her interview in appendix E.

Cathy was rehabilitated at World Vision, where she stayed for a few months. The staff at World Vision taught her how to behave after she was reintegrated. They also told her that she should get saved; that is, become a born-again Christian, in order to forget

about her past. When Cathy returned home, she distanced herself from the traditional rituals, “When I reached home here my mother prepared for me to step on the eggs, I refused completely because I took it to be evil. They (the staff at World Vision) said that it’s satanic in nature.”. Instead Cathy chose to get saved immediately after her return, which she describes as successful, “One great effect that I have is that the bad dreams that used to come that I am sleeping next to a dead body or we have gone to kill people now, I no longer dream”. During the time after the reintegration, Cathy had some psychological problems, “When I came back I still had that kind of trauma because now anything in form of loud noise could remind me of the past, any banging of jerry can could remind me of gunshot in the bush, and even when u talk loudly on me, still the memories come back and disturb me a bit”. However, these problems have decreased now because she has got used to it.

Cathy valued the help from World Vision highly; she believes that if they hadn’t helped she could even have died. However, she hasn’t had any contact with World Vision since her return home. She now lives in an IDP camp with her parents, by whom she felt very welcomed. Other people in her surroundings didn’t treat her badly, although they talked about her and said that she had pretended that she was going to stay with the LRA forever. She doesn’t yet receive food from the World Food Programme, although she has been reintegrated for a few months and she has registered her name. Therefore, she and her baby are currently living on her parents’ food ration. Cathy has never received any education, but hopes to start school in the near future. There is an adult literacy class nearby her home and one of the local leaders has offered to try to find out more about it.

The most important person for Cathy throughout her reintegration has been her mother, who has taught her a lot about how to behave and to be cautious about men. Her mother has taught her that some men might want Cathy because of the material support she received from World Vision upon her reunion, but once the man has consumed the start package he will leave her.

One organization has been very important to her, and that is an NGO-based center with a counselor and a child protection committee. Cathy believes that this organization has

been an important link between her and World Vision, and that this contact has generated some additional food support from World Vision.

Cathy believes that the first priority in helping the returnees should be to ensure the success of the peace talks. After peace has come, that's when they should start looking at other things. One step in the peace process should, according to Cathy, be for Kony to participate in the traditional ritual of mato oput. If it's possible, then she also believes that it could be combined with the modernized justice system and the international criminal court.

5.3.2 Interview with the mother

Cathy's mother has seven children and her everyday life consists of a lot of struggling for food. The family has some cultivation fields outside of the camp, but they rarely get enough food from there. They also rent fields closer to home and they get food support from World Food Programme. However, the food situation is very stressful. Apart from that, the mother doesn't have any major problems and she sees her future as bright.

The mother heard about Cathy's return on the radio and she was very happy to receive her back home. In the beginning the mother was concerned about Cathy and her newborn child. When Cathy didn't want to step on the egg, the mother was worried that Cathy would be haunted by evil spirits. It was important to the mother to know that her daughter hadn't committed any bad crimes while in captivity because if she had, then the family could be haunted by evil spirits if she didn't go through the ritual. Therefore, the mother questioned Cathy a few times before accepting that she hadn't done anything bad. She felt reassured by the fact that even though Cathy didn't go through any traditional ritual, she still turned to a religion.

Cathy's mother believes that one of the most important actors in the reintegration process of her daughter has been the government. The reason for this is that the government soldiers were the ones to bring Cathy to World Vision and she believes that they fought very hard to do this. Other than that, World Vision has been a key actor and the mother identifies the start package that was given to Cathy as their great achievement. World Vision met Cathy's mother on the day of reunion, when

World Vision brought Cathy home, but that is the only time they have met her mother. The mother doesn't know of anything World Vision could have done differently. Without World Vision, their life would have been really bad. The mother has not had any contact with any other organization or with any volunteers in the camp.

The most important thing when reintegrating a child who has been with the LRA is, according to Cathy's mother, for the returnees to go through *mato oput*. This ceremony should take place between the LRA and the Acholi people at home, and all the returnees should be brought together to participate. This is so important because "if *mato oput* is not done, then this kind of killing will continue because they have killed your people, and again you go and share with them anyhow. You find again you kill them and death will just continue like that". When it comes to the involvement of the international criminal court and the modern justice system, she doesn't know what she thinks.

5.4 Micro level

5.4.1 Family

The families and relatives are, according to social worker B, the most important network of all; "socialization begins from the family". The families should understand the children's needs and reactions to trauma, and they are the ones to enable the children's full reintegration into the community. In order to ensure that this happens, the social workers at Gusco have what they call family support talks with parents, as mentioned before. I believe that this could have been a great help for the children if it was really being implemented all of the time.

In the case of Okwera and his grandparents, this ambition has not been achieved at all. According to the grandfather, no social worker has even attempted to talk to him, in spite of him visiting Gusco several times. If this has been the case for many parents, then this shows a serious lack of implementation of Gusco's guidelines. This affects the children's reintegration enormously, since it means that they are reintegrated into a family, which doesn't understand their specific needs. My judgment is that the families

lack capacity to handle the children's psychological problems and give them the psychosocial support they need.

In the case of Okwera, this becomes obvious. There seems to be a severe lack of communication within the family network, since both the grandmother and the grandfather identify themselves as the only important person for Okwera, while Okwera said it was his grandmother and his parents. The grandfather even states that he avoids talking about things related to his grandson's past experiences.

Both Okwera's and Cathy's families also lack capacity to take care of their children's basic needs. Lack of money causes lack of food, health care and material support. These are all things, which can contribute to psychological stress for the children.

However, the families I interviewed welcomed their children warmly and accepted them back without hesitation. The children appreciate their support a lot and they have been of great help for their children, in spite of their limitations. In my conclusion, I don't mean to say that the families are not important or good for the children; only that their support could be improved tremendously with an increased capacity.

5.4.2 School and teachers

Almost all of the respondents have identified school and education as one of the most important networks for the reintegration of returnees. I have chosen to put this network at micro level because it has a great importance at this level. However, policies and regulations for schools belong at macro level. The implementation belongs at the other levels. The reasons to why the respondents believe that school is such an important network are because it can provide the child with an accepting environment with friends, something to do, self confidence, and hope for the future. If the child really is part of his or her class and school environment, then this could be one of the most important factors for the recovery of the child. Likewise, lack of school or lack of a supportive school environment was identified by the professionals as a great factor in the failure to be reintegrated. It could also be the ignition of psychological problems, as social worker A specifically stated. Social worker B recognizes the special needs that some of the returnees have in school and points out the importance of training the

teachers to understand these special needs. The social workers both told me that Gusco once sensitized over 700 teachers on relevant issues.

However, schools aren't sufficient to provide for all of the children, according to the CPC. The insufficiencies in schools result in parents lacking motivation to bringing their children to school because they see no future for their children in school anyway. So while school is important for recovery, a minority actually seems to benefit from it.

5.4.3 Religion

Religion is important to many children and provides spiritual guidance, according to the social workers. Gusco cooperates with a priest who normally comes to the center. Social worker B explained that many children are Catholics and they are given rosaries to keep. These help many children to avoid nightmares and they bring back their hope for the future. According to social worker A, churches organize prayers and bless children as an alternative to going through traditional cleansing rituals.

My findings also suggest that religion plays a large part in the recovery of the returnees. Both Cathy and Okwera mentioned religion as one of the most important things for them; more important than traditional rituals of Acholi culture are. Although when it comes to their guardians and other adults, it seems to be the other way around.

5.4.4 Friends

Social worker A pointed out how central friends are to the success or failure of reintegration. Without acceptance by friends and their families, a child's reintegration will be very difficult. Okwera also mentioned his friends as very important, although when asked who had been the most important for him in his reintegration, he only mentioned family members. Cathy doesn't really have any social network yet because of her long time away from home and recent reintegration. In general, friends were not mentioned much at all during the interviews. My conclusion from this is that even though friends are important, family is more important.

5.5 Meso level

5.5.1 The Community

For a child to be fully reintegrated into the community, it needs the acceptance and the support of the community. Therefore, the views and actions of community members are central to the reintegration process. I will argue that this network mainly belongs at meso level because the community consists of many different micro level networks, which the child could be part of and which interact with each other at meso level. However, the community could also be said to belong at exo level, since the community members and their views could affect the child without the child being a part of that specific group of community members. It affects the child even if the child does not interact directly with all community members.

According to social worker A, the capacity of the community to take care of returnees has increased lately. I draw this conclusion because of a statement made by this social worker that “the level of stigmatization is going down”. This same social worker talked about the importance of returnees being allowed to play with other children and to participate in activities in the community. Furthermore, when saying that, “that psychological torture will affect you and lead to the PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)”, social worker A argues that stigmatization as well as not having the opportunity to go to school can cause PTSD.

However, according to the CPC in the camp, stigmatization still seems to be a big problem and he explained that it is common for children to be rejected by their own relatives. Therefore, my conclusion is that the community both helps and hinders the reintegration process. Positive and regular interaction at meso level with various members of the community is a key factor for the child to recover and be fully reintegrated.

5.5.2 LRA and the family

I believe that a conflict at meso level possibly could arise between the values and lifestyles of the families of the returnees and of the LRA (the former micro level network of the child). When the child is reunited with its family, he or she needs to adapt to the situation at home. A child who has spent most of his or her life with the

LRA is obviously used to a certain culture, whether he or she chose it voluntarily or was indoctrinated into it. Therefore, this is important to recognize and address. The answers in the interviews show that Gusco and World Vision work with the children on this. Both the youths and their guardians pointed out how important the social workers' teachings on how to behave and live well with the community are.

5.5.3 Gusco and traditional leaders

Gusco cooperates with traditional leaders in performing cleansing rituals for the children. I believe that this cooperation is interaction at meso level. The traditional leaders organize the rituals and Gusco brings the children to the locations of the ceremonies. Other organizations or institutions, such as World Vision, are against the rituals, according to social worker B and Cathy. Therefore, I assume that there is completely no interaction at meso level between World Vision and traditional leaders. Instead, that interaction could most likely be found between church and World Vision. Gusco, however, teaches the children about Acholi culture while at the center, according to social worker B. This is done through traditional dances, group discussions, and such, and it is considered to be good for the recovery of the children.

5.6 Exo level

5.6.1 Acholi culture

Normally, the culture is placed at macro level in the theory of the ecology of human development. However, due to circumstances in northern Uganda, I have chosen to place the culture at exo level. The Acholi culture is not the same as the national culture (which belongs at macro level); it's specific for the Acholi people in the districts in the North. Furthermore, the culture affects networks at all levels. Through interviews with the elders about culture, I have understood how strong Acholi culture used to be and that, even though it has weakened due to war, it still plays a significant role in Acholi society. The greatest weakness seems to be that fewer youths believe in their culture and in the effects of the traditional rituals today, which most likely decreases the effects. One of my youth respondents was negative about the rituals and the other seemed a bit indifferent. However, it seems that both of them do believe in the rituals in some way. I base this on the fact that Cathy towards the end of the interview started talking about rituals in a completely different tone, and that Okwera didn't seem sure that he would

have escaped the evil spirits if he hadn't gone through the ritual. On top of that, even if the youths themselves wouldn't believe in the rituals, the rituals would probably have an effect anyway considering the strong beliefs of the surroundings. As one of the elders said about the Acholi people, "They revere the culture, they observe the culture, more than you would think of one revering the law of the land or even the law of the judges". All elders confirmed what previous research stated; that traditional rituals have a very central position in the reintegration of returnees. The culture provides the foundation for acceptance of and reintegration of returnees into society. If a returnee fails to undergo a ritual, he or she can fail to be properly reintegrated as indicated by my interviews.

Although Cathy, the girl I interviewed, was accepted without having undergone any traditional ritual, it did cause some problems in the interaction at micro level. This was particularly in the beginning when her mother insisted that she might need cleansing. Even though the mother now has accepted that Cathy got saved instead of stepping on the egg, she is still persisting that Cathy go through the ritual of mato oput together with the other returnees. Furthermore, in the interview with the grandfather of Okwera, it became clear that the grandfather feared returnees who hadn't gone through the rituals. Several of the other respondents also pointed out, that returnees who don't go through any ritual risk running mad and end up going through the ritual in the end anyway.

In this sense, the cultural effects are applied at micro and meso levels in the interaction within and between micro level networks. The culture is essential in the reintegration because without acceptance, chances of reintegration are very slim. In addition to that, the rituals are said by all respondents to have a healing effect for many individuals. The rituals appear to have an important psychological effect on the participants, in order for them to avoid being haunted by spirits of the dead. In fact, statements from many locals I have talked to indicate that PTSD is at least partly treated using traditional rituals. Typical symptoms of PTSD are said by many people, social workers among others, to disappear after an individual goes through the rituals. Examples of such symptoms are nightmares and aggressiveness. Considering the fact that there isn't really any proved method for treating individuals with PTSD, why couldn't traditional rituals be one way of treating the disorder then? It gives an explanation to the symptoms and puts things in a context, both things which are essential in the treatment of war-affected children. With

all the above in mind, I draw the conclusion that Acholi culture with its rituals is one of the most important networks in the rehabilitation of returnees in northern Uganda.

5.6.2 Health and food structures

Most of the respondents in this study talked about themselves or others having problems providing for their basic needs, such as food and health care. The returnees and their families even seemed so concerned about it that all other problems seemed to fade away and be put aside. In my analysis, I have chosen to define these structures as a network at exo level. In one way, the structures could be said to belong at macro level because of the responsibility of the state to provide for the basic needs of its citizens. However, policies and guidelines at macro level advocate for a different situation than the one found on the ground, showing governmental incapacibilities. The problems are found in the implementation at regional level. For example, policies say that internally displaced people should be ensured freedom of movement (Office of the Prime Minister, Department of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, 2004), which in turn would ensure them access to cultivation fields. This has not been the case due to poor security and even due to abuses by the UPDF, as described in section 1.1. People have not been able to cultivate their own food because of the risks attached to it, and even though the situation is changing, the poor conditions still remain. A special problem within the food area concerns child headed households. According to the CPC, it is difficult for them to receive food support from World Food Programme because they are not recognized as independent families. This results in the children not getting enough food. This is an effect of regulations at macro level not being adapted to the situation at exo level, since the policies of World Food Programme are at international level.

When it comes to health care, structural problems are also found at exo level. According to the CPC, there aren't enough medical supplies, causing the population to get poor health care or none at all. Another aspect to consider regarding health care is the level of knowledge among health workers regarding psychosocial support and war-affected children. Social worker A identified acceptance by health workers as central for the recovery process, and the CPC has sensitized health workers in the surrounding IDP camps on relevant issues for the same reasons. Cooperation between NGOs and the health care system is therefore vital at exo level. Social worker B agrees with the above

and further said that when basic needs aren't met, chances of a trauma developing or deepening increase.

Naturally, the gaps in these structures affect the reintegration of formerly abducted children greatly. Not only because their basic physical needs are not fulfilled, but also because other vital needs, such as psychological needs, are put aside.

5.6.3 NGOs

The NGO-network belongs at exo level, since they have an infrequent contact with most of the individuals and few individuals are part of the NGOs at micro level. NGOs and humanitarian organizations make up a large part of the society in northern Uganda. They fill some of the gaps, which the government has failed to fill. In providing clean water, food, counseling, equipment for disabled persons, sensitization on issues related to war-affected children, and much more, they are a necessary component in the life of the population. All of the professionals identified these areas as something which is part of the NGOs' work; however, only one of the non-professionals (Cathy) said that she had been helped by an NGO other than the rehabilitation organizations. Social worker A also talked about NGOs building schools and hospitals.

Some important persons acting within NGOs, mentioned by all professionals, are CPCs and community volunteer care givers (CVCs). Since one of the respondents is a CPC, he provided me with a lot of information about this. His role is to identify, support and refer vulnerable children to other organizations or institutions when necessary. One of his most important duties is to network with different organizations and institutions in order to support the camp inhabitants and try to fulfill their needs. The only difference between CPCs and CVCs is that the CVCs only deal with formerly abducted children, while the CPCs deal with all vulnerable children. Gusco provides training for these volunteers in psychosocial support and other issues related to war-affected children, children's rights, child abuse, etc. Also the social workers talked about the importance of CPCs and CVCs, and mentioned the same duties and functions as the CVC himself did. Through other positions that this CPC also has, he is also responsible for helping people with psychosocial problems and to sensitize the community. All of these are some of the roles that NGO staff and volunteers have.

My conclusion is that without NGOs, the population would face a devastating crisis, even greater than the current crisis. The NGOs even help building the infrastructure. However, though the NGOs provide a lot of support, their resources are limited. This becomes clear when looking at the situation and listening to the population.

5.6.4 Local leaders and the governmental district

My judgment is that local leaders partly play the same role as NGOs. According to the CPC they advocate for children's rights. They can also contribute to bringing support to children. Social worker A explained that local leaders are responsible to solve situations where children are mistreated, and social worker B furthermore said that they are responsible to mobilize people. Cathy reported being helped by a local leader in finding information about adult education. The whole governmental district is important because, according to social worker B, it gathers different NGOs and is in that sense a networking point. The above information leads me to the conclusion that this network is important from time to time, and therefore fits well at exo level.

5.6.5 Gusco

While the child stays at Gusco, Gusco becomes a micro level network for the child. However, I believe that as soon as the child has been reintegrated, Gusco switches from being a network at micro level to being a network at exo level. According to their goals and agenda, Gusco should have such frequent contact with the reintegrated child the first year that Gusco could be considered a network at micro level. This is certainly not the case for Okwera, who only met a representative from Gusco once since his reintegration. His guardians haven't even met anyone from Gusco at all since the reintegration. This is in spite of the fact that Okwera has lived within the municipality all the time, and is easy to locate. Even when Okwera was still at Gusco, the staff didn't try to sensitize his guardians. The same signals have been given to me when talking to other local people. As soon as the child is reintegrated, Gusco's importance therefore seems to fade away. However, Okwera and his grandfather reported that Gusco had been important for Okwera during his stay there.

My personal experience of having spent time at Gusco is that Gusco could be a much stronger network at micro level, both when the child is living there and afterwards. This

could be achieved with the resources that already exist. The guidelines of Gusco identify important needs of the children as well as good methods to meet those needs. However, not all of these things were being implemented during my stay at Gusco. By using the existing human resources, Gusco could improve their work greatly. The staff seems to recognize this to a certain extent, but not fully.

5.7 Macro level

5.7.1 National policies

The Ugandan government has adopted a number of policies relevant for the reintegration of former child soldiers. One of these is written by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2006) and defines principles for the work with war-affected children. It reached Gusco about eight months after the publication, which seems to be excellent compared to the dissemination of other policies. Most of the guidelines in this document are being fulfilled by Gusco, at least in theory. However, there are several other policies that seem to lack implementation. There are documents that I tried to get a hold of for one month, without succeeding. One of these documents is the Resettlement Plan, and what I discovered is that most of the employees working within relevant organizations barely knew what I was asking for, and they certainly hadn't read it or knew where to find a copy of it.

My conclusion is that these policies *could* be a very important instrument in the rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly abducted children, *if* they were implemented in practice. However, they seem to be formal documents with little applicability in reality. Therefore, I believe that the national policies do not affect the children to any greater extent and that they do not in practice form one of their important networks, although they should. Important to note is, of course, that I haven't read these policies and therefore do not know if their contents are being implemented or not; however, neither have the persons working with the issues, so if the contents of the policies are in fact being implemented, then it seems to be more of a coincidence or pure good judgment by the staff on the ground.

5.7.2 International policies

According to my judgment, international policies seem to be more well-known and better implemented than national policies. Some examples are the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as on human rights. These rights and conventions are frequently referred to in discussions with professionals, although there are many things on the ground breaking the regulations of the conventions. However, these conventions constitute an important framework for the work of NGOs and they help in creating goals and guidelines.

5.7.3 Laws and justice system

The national and international laws and justice systems affect the reintegration of formerly abducted children in the sense that they constitute the framework for the peace process. Naturally, the reintegration is affected by whether there is peace or not in the area. The national Ugandan justice system and the international justice system, represented by the International Criminal Court (ICC), give shape to the peace negotiations. However, the Acholi traditional justice system differs significantly from the other justice systems, which causes great obstacles in the peace process. There is a conflict between the systems at macro level (ICC and the Ugandan justice system) and exo level (the Acholi system), disturbing the reintegration processes even at micro level. The ICC has issued arrest warrants for the rebel leaders, while the Acholi traditions only call for reconciliation through traditional rituals. In the words of one of the elders,

Another aspect of our ritual is when your clan has murdered somebody from this clan. [...] We go for reconciliation. [...] After that is done, people return home, and the two clans will live like nothing happened before. [...] The Western justice system, it's more of a revenge, than actually healing. We don't know imprisonment, we don't know revengeful killing, [...] the Western justice system is now like what we read in the bible. An eye for an eye, that kind of thing.

This conflict of justice systems brings a standstill to the reconciliation and peace process. According to all three elders, *mato oput* needs to be performed in order to reconcile the people. What the respondents disagree on is how the ritual should be performed and who should represent who. I believe that the disagreements are mainly caused by the weakened culture and the changing society. The ultimate situation would, according to the respondents, be if the government or the state army (UPDF) would take

part of the ritual in some way. This way, the actors at macro and exo level would be brought together. The elders are hopeful regarding the outcome of mato oput, but with one reservation in the words of one of the elders, “It will work if politics don’t enter it!”

6. Concluding discussion

To summarize, my results show a discrepancy in the information provided by social workers and by the youths. The goals of Gusco are higher than what the social workers achieve in reality. In spite of this, the youths seem satisfied and are very grateful for the support they have received. Gusco has high ambitions and tries to network with actors that are important for the children. There are a number of important networks in the reintegration process and once the children have left the rehabilitation centers, the centers don’t have an exceptional role for the children. One of the most important networks is Acholi culture. There is a general lacking capacity in different networks surrounding the children, with one being the family. However, I believe that this could be improved with resources, education and commitment.

Throughout my study, new questions and areas to study have turned up. I have found that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and theories of resilience and vulnerability successfully could have been applied to the situation of returnees in northern Uganda. However, this study does not leave room to apply these theories.

Something that I have been thinking about is what happens if the cleansing rituals don’t help against the psychological symptoms. I guess that is where the CPCs and counselors come in, but are they sufficient? Social worker A said that it’s more common for PTSD to develop after the reunion than at the rehabilitation centers or before. This, in combination with the short period of time that the children spend at the rehabilitation centers, means that the support available in camps is even more important. This includes follow-ups of reintegrated children, which obviously don’t take place as often as they should. That leads me to ask how many children are suffering from psychological problems such as PTSD without anybody knowing about it? Do children feel that they can tell people about their psychological problems, without fear of people distancing themselves from them because of evil spirits? How many children are walking around,

believing that they have done something wrong and caused evil spirits to haunt them, when they in fact haven't done anything wrong and only need some support?

Another thing, which I have been reflecting upon, is what the reasons for the poor implementations at Gusco could be. It seems to me that there is a conflict between the Acholi or Ugandan culture and ways of handling and defining psychological problems on one hand, and the modernized, western methods of rehabilitation and psychological support on the other hand. The theoretical structure of Gusco and their goals seem to mainly be made up of western methods and ways of thinking. The social workers seem to understand this way of thinking in theory and some of them can describe them in a very professional way. When it comes to implementing those same things in practice, however, it seems that they run into some problems. Maybe the reason for this is a conflict of cultures? Perhaps the social workers understand the importance of certain methods in theory, but they don't feel the importance within themselves and therefore do not implement them fully? During my time in Uganda, I noticed that people don't really differentiate between teachers and social workers, indicating the differing views the Ugandan culture and the Swedish culture have on these roles.

Furthermore, it seems that although the staff at Gusco is trying very hard to keep a child-oriented perspective, and do succeed in some ways, they sometimes miss important aspects. For example, I've heard social workers talking about the importance of making the parents understand a child's reaction to a trauma. However, I haven't heard anybody talking about the importance of making the children themselves understand their reactions to what they have gone through, neither have I seen any signs of it being implemented. Of course this doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't exist.

Having said the above, I don't mean to disregard the skills and ambitions of Ugandan social workers and counselors. I believe that social workers of western traditions have a lot to learn from the way of thinking in Acholi culture. One of the things that I have realized through this study is how important culture is in social work. It's important to remember that our western methods aren't universal, and that other methods could work much better in other contexts. Non-western methods could also contribute important information to be used in combination with western methods. I believe that all this shows how essential a holistic and an ecological perspective is in all social work.

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Questionnaire for the youths

1. Living conditions

- a. Can you describe your everyday life?
- b. How do you feel about your current life situation?
- c. How are the relations in your family?
- d. What are your thoughts on the future?

2. Map of networks

- a. The respondent is asked to draw a map of his/her networks.

3. Views on the situation in northern Uganda

- a. What is your view on the conflict?
- b. What effects do you believe that the conflict has on society?
- c. What is your view on the UPDF?
- d. How would you describe the agenda of the UPDF?
- e. What is your view on the LRA?
- f. How would you describe the agenda of the LRA?

4. LRA

- a. Can you tell me your story of when you were with the LRA, starting from the beginning?
- b. What things do you remember the most from your time with the LRA?
- c. How has your time with the LRA affected you?
- d. What impact does your time with the LRA have on your life today?
- e. Do you currently have any contact with anyone from your time with the LRA?

5. GUSCO

- a. How did you end up at GUSCO?
- b. Can you describe your time at GUSCO?
- c. What did you do at the rehabilitation center?
- d. What did you learn?
- e. What has GUSCO done that was good for your life?
- f. What could GUSCO have done differently?

6. Experience of and views on reintegration

- a. What happened the first time you met your relatives after you had left the LRA?
- b. How did people treat you when you returned home? How did that make you feel?
- c. What things were the most difficult for you when you returned home?
- d. Did you solve these difficulties? If yes, how?
- e. What role did GUSCO play in the reintegration?
- f. What kind of contact has GUSCO had with your family?
- g. Who have been the most important persons for you since you left the LRA?
- h. What kind of support have you received in your community?
- i. What role have the Acholi traditions played in your reintegration?
- j. What role have religion and religious leaders played in your reintegration?
- k. What else could have been done to improve your reintegration?
- l. How do you think that your situation would have been if GUSCO hadn't helped you?
- m. What do you believe are the most important things when reintegrating a child who has been with the LRA? How have these things been fulfilled in your case?

Questionnaire for the parents

1. Living conditions

- a. Can you describe your everyday life?
- b. How do you feel about your current life situation?
- c. How are the relations in your family?
- d. What are your thoughts on the future?

2. Map of networks

- a. The respondent is asked to draw a map of his/her child's networks.

3. Views on the situation in northern Uganda

- a. What is your view on the conflict?
- b. What effects do you believe that the conflict has on society?
- c. What is your view on the UPDF?
- d. How would you describe the agenda of the UPDF?
- e. What is your view on the LRA?
- f. How would you describe the agenda of the LRA?

4. Views on rehabilitation and reintegration

- a. What do you believe are the most important things when reintegrating a child who has been with the LRA?
- b. How have these things been fulfilled in the case of your son/daughter?
- c. In which ways have you been involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of your son/daughter?
- d. Which role do you feel that you have had for your son/daughter in his/her rehabilitation?
- e. Do you feel that you have been able to give your son/daughter the psychological support he/she has needed? In which ways/what do you lack?
- f. In which ways have other persons been involved in the rehabilitation and the reintegration of your son/daughter?
- g. Who do you think have been the most important persons for your son/daughter in the rehabilitation? In which ways?
- h. What kind of contact has GUSCO had with these persons?
- i. What kind of contact have you had with GUSCO?
- j. In which ways do you believe that GUSCO has improved your son's/daughter's life?
- k. What do you believe that GUSCO could have done differently?
- l. How do you think that your child's and your situation would have been if GUSCO hadn't helped you?
- m. When did you first hear that your son/daughter had left the LRA? How?
- n. Did you hear anything about your son/daughter while he/she was with the LRA?
- o. What kind of help and support is available for former child soldiers in your community?
- p. What problems have you experienced in the reintegration of your son/daughter?
- q. How have these problems been solved, if they have been solved?
- r. What role have the Acholi traditions played in the reintegration of your son/daughter?
- s. What role have religion and religious leaders played in the reintegration of your son/daughter?

Questionnaire for the staff at GUSCO

1. The background of the staff and GUSCO

- a. How long have you been working at GUSCO?
- b. What is your educational background?
- c. What did you learn about war traumatized children in your education?
- d. Do you have any other experience which is relevant for your work at GUSCO?
- e. What have you learnt or been taught at GUSCO?
- f. Do you as a social worker receive any support or guidance in your work?
- g. How does the management at GUSCO control your work and results?
- h. Do you evaluate your work? How?

2. Map of networks

- a. The respondent is asked to draw a map of what a child's network could look like.

3. Views on the situation in northern Uganda

- a. What is your view on the conflict?
- b. What effects do you believe that the conflict has on society?
- c. What is your view on the UPDF?
- d. How would you describe the agenda of the UPDF?
- e. What is your view on the LRA?
- f. How would you describe the agenda of the LRA?

4. The rehabilitation and reintegration process

- a. Can you describe the rehabilitation process from the beginning to the end?
- b. Are there any differences in treatment and rehabilitation depending on the age of the child? If yes, which? Depending on the sex of the child?
- c. How do you work with girls with children?
- d. In which ways do you prepare the child for reintegration?
- e. What kind of contact do you have with the child's family? (mother, father)
- f. What kind of contact, if any, do you have with other persons in the child's surroundings?
- g. What do you want to achieve by working with the families of the children? How much of this do you achieve?
- h. Which problems have you met in your work with the families? How have these been solved, if they have been solved at all?
- i. Which possibilities have you met in your work with the families? How have you used these possibilities?
- j. What do you believe are the most important things when reintegrating a child who has been with the LRA?
- k. How are these things fulfilled regarding most of the children?
- l. Can you describe GUSCO's general informational work and advocacy? For who, where, when, how?
- m. What other actors do you believe are important for the children in the rehabilitation process?
- n. How common are traditional rituals? What is the purpose of these and how are they carried out?
- o. What effects do you think traditional rituals have?
- p. What role do Acholi traditions play in the reintegration of the children?
- q. What role do religion and religious leaders play in the reintegration of the children?

To whom it may concern,

My name is Caroline Andersson and I am a student at the School of Social Work in Lund, Sweden. I am in Uganda to study the reintegration of children and youths in the Gulu district. The purpose of my study is to get more information about how to rehabilitate and reintegrate children and youths in northern Uganda in the best way possible, and to spread information in Sweden about the situation in northern Uganda.

All interviews I carry out will be strictly confidential. I have signed confidentiality papers at GUSCO regarding the contacts they provide me with. My research assistants are also bound by confidentiality. If possible I would like to record the interviews, for my own use only. After I have completed my study, I will erase the recordings.

I will not use any information, which the respondents don't want me to include in the final paper. Everyone who contributes to my study will be offered to take part of it when it has been completed.

Throughout my study, I am receiving guidance both by a Ugandan field supervisor and a Swedish supervisor of my university. The study is being carried out as part of a scholarship, which I received by the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

If the respondents give their consent, I would like to share the information with my colleague Erika Gullstrand, who is also carrying out a study on reintegration. She, and my Swedish field supervisor, are the only ones who will take part of the material in the original version, and only if consent is given. They are both bound by the same confidentiality as I am.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sincerely,

Caroline Andersson

Appendix E

The following text is quoted from the interview with Cathy. Instead of names of places and persons, I have put an “X”. Words in parenthesis are my addition.

I was arrested from our home down here. [...] They (LRA) would tell us to go to collect food and when you fail to collect food, you're beaten and even refused to eat. And after you've brought food, they even give you some little part of it because they tell you if you overeat, you won't walk a long distance. When we were at X we were put on standby and from there the UPDF came and attacked us and we run and scattered all over and for me, I was alone, I ran alone. When I went back to our camp they started pinning me up that I wanted the UPDF to finish people because I decided to run alone, and I was beaten. [...]After there I was appointed to become the OP and I was made to go with some boy where we climbed up the tree to see if the UPDF were coming. [...] (An op is) a spy. If here is our camp, then the spy is put very far on a tree to see if enemies are coming because they have nothing to detect this kind of thing. So that's the one called an OP. After being an OP, they warned me I should not repeat my mistakes. If I repeat it, I'd be killed and I'd never see my home again. Then from there I was given to one of the commanders there so that I become a mother. Then I told them that I am still young, I cannot become a mother, then they said that if I don't want, they kill me. And from there I accepted to become now a wife.[---] I was thirteen years old by that time.

[---] The commander said that for you under all cost it will overthrow the government and whoever escapes from him there, will just come back and finish all the people at your home. [...] There is one who escaped, came back home, and he was followed up and rearrested from here, taken back there and was killed because there was fear that he was going to take to us the enemies. The commander could send us to go and look for wood, then they give us some bullets and instruct us to carry out attacks on the soldiers, which is UPDF, and we loot sugar and other food items and we take to him. And when we went for the attack, the husband that I was with, he died from there. When that husband of mine died, I went back, then the commander himself came and asked me that I'm a witch, why is it that a man died in my hand? So from there I was beaten 100 strokes for making a man die. Then after the 100 strokes, then I started praying that oh God throughout my life such thing has not happened to me, I think God now you better take away my life. After now I started living now a free life there, when they instructed to do anything I just go and do it now, I was now careless with my life, I'd do anything. [---]I came and got a new husband, he's called X, I started staying with him. We just negotiated within now there - it was between the two of us, not given. [...]My kid was only 4 days old and my husband had gone on standby, for that time when they attacked (the UPDF). [...] When they arrested me, they brought me now in the hand of the government. [...]We went to Gulu, where they made an announcement over the radio that I am now back and my mother went and collected me from there.