ELSEVIER

Research article

How mothers mediate the social integration of their children conceived of forced marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army☆

CrossMark

Fiona Shanahan *, Angela Veale

School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

A B S T R A C T

This article aims to understand how formerly abducted young mothers mediate the social integration of their children conceived of forced marriage and sexual violence within the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. Interviews and photographic methods were used in six Internally Displaced Persons Camps in northern Uganda. This article draws on data derived from ten mothers of thirteen children who were conceived in the LRA, five boys and eight girls. The analytic approach used was Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The analysis identified turning points of sites of action where young formerly abducted mothers used diverse strategies to support the reintegration of their children born or conceived within the LRA. Six key turning points are identified, these are (a) participating in rituals and ceremonies, (b) naming, (c) adapting to changing family structures, (d) responding to discrimination against boys (e) managing disclosure and (f) sharing positive memories and identities. Formerly abducted young mothers mediate the social integration of their children by engaging in strategies to support and foster their well-being and social relationships. However, the contexts in which they are operating are highly constrained and the relational identities of children born in the LRA are fluid and potentially insecure within communities of return. Implications for policy and programming are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This article aims to understand how young women who were abducted as children by the Lord's Resistance Army mediate the social integration of their children who were conceived of forced marriage and sexual violence within the armed group. In northern Uganda, population-based surveys indicate 26% of girls and 47% of boys were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (Annan, Blattman, Carlson, & Mazurana, 2011; Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006). Conservative estimates suggest between 60,000 and 80,000 youth were abducted over the course of the conflict (Annan et al., 2006; Pham & Vinck, 2007). Within the LRA, former abductees reported multiple combat and military support roles, over half of females also reported forced marriage (Annan et al., 2011; McKay & Mazurana, 2004). Interviews with demobilized former LRA commanders, senior fighters and abductees indicate that the abduction and distribution of females was often orchestrated by the top LRA leadership who dictated the number of females targeted for abduction, their placement within LRA units, and which commanders and higher ranking fighters would take them as "wives" (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008). Forced marriage within the LRA was a deliberate military strategy designed to sustain the fighting force and was used as a reward mechanism,

an organizing structure for forced labour, and to produce the next generation of LRA fighters (Annan, Blattman, Carlson, & Mazurana, 2008a). Half of all forced wives gave birth to children (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008) and the social integration of those children has received little attention (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2009, 2013; United Nations, 2000; Wessells, 2006). Within the military context of the LRA, discourses on children born within the armed group position them as inextricably connected to the conflict. Speaking during the Juba peace talks in 2007, Vice-Chairman and Second-in-Command of the LRA Vincent Otti identified children conceived within the LRA as "by-products of the conflict" (New Vision, 2007). Academic and policy discourses have also tended to position children conceived within the LRA as connected to, and symbolic of, the conflict, and as complicating their mother's return to civilian settings (Apio, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008; Carlson & Mazurana, 2008; Onyango, Atyam, Arwai, & Acan, 2005), as illustrated in the following extract (Apio, 2007 p. 103):

> The children of the LRA symbolize these almost two decades of long suffering: rape, defilement, cold-blooded murders and massacres, abductions, pillage, wreckage of the once peaceful and progressive society, displacement of whole communities, and disruption and stoppage of social services. These children are therefore automatically and unanimously blamed for the acts of their parents. Each grows up being seen as a rebel, a thief and murderer, an accident, an outcome of rape and defilement, a Joseph Kony.

How do young mothers navigate a context where dominant discourses position their children's identities as connected to and symbolic of the conflict? Identities are constructed and maintained through social interaction. Within the social relational contexts of formerly abducted mothers and their children there are sites of tension and contestation regarding children's identities that have not yet been adequately named or explored. Apio reports that 71% of her sample of 69 children born in the LRA in a reception centre in Gulu had been given names with negative meanings such as *Komakech*, meaning "I am unfortunate", A*nenocan*, "I have suffered", *Odokorac*, "Things have gone bad", *Lubanga kene*, "only God knows why this happened to me" (2007 p. 101, see also, 2008). In reception centres, residential institutions for returning youth run by local and international non-governmental organizations, Apio reports that social workers routinely changed the names of children who had been born in the LRA "out of sheer sympathy" (2008 p. 6). Apio reports that when mothers gave birth in the centre the social workers chose names they felt were more suitable but mothers resisted these changes and "preferred the old names" (2008 p. 6). It is unclear whether the meanings young mothers made of their child's name was considered. The naming of children in this manner has been presented as a denial of child rights due to fears that children's names act as a reminder of suffering, captivity and may lead to "self-chastisement" (Apio, 2008 p. 6). However, this finding should be interpreted in the context of Acholi communities, where it is traditionally considered impolite to boast at the birth of a child and most of the most popular baby names have meanings that are neutral (usually related to birth order) or negative (usually related to family or community experiences at the time of the birth). Therefore although children born in captivity often have names with negative meanings, these names are common to many children and adults in the community. Mothers' resistance to outsiders (such as social workers) renaming their children must be understood in the context of familial and community naming patterns.

The limited empirical evidence available would suggest that the majority of mothers of children conceived within the LRA do not report that their children are treated differently to others (Annan et al., 2011; Apio, 2005b, 2007, 2008). Nonetheless, a significant minority (31%) of a sample of sixty-nine forced mothers living in reception centres did report differential treatment of their children by families and communities (Apio, 2008). More recent data indicates that 20% of twenty-nine forced mothers surveyed reported difficulties between their children and other family members (Annan et al., 2011). Small sample sizes make it difficult to draw conclusions, but there are indications that problems are confined to a minority, often isolated to relationships with one or two individuals and decrease over time (Annan et al., 2011). Annan's participants who did report problems found that when they remarried, their children conceived or born within the LRA were not accepted by their husband and experience differential treatment, this experience was likened to that of other children born of relationships prior to their mothers' marriage (Annan & Brier, 2010). In families where there were multiple ongoing stressors the relational identity of a child as having been born in the LRA was activated when there are tensions around inheritance rights, payment of school fees or their mother's remarriage, indicating a possible distinction between acceptance and belonging in familial contexts (Shanahan & Veale, 2010). This potentially impacts on children's claims to social legitimacy and perhaps property rights within the maternal home (Angucia, 2010; Ochen-Awich, 2011). Interviews with young mothers, parents and Acholi elders have indicated that these tensions are similar among all children born of single mothers, who traditionally remain part of their mothers' clan (Shanahan & Veale, 2010). Dominant discourses marginalize children born outside of marriage, rather than solely children conceived within the LRA, and present particular challenges in terms of 'illegitimate' children's relational identities, which are fluid and somewhat insecure.

Relational identities take three forms (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005) (1) identity as an ongoing product of social interaction whereby one's identity is modified in response to other's view of the individual (2) identity as defined by relational roles such as parent or child, and, (3) identity as the relational unit in which the relationship itself is an identity (such as being a member of a particular family). In times of threat or tension the identity of a child as a 'child conceived within the LRA' or 'child born without paying luk' (bride price) can be activated affecting their relational identity in the first sense. This could also impact on their relational identity in the second and third sense, bringing about changes in their relational roles as a nephew or granddaughter for example and as a member of their family and clan. These tensions open up spaces for identity gaps; for example the gap between how a mother sees her daughter and how she is seen by members of her