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Annex

Foreword

Rosemary was abducted by the LRA when she was about 12 years old and remained with the LRA for about 10 years. She would talk about the unspeakable atrocities she had witnessed and experienced. Such stories about the LRA's brutal violence as have been shared widely. She would talk about the hunger and injuries she went through, the long distances she had to walk, and the dangers she had to endure. She would talk at length about how those who tried to escape were punished severely, even killed. But that was not all. She spoke with warmth about her friends and family in the LRA, abductees who were in the same situation as her. She would also narrate stories about supernatural things she had seen within the LRA: the special powers of Joseph Kony, and how these powers would protect Rosemary and her friends on the battlefield.

I have been working with former LRA rebels such as Rosemary since my field-work began in the mid-2000s. I have always been struck by the ambiguity of how they spoke about the LRA. This ambiguity was further deepened after seeing photos taken by LRA commanders, which are presented in this book. The photographs, dating from 1993 to 2003, document daily life in the LRA, and how the combatants wish to represent themselves. The images were shown to Rosemary and other former rebels and discussed at length. The horrors, violence, and brutality they experienced featured prominently in these talks, but many discussions went beyond this. What emerged in many of our long conversations were vivid memories of friends made, fashionable clothes worn, or dreams fulfilled or lost, and of miracles witnessed.

This book is about this profound ambiguity: about how people try to survive and express themselves within extremely violent and coercive circumstances, or “bad surroundings” as Finnstrom¹ called them. The photos specifically engage with this ambiguity and are a testimony to this struggle. On the one hand, they portray a force showing off its military power, which it used to commit unspeakable atrocities and inflict terror upon the wider population. On the other hand, they show scenes which – at first sight – are strikingly familiar. They are no different from “normal” family photos: parents with their children, wives and husbands, women in their nicest clothes, or portraits of teenage boys trying to look tough.

This is a visual story which is not only about the Lord's Resistance Army. It is a story about a conflict where the limits of victim and perpetrator have become blurred, where people struggle to survive and find their place, and where children in particular bear the brunt of this tension.

My deepest gratitude goes to the many women and men who I have been able to meet and talk with over the years, and who trusted me with their stories. I feel honoured, and grateful. *Apwoyo Matek*.

I have been very fortunate to have had incredible support, people who helped me navigate the different steps of this often difficult process. Without them, this book

would not have existed. Rein Deslé has been a major source of support and an important soundboard throughout the development of this project. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to exhibit this work at the Photomuseum of Antwerp. Holly Porter, Sam Dubal, and Sarah Watkins all generously commented on earlier versions of texts. The tireless support, aid and critique of Ewa Majczak and Matthew Sebastian was inestimable in shaping the book in its current form.

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On a personal note, this book would not have been possible without Lienke, my partner in life and love. Our son Anton was born during the course of this project. They constitute the biggest happiness I can ever imagine.



I have four children between 3 and 13 years. They are with my mother in Kitgum. I see them every three months, at least, when I am in Uganda, and not gone outside the country.

I continue to serve in the armed forces today. I'm not educated, there's no other way for me to earn a living. It's only through that I can take care of my children. With the UPDF, I went on many missions: to Congo, to Sudan, then to Uganda, and to Somalia.

Life in Somalia wasn't easy. We fought the Al-Shabaab rebels all the time. Life in Somalia was even more difficult than the bush: there are times that you cannot even sleep - day or night, you are under attack the whole time, and you must always be in position. In Somalia, if you go there, you remain inside a fenced area for a whole year. There's no way of going outside: if you try, you'll be shot or hit by a bomb. Even the vehicle that delivers supplies is hit by bombs - people died like that. Just after we arrived, we were in a vehicle for deployment and the rebels hit our vehicle with a bomb. We survived but it was really dangerous. Those vehicles are bullet proof; only the tires were destroyed, but people inside could also be hurt. It shakes you and you hit your head! So you hurt yourself.

I encountered many dangerous situations. There was a day when we were ambushed when we were coming from Sudan to Uganda. The three in front were killed. I was carrying a big bag, with a saucepan and many other things. The bomb hit the bag, everything was thrown away. My ear and head were hit. I became unconscious. Later on, my colleagues told me I was pulled to safety because they didn't want me to be taken by UPDF. They carried me away on a stretcher and took me to the sick bay.



I was abducted in 1994 when I was 9 years old, and I escaped in December 2003.



All the battles I was in, I fought with my husband. I didn't know what his intention was. I do not know whether he wanted me killed in the frontline. Wherever he was sent to fight, he would put me in the squad to go and fight. I was just being forced. Yet all his other wives remained behind. The other wives thought he was using me as one of his bodyguards: everywhere he went, I moved with him.



Life with the LRA wasn't easy: you live like an animal. You lead a life that isn't in your interest; even the battle you fight in isn't in your interest. You are always forced to go and fight. There was no easy life in the bush. You live your life like a guerrilla. You don't get any peace.



By carrying that thing I was holding, you are going to poor blood. You are going to kill innocent people. You have to carry it 24/7, it's like your baby. It's your protection. Any time you're attacked, you have to use it. When I was carrying it, I feel bad. I feel bad. I feel stressed, I feel pissed off, I feel disgusted in life. It is for murdering people, for innocent people. Anything you find on your way, you have to shoot, you don't question anyone, you just shoot. I carried it for 7 years. 7 of my good years, I had to be with it.¹

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Kulak



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I don't know who took the photo. But that day, my father came. When he saw me, he started crying. Also me, I started crying. We had not seen each other for seven years. He didn't know I was still alive.

He was crying: is this really my daughter?

I was crying: is this really my father?

When the LRA took me, I was 14 years old, so I knew: this was exactly my father. My father was a little bit lost because of me: he wasn't sure it was me – it was 7 years later. I came back when I was big, and I was wounded, and I came with a child. When we met, my father therefore asked me 3 times: “Is this one you?” And I said “Yes, I'm the one”. Then again, and again. Then my father said, “What happened to you, you're wounded?” When we were in the bush, I had gotten a bullet in my head, and also in my chest.¹



Coming Home



What did “coming home” for combatants look like? This question will be answered through pictures and drawings from the combatants’ return “home”. It shows them in reception centres after they were rescued from the LRA or managed to escape. It also shows them on their way home or reunited with their family. Lastly, it shows drawings which reflect how returned children see their future. This essay aims to describe the context in which these photographs and drawings can be understood, and also shows the profoundly difficult and ambiguous experience of coming home.

The reception centres

After surrendering, escaping, or capture, combatants were first kept with a Child Protection Unit of the army (in theory for 48 hours, in practice for about two weeks), then transferred to a reception centre, after which they were reunited with their family.² Reception centres were established to help the former abductees re-integrate into civilian life. In 2006, it was estimated that around 20,000 children had gone through these centres. 2003, the year when most of the photographs were taken, had a particularly high number of abductees passing through the centres: around 4,000 that year, compared to 600 in 2005.³ Children stayed in these centres between 2 to 6 weeks,⁴ where they underwent medical examinations and undertook a range of activities such as sports, vocational training, and counselling.⁵ Most centres gave the former combatants a reintegration package, with goods such as a mattress, blanket, jerry can, and saucepan⁶ – some of these goods are portrayed in the photographs in this chapter. Yet many ex-combatants – particularly adults – didn’t go through these reception centres, instead going straight home.