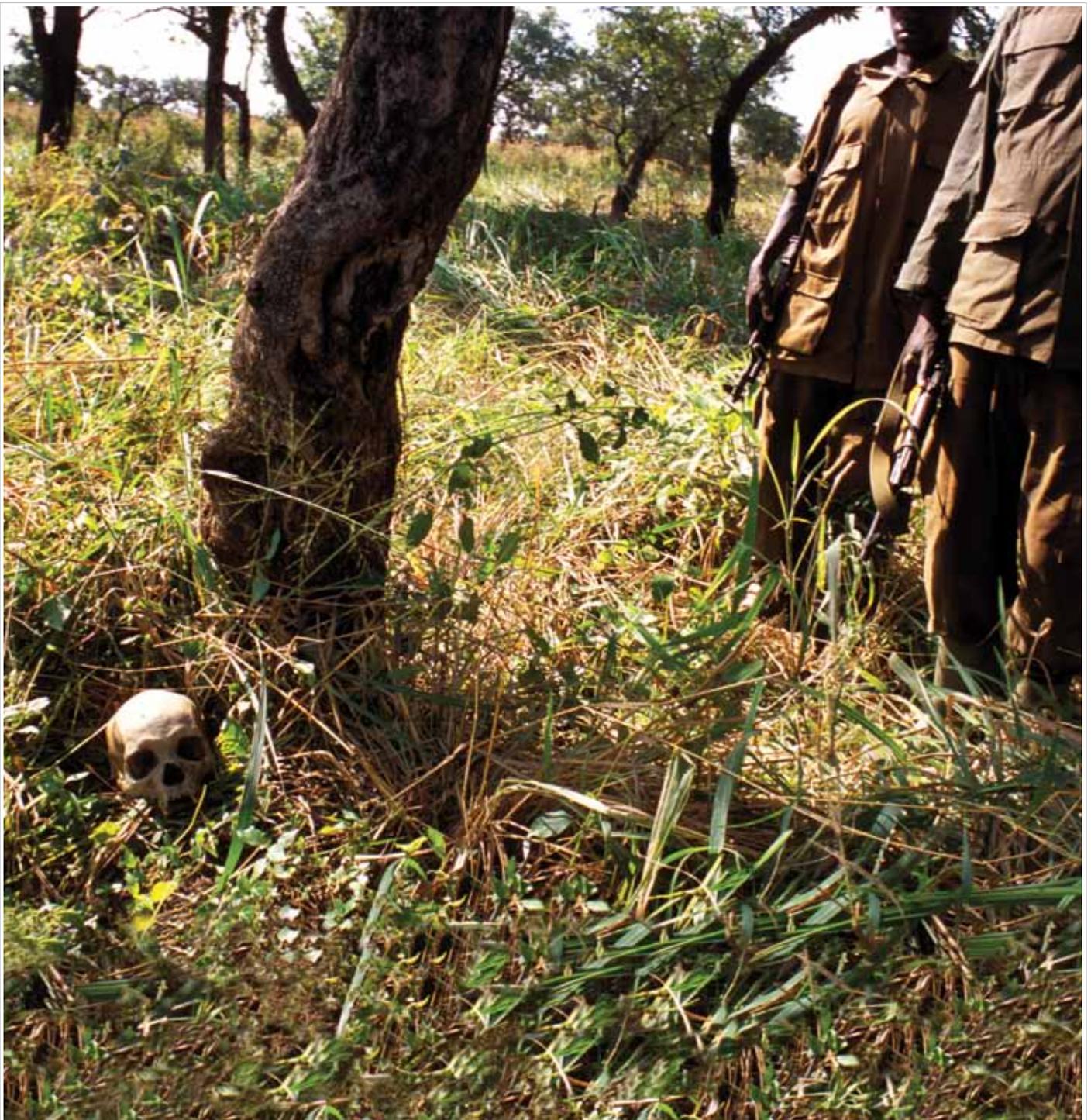


International Center for Transitional Justice
Justice and Reconciliation Project

We Can't Be Sure Who Killed Us

Memory and Memorialization in Post-conflict Northern Uganda

Julian Hopwood
February 2011



Cover: Barlonyo massacre site.
Photo by Lara Rosenoff 2006

Below: A grave in Mucwini.
Photo by Lara Rosenoff 2006



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About ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice works to redress and prevent the most severe violations of human rights by confronting legacies of mass abuse. ICTJ seeks holistic solutions to promote accountability and create just and peaceful societies. For more information, visit www.ictj.org.

About JRP

The Justice and Reconciliation Project is a nonprofit organisation based in Gulu, northern Uganda. JRP has played a key role in transitional justice in Uganda since 2005 through seeking to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns, and views of the communities affected by the LRA conflict. For more information, visit www.justiceandreconciliation.com.

Executive Summary

This report examines the role memorials have played in Uganda's transitional justice process. Addressed to community members, conflict survivors, policymakers, and donors, it reviews existing memorials and offers recommendations to those seeking to initiate new memorial activities. It is based on research conducted in the Acholi and Lango subregions of northern Uganda involving the eponymous ethnic groups.

emorials are intended to preserve memories of people or events. Many are designed to promote a specific political or spiritual narrative, though individual experiences of them will vary. Memorials in northern Uganda were made in response to the events of the war conducted by and against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has now moved outside of Uganda to the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. The memorials reviewed include a monument, a school and annual prayer ceremony held in Atiak; a cross and twice-conducted annual ceremony in Mucwini; a technical school and annual prayers in Abia; and a stone monument, mass grave, and annual prayers in Barlonyo. All memorialize massacres at those sites.

The positive impacts of memorials include individual and communal healing, thereby improving inter-communal relations. Individual and community healing were reported as outcomes of prayer ceremonies at all memorials reviewed. An improvement of relations between the Acholi and Madi communities relating to the Atiak memorial was also noted. The Abia memorial in particular was singled out by respondents as providing symbolic reparations.

Negative impacts were seen to be the result of a lack of traditional elements of conflict-resolution processes including apology and compensation. Annual prayer ceremonies had the negative effect of recalling traumatic memories for many respondents. The presidential dedication speech for the Barlonyo monument had an especially negative effect, as it characterized the victims of the massacre as deserving their suffering.

Memorials in northern Uganda must confront the challenging lack of reliable information about the history of the conflict. A number of facts may never be known, including the names and numbers of people killed, the identities of their killers, the circumstances of their deaths, as well as the motivations of the LRA and the Ugandan government in pursuing the war for 20 years at such high cost to the civilian population. These factors indicate that memorials should not attempt to establish definitive histories, but should rather focus on memory. They should provide opportunities for long-term reflection instead of focusing on short-term outcomes.

Memorials must also take into account overlapping constituencies of traditional and Christian beliefs. They should incorporate the needs of both and avoid politicization. While providing opportunities for healing and comfort, they should be careful not to provoke desires for revenge and feelings of envy.

ACRONYMS

CAR	Central African Republic
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAP	Formerly Abducted Person
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission, Gulu Archdiocese
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PRDP	Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan
RLP	Refugee Law Project
TC/TRC	Truth Commission/Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TJ	Transitional Justice
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force

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1. Introduction

Currently in Uganda there is political and civil-society enthusiasm coupled with international money and an impetus for transitional justice in what is hoped to be the aftermath of northern Uganda's extended conflict. At the same time, there is evidence of an urgent need for post-conflict interventions, to be found in inter- and intracommunal tensions, re-expressions of historical clan and tribal enmities, disaffected and angry young people including former combatants, rising violent crime, and a widely traumatized population.¹ In this context, learning more about the functions that memorials have served and can serve in supporting the recovery of victims of the conflict becomes increasingly significant.

Uganda's is a seemingly atypical transitional justice process, in part because the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war continues, albeit not on Ugandan territory. In November 2008 the last initiative to persuade the LRA leadership to sign the Juba Final Peace Agreement failed. In December of that year the armies of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Southern Sudan, with U.S. intelligence, logistical, and diplomatic support, staged an attack against the LRA called "Operation Lightning Thunder." In retaliation the LRA are reported to have executed more than 600 people in northeastern DRC in the "Christmas Massacres."² Despite the ongoing conflict over the border, most displaced Ugandans are tentatively moving toward rebuilding their lives after years of humiliating and debilitating dependency on international aid.³ They can, for the first time in many years, live in their homes without the immediate threat of violent death, torture, mutilation, or abduction at the hands of the LRA and are again living under civilian rather than military authorities.

However, this is the extent of the transition taking place. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, which many northerners believe unnecessarily prolonged the war and whose army, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), at times played a role in the abuse of the civilian population, remains firmly in power. Notwithstanding an apparently strong commitment to the Juba peace process (which led to written assurances to address human-rights abuses, reconciliation needs, and northern underdevelopment, poverty, and neglect), there is limited evidence that the government of Uganda has radically modified its approach to its northern region.⁴ Its much trumpeted Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) for the conflict-ridden northern and eastern districts failed to deliver significant benefits in its first year.⁵ It was subsequently suspended. Payments to districts

under the PRDP finally started in mid-2009 but have not been able to compensate for the withdrawal of humanitarian assistance now well under way.

This is the context in which transitional justice actors are attempting to assist northern communities and the country as a whole to reconcile, apportion accountability, and find a degree of closure. Most of the transitional justice activity and government, donor, and civil-society policy engagement to date has focused on criminal justice mechanisms and, to a lesser extent, traditional accountability mechanisms and a possible truth commission.⁶ Vetting of officials has not been considered in the context of continuity of government and state institutions, while reparations are an issue of such complexity that no coherent debate has yet emerged, despite considerable evidence to suggest that this is the issue of greatest concern to affected communities.⁷

Memorialization, sometimes conceived as "symbolic reparations," is perhaps perceived as a relatively easy entry point into this tangled territory.⁸ According to the 2007 report *When the War Ends*, "almost all (95%) of the respondents said they wanted memorials to be established to remember what happened in northern Uganda. The most frequent proposition was to establish a written historical record (41%); 24 percent proposed a day dedicated to the remembrance of the war and its victims; and 16 percent said a memorial, such as a statue or other object, should be erected."⁹

This would seem to offer a clear mandate for those initiating memorial projects. However, questions arise about the motivations and assumptions underlying this activity, as well as about how memorials are actually received by communities. It was in the hope of answering some of these questions that the Justice and Reconciliation

Project (JRP) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) initiated a project to begin to explore northern Ugandan community attitudes to memory and memorialization. It was conceived as a response to apparently ambivalent reactions to some of the few formal monuments and memorial ceremonies so far undertaken in northern Uganda. These were encountered in the course of earlier research conducted by the JRP on three of the most extreme single events in the LRA conflict: the Atiak, Mucwini, and Barlonyo massacres.¹⁰

Data collection was conducted through 22 focus group discussions, 25 key-informant interviews, and one “community dialogue.” All data was collected at eight principal locations in four Acholi and Lango districts, including three massacre sites. We talked to 280 people: 142 women and 138 men. Focus group discussion members were identified through snowballing from respondents to previous data-collection exercises or from individuals identified by local leaders and contacts. Selection was not random, and, while we believe that we have captured something of the range of views held on memorialization, identifying how widely these are held would require further, quantitative research. Interview subjects were key informants who had played a role in developing existing memorials, including religious, traditional and community leaders, and victims. Topics discussed with respondents included their perceptions of what should be remembered and what forgotten (both normatively and pragmatically), traditions and expectations of

memorialization, their responses to the activities to memorialize the LRA war that have already taken place, and their narrative of the war and how it was evolving.¹¹

Some of the locations for this research were chosen because memorial activities had already taken place there.¹² Two of these sites were in Acholi: Atiak and Mucwini, sites of massacres in 1995 and 2002, respectively. In Lango, we went to Abia, site of a 2004 massacre, close to the subsequent and more heavily reported Barlonyo massacre.¹³ We also drew on data collected for reports on three massacres—Atiak, Barlonyo, and Mucwini—drawn up by JRP between 2007 and 2009.¹⁴

The other sites we visited—in and around Pabbo in Acholiland, as well as Awer, Amuru, Padibe, and Anaka—were chosen because of their more-typical experience of the war, having suffered mass displacement, multiple killings, and abductions, but no single extreme event; these sites have experienced very little memorial activity.

This report is addressed to community members, conflict survivors, policymakers, and donors and is intended to guide current and future memorial initiatives in northern Uganda. With this in mind, we examine below the reported motivations for and impacts of some existing memorials, our respondents’ understandings of the conflict, their views on whether it should be forgotten or remembered, and, in case of the latter, in what way.

SARAH L. STEELE¹⁵

“Whilst there has been agreement of what memorialisation is, there has, however, been far less agreement on ‘why’ it is undertaken.”

2. Memorialization

A memorial is intended to preserve the memory of a person or event. It does so symbolically: a functioning memorial needs to connect to a narrative or history to in the minds of those who experience it. This will not be the same for all who encounter the memorial—every victory is someone's defeat, and even those on the same side may experience a single event in vastly different ways. In preserving memory, some memorials fail through lack of a substantive referent: many cities have monuments to past wars that have been forgotten in the public memory. Other memorials can have a perverse effect of keeping wounds open rather than healing them, at least for some parts of affected communities.

Some memory theorists, such as psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan, have argued that societies and populations can be traumatized in a manner comparable to individuals.¹⁶ Proponents of this position suggest that, like individuals, traumatized societies require therapy involving re-experiencing the traumatic events in some form in order to recover, and that memorials can play a role in this. In individuals, a pathological, traumatic memory differs from a normal, healthy memory in that the former cannot be psychologically processed so as to meld into the totality of one's experience. The traumatic memory remains raw and immediate, intrudes painfully and disruptively into one's subsequent life, and does not fade with time.¹⁷ Academic literature on memory and healing, as well as much public debate about memorials, tends to assume a degree of equivalence in collective trauma. The consequence of a failure to recover from the humiliation and powerlessness of collective trauma is a likelihood that the traumatic memory will be transmitted from one generation to the next, potentially fuelling future conflict.¹⁸ However, as has been noted in the context of both individual and collective trauma, remembering can sometimes retraumatize rather than heal.¹⁹

Memorials are, by definition, designed with a purpose. It is rare, though perhaps less so now than in the past, for memorials to be designed to accommodate a range of narratives, particularly when that range includes opposing narratives. Most public memorials are designed to promote a hegemonic political or spiritual vision of the people or events concerned.

Remembering a war is in large measure about remembering the dead. How a society deals with its war dead is inevitably shaped by cultural understandings of the afterlife. For orthodox Islam and Christianity, the dead are

very distant, and the eschatology of the desert religions does not generally grant them the ability to interact with the living or recognize them as having tangible needs. On the other hand, religions as practiced may diverge from this orthodoxy: popular culture, horror fiction and cinema, and the periodic resurgence of spiritualism suggest that the notion of interaction between the dead and living has traction even in the most secular of contemporary cultures.²⁰ Emotionally, the bereaved may experience their dead as very present. However, in public discourse in the secular world, these notions tend to be contained as myths, fictions, and intrapsychic experience.

In northern Ugandan tradition, the dead, along with other spirits, are very present. People believe that they have the power to interact with the living and often exercise this ability by punishing and rewarding the living. It is also believed that the dead have needs and emotions, including desires for respect and for justice, and will take vengeance against the living when these are left unfulfilled.²¹ Okot p'Bitek, Heike Behrend, and others who have recorded Acholi belief systems emphasize that Acholi spiritual discourse is in a state of evolution, shaped by and shaping Christianity, Islam, and new internal cults, including those of Alice Lakwena of the Holy Spirit Movement and Joseph Kony of the LRA.²² Traditional beliefs have also changed in the context of social challenges, the ruptures of colonization, war, displacement, and modernity.

Memorialization tends to be the least considered and least researched aspect of transitional justice, often seen as a matter of individual or community mourning. There is a potential for memorials to function as state responses to provide redress for harm suffered by victims, but this is also an area of risk, as complex political agendas are usually involved.

International public discourse on memory and trauma has expanded in the decades since the Holocaust and has revealed the complexity of notions including remembering and forgetting, history versus memory, individual and collective memory, collective trauma, and victimhood and perpetratorhood. These issues are relevant to this project but mostly beyond its scope. We have attempted to use these and related academically contentious terms and ideas only in the contexts and senses that they were used by our respondents as we understood them.

3. Existing Memorials

We encountered three principal reported motivations for creating the memorials we visited. The intention of healing traumatized victims and victim communities was reported at all the sites, as was raising awareness of the plight of victims with a view to generating material support. Lastly, interclan and intertribal reconciliation was reported as a central motive in Atiak and as an outcome in Abia.

In Atiak, site of the infamous 1995 massacre, a monument has been erected, an annual prayer ceremony has been held on the anniversary of the massacre since 2005, and a secondary school, Lwani Memorial College, has been constructed. In Mucwini, site of a 2002 massacre that sparked complex interclan tensions, a cross commemorates the dead. An annual prayer ceremony conducted there for two years was suspended due to a lack of funds but was revived in 2010. In Abia, memorial prayers held in two years also faded out, but a memorial technical school has been built.²³ In Barlonyo a large, stone monument to the victims was erected by the government, annual prayers are held, and a mass grave site exists.

Our respondents presented a highly complex picture in which some reported tangible benefits for themselves and their whole communities, while others reported a range of negative impacts.

Positive Impacts

In Atiak, an internally displaced person (IDP) camp and trading center, the massacre took place on a market day, April 20, 1995, and was led by LRA General Vincent Otti, who is originally from Atiak. Members of the Madi tribe from neighboring Moyo (now Adjumani) District had come to Atiak on that day to trade, while others were students at the technical school. A number of Madi were among the victims. The Acholi are often perceived by neighboring ethnic groups as collectively responsible for the war, and the Atiak massacre intensified existing tensions between the Acholi and the Madi. In the context of traditional notions of collective clan responsibility for the crimes of individual members, interethnic tension was further heightened by Otti's membership in the dominant clan in Atiak.

A number of respondents felt that the first memorial ceremony had a substantial positive impact on relations between these communities, as Madis who attended realized for the first time that the Acholi were victims as well.

Some respondents stated that this reconciliation had been one of the objectives of the ceremony:

*It was the Rwot Moo [the anointed, hereditary clan chief] who first thought about organizing this memorial service. He was of the view that after we lost very many people in Atiak, something should be done in their memory. He also thought that since children of many tribes were killed in the massacre, this could make them annoyed with the people of Atiak. They would think that since Otti was from Atiak, they would blame the people of Atiak for the massacre. We needed to invite these people so that we were able to explain to them what happened on the day of the massacre. That is the reason that we invite all these people who lost their children in the massacre, so that they are able to learn exactly what happened and know that it was not in our wish that these things happened. That is why we invite survivors of the massacre to recount to them the story of the massacre so that they can know exactly what happened. . . . At the start the Atiak people feared the Madi people but today they are free. The Madi people have now confessed that they shall never look at the Acholi people as enemies anymore. We brought survivors of the massacre to recount to them the story of the massacre and this made them clearly understand that the Acholi people also suffered the same way as they did.*²⁴

Another young man from Atiak explained, "The way I see these memorials is that they start with prayers, then a drama is played, traditional dances performed, so in the end people interact freely and reconcile with one another in the process."²⁵

In Abia, in the Lango subregion, where there has also been a tendency to see the Acholi as bearing collective responsibility for the conflict, one respondent said, "We no longer think about this massacre and it's only because you have come to talk to us that we are talking about it now. We were so annoyed with the Acholi people after the massacre that we wouldn't speak to them, but today we even have some of them staying with us here. This is a sign that we have forgotten about the massacre."²⁶

Positive impacts of prayer ceremonies in terms of community and individual healing were reported at all the massacre sites we visited:

Most of the victims now have a normal lifestyle, psychologically they are healed. Those who got very traumatized were prayed for and are now fine. There is harmony in the community since people see it as a binding factor. The ceremony has had a great impact on me as an individual,



A sign post in Lira District showing directions to the Bar lonyo massacre site. Photo by Lara Rosenoff 2006

*together with other people. We used to cry a lot for our loved ones but this has ceased. We are gradually forgetting what took place. The memorial ceremony also gives us the chance to pray for the souls of our dear ones to rest in peace.*²⁷

It also became clear that a substantial amount of memorial activity that has so far taken place has been motivated, at least in part, by a desire to publicize the suffering of survivors in a bid to generate material support from the government, the churches, and humanitarian agencies. As a respondent in Abia put it, “Each year we have the memorial prayers here where everyone is gathered. We invite the religious leaders, government leaders and when they come, they make contributions mostly in the form of cash which is then given to the families that lost their loved ones.”²⁸

Another from Abia said, “We get happy when we see the memorial school constructed in memory of those people who were killed. It shows that they acknowledge the sufferings that we underwent.”²⁹ This and many other responses suggested that perhaps the most effective

symbolic reparations were in fact physical and practical ones. Symbolic reparations aim to show understanding of and empathy with pain and loss and acknowledge suffering and injustice. Where suffering and injustice persist in the form of extreme poverty and destitution wrought by the conflict, understanding may need to manifest itself through practical aid. In a context where traditional reparations have had an intrinsically material component, this is particularly true. As one man in Palwong said, “If an organization could come to compensate us for our loss, we would surely know that the government recognizes the pain that we went through. I have personally lost both my parents. If they could give me some livestock, I would then be able to recognize that they think about us.”³⁰

Despite the fact that these institutions charge fees, we encountered no criticisms of the memorial schools in Atiak and Abia. However, many respondents noted the need for more educational support for those orphaned in the conflict, and indeed for all victims and survivors.

Negative Impacts

Reports on cultural understandings of justice and reconciliation throughout northern Uganda, as well as surveys of current public opinion, have shown that, to lead to reconciliation and closure in the minds of the affected populations, redress depends on apology and compensation offered by the perpetrator's clan to the clan of the victim.³¹ For some, the absence of these elements can lead to a negative experience of Christian memorial prayer ceremonies. As one young man put it, "Memorials bring pain, especially when the bereaved are not settled through dialogue with the perpetrators, and they are also not compensated."³²

Many reported that, far from being a healing experience, the ceremonies revived the pain of loss. In some cases, they also renewed feelings of envy of those who had suffered less or the desire for revenge against perpetrators. As a former LRA abductee put it, "Those whose children died feel bad on such a memorial day and do not look at other people's children who are still alive with a clean heart. They feel more hurt about the loss of their children."³³ In all of the massacre sites where people who felt that attempts to retell the events of the massacres, whether through testimonies, films, or plays, were counterproductive: "This year we didn't have the memorial prayers because we needed to have someone who would give us a testimony of the incident. They used to invite those women who hit their children on tree trunks so that they would recount their stories to the congregation, but many people complained that it was painfully reawakening their memory of the massacre."³⁴

A former abductee from Atiak stated that "Some people take advantage of the ceremony as a chance for them to meet their enemies and do something to hurt them through witchcraft."³⁵ Another said, "Memorials can be of damage in the society. It may cause conflict amongst the people. Some of the people might choose to revenge against the clans that caused them pain during the war."³⁶ Still another respondent from Anaka said, "I feel the issue of memorial and reconciliation should be

stopped because it cannot work. It makes the children who are left orphans due to this conflict recall the conditions they were in before the death of their parents and this can either lead to hatred or revenge killings."³⁷

We also encountered memorials that were having the reverse of their intended effect as a result of mismanagement, misjudgment, or exploitation. In Atiak, the neglect of the monument and the political co-optation of the annual ceremony are sources of pain to survivors and relatives of the dead.³⁸ In Barlonyo, the formal ceremony at the mass grave and the unveiling of a monument were marred by a speech in which the president of Uganda was understood by those in attendance to treat the massacre as "moral justice visited on northerners for the crimes committed by the then—largely northern national army in Luwero in the 1980s". The president's remarks have echoed throughout the north as evidence of government antipathy and have arguably damaged national reconciliation efforts to a degree far outweighing any benefits that might have come from the ceremony or monument. Victims believe that they have been told that they deserved their suffering, compounding the injustice and deepening their wounds. The monument's inscription creates further divisions: it specifies only 121 victims, well under half the death toll reported by eyewitnesses in the aftermath of the massacre.³⁹

When describing the impacts of ceremonies held to remember the 2002 massacre of 56 people in Mucwini, one man said,

*It is achieving something but very gradually. The unforeseen impact is that it has resurfaced fresh memories of what happened which should have been forgotten. Mentioning the names of those that were killed traumatizes so much. In addition, people ask for assistance in the names of the memorial prayers but this assistance never reaches the right beneficiaries. Some sectors are using the memorial to fulfill their selfish political motives hence bringing political tension.*⁴⁰

4. Confusion and Ambivalence

A key element of the ambivalent attitudes held by communities and, in some cases, individuals toward memorials appears to be the issue of divergent narratives of what took place. Our findings suggest that there is no widely held political or moral understanding of the conflict, and many doubt that one could ever emerge. We also detected a fault line, particularly acute between traditionalists and born-again Christians, concerning the spiritual efficacy of different sorts of memorials.

What our study did not reveal, and that it suggests is still unclear to the people of the north, is which narrative, or collective memory, of the conflict is to be preserved. Many of our respondents were acutely aware of this issue and identified a wide range of pitfalls where memorials might generate further problems through having different meanings for different people. One young man expressed this eloquently: “We could have sculptures where [LRA leader Joseph] Kony and [Ugandan President Yoweri] Museveni are standing together and this shall demonstrate that the two have agreed a peace deal. The danger, however, with that is when we see such sculptures, we would instead get to see that it was because of these two forces fighting that we got to suffer and yet for them they lost nothing. Such things can make people become wild and even lose their lives out of pain.”⁴¹

Causes of the LRA Conflict

Our respondents variously articulated what they understood or, more often, what they were unable to understand, as the primary causes of the LRA conflict. Very few expressed their own unequivocal beliefs on this: responses described rumors and secrets. One Acholi man said:

*I know nothing about the spiritual power that Alice Lakwena and Kony used and this needs to be explained, because some people allege that it is the current government that sent that spirit. . . . There is also this allegation that the NRM government has planned to stay in power for fifty years and that it has a systematic plan to wipe out the Acholi tribe and culture and replace it with that of the Bantu, that is why long-horned cattle have been introduced, and women's empowerment is being enforced so that, contrary to my culture, a woman can now have more than one husband.*⁴²

Such bitter Acholi interpretations of events are often very foreign, illogical, and unwelcome from external points of view—including the government's and the

international community's. However, Sverker Finnström, in his ethnological study of the Acholi during the conflict, explicitly rejects the concept of an Acholi paranoia. In discussing the phenomenon of “radio kabi,” the rumor mill of the north, Finnström says, “the rumors manifest themselves within a political discourse of domination and contest. In other words, the rumoring aims at resisting domination by means of assuming the right to interpret the lived reality.”⁴³

In forming a narrative of the conflict, it is not hard to understand why people struggle, and why “interpreting the lived reality” is almost always ambivalent or contradictory. Circumstances can place survivors in situations where—however compelled they may feel to bear witness—they are unable to do so because they cannot express themselves at all or because they cannot do so in a way that effectively communicates their experience to others. Studies have noted this phenomenon with respect to the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide.⁴⁴ As with these conflicts, few heroes emerged from the northern Ugandan war. What heroism took place was almost entirely below the radar of public memory, because individual acts were largely unobserved and unrecorded. Instead, there were perpetrators of evil and their victims—a picture immensely complicated by the LRA's use of abducted child soldiers, creating a class of semi-reintegrated victim-perpetrators. The extent of the impact on entire communities, and the extreme nature of the traumas inflicted, is perhaps comparable to those crimes against humanity and war crimes. As Steve Buckler describes in relation to the Holocaust, “A sense of autobiographical rupture may be expected given the experiences of the victims, subjected to treatment designed to obliterate identity and to reduce the opportunities for choice and responsibility to zero. The trauma of the victim here can be understood in terms of a break in the thread of self-identity that underwrites an autobiographical story.”⁴⁵ The experience of the LRA abductee and the life of the IDP-camp dweller are reflected, each in different ways, in Buckler's analysis.

Added to this is the extreme complexity, especially for the Acholi, of identifying the “other,” the perpetrator or the source of evil. Kony is one of their own people, and he claims to be fighting for their “benefit”. Most of his fighters, albeit overwhelmingly involuntarily, were their children and siblings. Some responses we received hint at the extraordinary difficulty this poses. One man from Atiak, the home area of Vincent Otti, who led the 1995 attack and massacre in the camp, said, “What we should forget but cannot totally forget is the death that took

place here in Atiak. We can't be sure who killed us and worse still we know that nothing shall come out of it."⁴⁶ In a war clouded in mystery, the Atiak massacre is one of only a few relatively well-documented incidents. Otti's alleged role in committing this atrocity was reported by a number of eyewitnesses and is widely accepted as fact.⁴⁷ Yet for some survivors it seems impossible to comprehend or, as in the case of the man quoted above, to even acknowledge. One elder reported, "In 1995, one big thing happened here that beat the understanding of us elders. Our own son [Otti] gave us a very big shame. A real shame to the extent that he killed his own mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters."⁴⁸ Even Kony's culpability is questioned by some; a man in Pubec said, "There are things we shall never know. We are told that it is Kony who has caused us all this suffering but I have personally never seen him. We might never get to see him."⁴⁹

Communities assign collective blame for the conflict in different ways. In western Acholiland, blame is usually perceived as resting with the clan of a particular perpetrator, while in the east (Kitgum and Pader) culpability is often attributed to western Acholis more generally.⁵⁰ For neighboring ethnic groups guilt rests with the Acholis as a whole, while in other parts of Uganda northerners are deemed responsible. In Sudan and Congo it is Ugandans. As one man from Atiak put it,

We were all blaming our child Otti. The Madi people were killing the Acholi people in revenge. The people from Kitgum and Pader were all blaming Gulu for the massacre. The people of Atiak and the Madi had a long running conflict even before the massacre and the massacre only worsened it but we didn't have any problem with the people from Kitgum and Pader. Immediately after the massacre, they were angry with us. We had to organize the gomo tong ceremony [a traditional ceremony marking the end of conflict between clans], without which they wouldn't have even come for the memorial prayers.⁵¹

Another said, "What we should remember is not to engage in war again. We should all get together and stop hating, since the war made us hate one another. Many people looked at their neighbours as enemies and most of the other tribes in northern Uganda now consider Acholis' as rebels."⁵²

For some it seemed that forgetting the conflict was preferable to trying to make sense of it. One man in Palwong said, "In these twenty years of war, our own brothers and children were abducted and forced to commit atrocities against us. This is something that we should be able to

forget because they did all things against their will."⁵³ Another said, "We can't understand why Kony is concentrating on killing us the civilians and not concentrating on government forces."⁵⁴

In contrast, for some the Ugandan government's crimes form part of a well-developed narrative. This might be characterized as follows: Museveni, having reneged on the 1985 Nairobi peace agreement with Uganda's then-president, Tito Okello (an Acholi), to share power, decided to take his revenge on northerners, and in particular the Acholi, for the war crimes committed by the national army dominated by northerners against the Baganda in the Luwero Triangle during the "Bush War" of 1981–86. As well as allegedly allowing elements of the National Resistance Army (NRA) to loot, rape, and kill northerners during the early years of the war. The Ugandan army deliberately prolonged the war by "sabotaging" the many peace initiatives. The strategy of forced displacement was in fact a deliberate policy of cultural and economic destruction, demonstrated by the failure of the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) to offer protection against the LRA once people had been placed in the IDP camps.⁵⁵

So much, approximately, is the received wisdom of many northerners, though it seems likely that this view is more prevalent among the older population and the politically literate. Older people remember the period in the mid- to late-1980s when the LRA and its preceding rebel movements had more-coherent political agendas and focused their aggression on government forces rather than on civilians. During this period the government army sometimes behaved as an occupying force, committing multiple abuses against the civilian population in Acholiland and reportedly facilitating the mass looting of the Acholi cattle herds.

A majority of younger people, however, will have grown up with the constant fear of abductions, civilian killings, and mutilations by the LRA and are more likely to have an ambivalent attitude towards the UPDF as protectors, albeit ineffective of the civilian population. Formerly abducted young people, however, will have been exposed to antigovernment propaganda by the LRA, which is likely to have shaped their perceptions, even though few feel any loyalty to or support for the LRA.⁵⁶

Even among those who award a large degree of blame for the conflict to the government, there seems to be confusion about what this indicates about the government's attitude to northerners. As one man said, "The rebels came to kill us and loot our animals while the govern-

“How, for instance, does a society commemorate a war for which the central narrative is one of division and dissent, a war whose history is highly contested and still in the process of being made?”

ment looked on. We shall never get to know whether this government really cares about us.”⁵⁸

Many respondents suggested a deep yearning for information about the causes of the war. As one man said, “It brings us more fear if we can’t learn why these things had to happen.”⁵⁹ However, we were repeatedly told that the answer to the essential question of the cause of the war and the suffering it led to would never be known. A woman in Atiak said that we would never learn “the reason as to why the government has not been able to resolve the conflict for all these years. Who started the northern conflict, is it the government or the rebels of the LRA?”⁶⁰ Another asked, “What is the root cause of the fight between Museveni and Kony? Are they fighting for wealth? For power? I want to know why the war cannot end because up to now, we are still hearing rumors.”⁶¹

Names and Numbers

Our children have been abducted. Our only hope is the children we had in the camp because of those abducted we know nothing.

— FEMALE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION MEMBER⁶²

The other key questions that our respondents saw as unanswerable related to the extraordinary opacity of this war and its victims: the massed ranks of the missing, presumed dead. “There were people who were abducted, and they died in the bush. We shall never know the places where they have been killed and, in some cases, we shall never know whether these people are still alive,” said one man in Gaya.⁶³ Another in Mucwini said, “The most difficult thing to know is the children that have been abducted. We shall never know whether they still live or have been killed.”⁶⁴ There are recurrent though unsubstantiated claims that thousands of children abducted by the LRA have been sold into slavery in Sudan, adding another possible answer to the question of the fate of those who do not return.⁶⁵ There are indications to suggest that the number of abductees killed by the LRA was very high indeed and that very many nonreturnees are likely to have died early in their period in captivity. However, the belief that they may still be held as slaves somewhere in Sudan adds to the confusion of grieving families.⁶⁶

For most individuals, multiple barriers to the clarification of their stories of personal loss and bereavement are emerging. Who killed whom in the bush is often either information that no one has ever known or is now lost

and unrecoverable. There were many other crimes committed in more accessible circumstances, but even these are often obscured by other factors, identified below.

Problems with recording deaths in certain conflict contexts are illustrated by the fact that estimates of numbers killed in the Rwandan genocide, now 14 years after the event, vary between 600,000 and 1,000,000—an extraordinarily large margin of error; and similar factors of uncertainty occurred for example in Guatemala and East Timor. The situation in northern Uganda is if anything even more obscure, and no one has as yet attempted even an approximate death toll.

The reasons are demonstrated by the 2004 Barlonyo massacre: “Very many people died here, and it is difficult to know the exact number,” said one survivor, echoing many others.⁶⁷ “Some were wounded and died in the bush around here while others were abducted and killed away from the camp. A great number were burnt in huts and their bodies could not be identified. Walls were demolished on them.” Further confusing the numbers, while many bodies were buried immediately and then later reinterred in the mass grave, some bodies were not moved after the initial burial. “The army made us to throw seven people in the latrine, and their bodies weren’t exhumed with the others to put in the mass grave,” one survivor remembered. “I feel the skeletons of those people could still be deep down there.” Many survivors believed that efforts to determine the true number of those killed in Barlonyo were deliberately hampered. Others have complained that the reported number of deaths differs wildly from the number of corpses counted by survivors and other witnesses who took part in the burials the next morning.

This problem of contested numbers of those killed is not only specific to the highly politicized circumstances of Barlonyo.⁶⁸ In Atiak, estimates of those massacred on April 20, 1995, are similarly vague, ranging from 170 to 300.⁶⁹ The confusion surrounding the events of a single incident on a single day in a densely populated location demonstrates just how elusive a verifiable record or even a well-grounded estimate of overall LRA war casualties would be.

The multiple challenges in producing even approximate records of LRA war casualties are due to, among other factors, the 20-year duration of the war, limited recording and reporting of the conflict, especially in its earlier years, the lack of regular recording of births and deaths, displacement, abductees’ use of false names and con-

cealment of their identities within the LRA, the lack of forensic capacity in Uganda, and the nature of bush warfare in remote regions. Many believe that the government has consistently sought to downplay the LRA conflict over the years for a range of motives, including resistance to international humanitarian involvement and as a reaction to charges from many quarters of negligence, incompetence, or deliberate prolonging of the conflict.

Financial and political motivations to conceal, deny, exaggerate, or fabricate victims are further complicating factors. Some people hope for financial gain in the form of possible future compensation for relatives who were war victims, but there are also potential liabilities. The lure of compensation could lead to the inflation of reported casualties, and stories of compensation paid for “ghost victims” have appeared in the press.⁷⁰ However, it is risky to be associated with abducted fighters, especially those of higher ranks. As long as the possibility of traditional justice processes occurring continues in the wake of the conflict, the fear of clans having to pay compensation for deaths caused by their members, alive or dead, remains.⁷¹ Memorials, said one young woman, can “bring reconciliation because those who perpetrated violence have already returned home so if they come out and Mato Oput [a traditional restorative justice and reconciliation ceremony] with these victims, there will be restoration. On the other hand, I feel it is dangerous because I may not be able to pay compensation to bring about reconciliation.”⁷²

Religion and Spirituality

We may never know God’s plan for the Acholi. Maybe the war has come to wipe out the Acholi from the world.

— FEMALE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION MEMBER ⁷³

The war-affected populations include the Acholi, Lango, Teso, Madi, Alur, and others, each with their own traditions and varying levels of Christian and Islamic influence. In this project we only spoke to people of Acholi and Lango ethnicity. Anecdotally, Christianity has had a greater impact amongst the Lango people than the Acholi, in that it has diminished popular engagement with traditional beliefs.⁷⁴ In both subregions, the majority is Catholic while substantial minority populations are born-again Christians, or Balokole, along with smaller Anglican, Orthodox and Muslim congregations. However, in considering the spiritual power and appropriateness of different types of memorials, the question revolves more pertinently around how many, and to what degree, have

abandoned traditional beliefs, and how accessible traditional spiritual ideas, actors, and resources remain.⁷⁵

In Acholi culture there is considerable synergy and sympathy between mainstream Christianity—Catholic and Anglican—and traditional beliefs.⁷⁶ This relationship is perhaps exemplified by the fact that one of the principal sources of information about traditional cultural practices was researched and published by Gulu Catholic Archdiocese.⁷⁷ Evangelical Protestant churches, on the other hand, consider some traditional practices as “satanic.”⁷⁸

In Acholi there seems to be a spectrum of beliefs, some strongly and exclusively Christian and others similarly traditionalist. Most people however seem to take their beliefs from both cosmologies in varying degrees. These issues aren’t readily accessible to outsiders: people do not often self-identify as having, in effect, a dual cosmology, and traditional spiritual beliefs are rarely described as “religious.” However, this duality emerged in certain responses. For example a woman in Mucwini said, “The [Christian] memorial service was intended to protect the community against a similar problem that might occur and also to appease the deceased so that they do not bring any vengeance on the people.”⁷⁹

We found many indications of the significance of this for memorialization. It emerged most clearly in reactions to the prayer ceremonies conducted in the massacre sites we visited and in response to questions about appropriate memorials. For many traditionalists there is an immediate need: the north is crowded with spirits of the dead that need to be placated if disease, madness, and other misfortunes are to be avoided. A man in Awer camp said,

Something that I thought that I would be able to forget was the many killings that took place here but because of the vengeance that the spirits have started showing us, we have not been able to forget about this. There are instances when people find these remains in the bush and when they happen to touch them, they eventually start falling ill. These are the kind of effects that make us fail to forget these events that took place here some time back.⁸⁰

Others explained, “In Acholi when someone dies and he is not buried, he remains unhappy. He sends sicknesses that attack family members and this is meant to communicate his grief. The only way that such a person can be remembered is by calling back the spirit home and then organizing for the last funeral rite for such a person.”⁸¹ Another added: “Sometimes the dead are demanding.

They send sickness and death if their needs are not met. It's after such things begin to happen that they go and consult the ajwaka [witch doctor] so that the spirit of the dead is called to find out whether and how they have to be compensated for, then after that arrange for the burial."⁸²

Sometimes a family decides not to perform full burial rites or call the spirit back home. As one man explained, "Traditionally if someone dies in a bad way and we do not know the reason behind their death then their graves are not cemented. They are left to go and seek revenge on the person who caused their death until a period when that clan feels necessary to do the last funeral rite."⁸³ More often, failure to conduct traditional burial rites is due to a lack of sufficient funds.

*I lost my child who was in primary six. He was abducted on his way to school. I think about him a lot, especially the way that he used to help with work at home. He would help with garden work and also help me fetch water from the well. This is what pains me when I think about him. I know that he wants me to prepare and call back his spirit home so that he is then buried at home.*⁸⁴

Some respondents were very clear that proper funeral rites were an essential part of ongoing relationships. One said, "For the people that we have lost to abduction, we should call their spirits and organize for their funerals so that they know that we still care and love them."⁸⁵ Another young former abductee said, "Lwongo tipu [the ceremony for calling the spirit home] could take place to improve relationships between those who died and those who are still alive."⁸⁶ Once someone has been buried, a further ceremony is required to achieve closure, described thus by one woman elder:

*Traditionally there is what we call guru lyel [last funeral rites] which are done two to three years after the person has been buried. It is a big ceremony where many people gather for drinking, eating, dancing, prayers and they disperse after three or four days. After this ceremony, the deceased feels happy that they have been thought of. The graves are also usually cemented to last for generations to come.*⁸⁷

Traditional memorials include planting a tree on a grave, preserving or using a deceased's possessions, or naming children after them.

Questions arise about the relationship of a number of traditional practices to memory: are they designed to facilitate remembering or forgetting? There were multiple responses which indicated a normative weight to aspects of memory. Often remembering seemed linked to the notions of unfinished business, trauma, unpaid reparations, bad dreams, and the desire for vengeance. Forgetting, on the other hand, was linked to moving on, forgiveness, writing off losses and compensation, recovery, and closure.

One formerly abducted young man said, "As human beings, it is very difficult to forget about the war but it is good to forget anyway."⁸⁸ Another man said, "We should have to forget about the rape and defilement and the burnt houses because the perpetrators knew us and it is not happening these days. Those people that were killed by the LRA cannot be resurrected and it is better to forget them and begin to plan how to improve on our life and that of the orphans."⁸⁹

5. A Way Forward?

Should a society's right to know the truth be turned into an unbending obligation? That is, if those persons most directly affected, the victims themselves, are not interested or not yet prepared to revisit these horrors, should they be obligated to do so? Could there sometimes be aspects of a conflict, a transition, or a people's culture and history that would make such truth-seeking unattractive and unhelpful?

— PRISCILLA HAYNER⁹⁰

Our findings have revealed no clear picture as to whether and, if so, how the victims of the LRA war want to memorialize the war itself, their dead and missing, and their suffering, and so our conclusions and recommendations are offered tentatively. All the memorials we encountered were positively experienced by at least some, bringing comfort and healing at both individual and community levels. One memorial ceremony, Atiak, was reported by many as having brought about a critical reconciliation between clans and tribes.

On the other hand, a majority of respondents claimed that all of the purely symbolic memorials, including monuments and ceremonies, led variously to unfulfilled expectations, retraumatization, corruption, marginalization and exploitation of victims and survivors, intracommunity feelings of revenge and envy, and other ills. One ceremony, the dedication of the Barlonyo monument, appeared to have deepened the fracture in the relationship between the government and northerners. Memorial activities in Mucwini had also exacerbated interclan tensions.

The more-practical memorials that responded to an actual need generated by the event memorialized, such as the schools built in Atiak and Abia, appeared to be welcomed and appreciated by all, whether individuals or their families benefitted personally or not. However, many respondents still deplored the lack of support offered directly to victims.

Many responses suggested that any government acknowledgement of crimes committed and neglect, be it in the form of a memorial, apology, compensation, or accountability mechanism, would likely offer some relief and facilitate healing, reconciliation, and “moving on.” Here a relatively common narrative exists and demands a response.

LRA crimes, on the other hand, are far more complex emotional, social, and spiritual territory. This is a narrative in construction, and it remains to be seen whether more coherent or widely held themes will emerge in years

to come. There is no reason to suppose this will happen quickly, nor is it clear whether the narratives that do emerge will foster local and national healing or generate antipathy and violence.

We found evidence that memorial activities have multiple unexpected and, often, undesired outcomes. Memorials are symbols, and symbols, like language, depend on their power to communicate. To communicate well, one must be fluent in a common language and have empathy for the audience, and to influence one's audience one needs to be persuasive. Okot p'Bitek recounts a well-known story of how early missionaries to the Acholi adopted as the translation for “God,” through a series of linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, the name of a malevolent demon associated with tuberculosis.⁹¹ Memorials at this time offer perhaps-equal opportunity for misunderstanding, and a monument designed to inspire healing, reconciliation, and peace may have a quite different, and perhaps negative, impact on the collective psyche of victims and survivors.

We encountered many voices in the north actively calling for the forgetting of the conflict, and warning that memorialization is either dangerous or pointless or both. Their arguments include the notion that this has been a senseless war of which there is no understanding that could contribute to healing and reconciliation. Another argument put forward was that remembering actively stimulates feelings of pain and of revenge that might otherwise fade with time.

The national-level transitional justice project in Uganda has been hailed as an instance of a government demonstrating real commitment to its human rights obligations, but progress is slow. In 2008 the Special Division of the High Court was established to try international crimes, and in May 2010 the International Criminal Court Act was passed. Serious questions arise whether any further transitional justice measures will be put in place before donors' funds and patience expire, and even if they were, whether the government would have a commitment to the transparency that would make them meaningful to affected communities in the north or provide national reconciliation. As Laura Arriaza and Naomi Roht-Arriaza put it,

[A national] approach is useful in terms of establishing global norms and creating a national (re)founding mythology—undertakings that can only be carried out on a uniform basis and by a state. Such efforts, however, ignore existing local dynamics aimed at reinforcing or transform-

*ing the power relations that are often most relevant to peoples' lives, especially given the perennial weakness of the central state. In transitional justice, as elsewhere, all politics is local.*⁹²

Criminal justice and truth-telling, as well as being a matter of fundamental human rights, can assist in bringing a degree of closure to communities affected by war in many ways. At the level of individual psychology, they can address anger and fear. They may help to address issues of loss and grief through acknowledging unjust deaths. However, in northern Uganda, transitional justice needs to be placed in context: the likelihood is low of most individuals learning the fate of relatives who disappeared in the bush or of seeing any but a small number of the most-serious LRA perpetrators face any form of justice. In other words, accountability, to the extent that it occurs, will be primarily symbolic—an overwhelming majority of the many tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands of individual killings, and other crimes, will not be investigated or otherwise formally addressed.

Regarding truth commissions (TCs), Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza state that:

*in cases of massive violations, a TC report, no matter how well researched, provides only a general, not a personal, "truth" to many. Moreover, a short-term, truth-seeking endeavor cannot hope to garner widespread trust among people in a deeply traumatized society. Testimonies taken may be from people who were less affected by the violence, who are more articulate or who are members of organized groups. Without reaching all sectors of society, a partial, fictionalized or exaggerated past of a few may become the official narrative through the TC process.*⁹³

Reflecting this logic, a number of respondents indicated that generating a commonly understood history of the war is likely to be a topic of greater concern once people are convinced that the war is, in fact, history, which is certainly not the case at present. "We could easily forget what happened in the past if there was total peace, but these days we hear over radio that Kony has refused to sign the final peace agreement and is still abducting and killing people," said one woman in Pabbo.⁹⁴

We found that memorialization is intimately linked in people's minds to gaining an understanding of the conflict that coincides with their lived reality and to their

religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Given the diversity of all of these factors among the peoples affected by the LRA war, this would seem to predicate highly localized memorial activities. The common theme of a need for a diversity of spiritual approaches was articulated by an elder: "There are two types of memorials, the traditional and the religious way. . . . We should sensitize the community members about the different ways through which they can remember their loved ones so that they can then choose which ones they can practice."⁹⁵ A collective understanding or memory of the conflict will take a long time to emerge, and narratives may surface that are specific to different ethnic communities. We see dangers inherent in *historicizing* this conflict prematurely or presumptively—for example, by attempting to specify numbers of victims where records are insufficient or contradictory. Despite their good intentions, we also see dangers to hegemonic memorials—like some monuments or ceremonies—that try to fix an event in collective memory and define how people should respond to it.

However, we do not suggest that our findings indicate the abandonment of memorial activity relating to the LRA war. Judy Barsalou and Victoria Baxter's 2007 report for the United States Institute of Peace observes:

*The process of determining what shape a memorial project should take and how memorial space should be used is essential—more important, ultimately, than the physical edifice itself. Moreover, the process remains essential even after a memorial is built. Memorial projects that encourage survivors to explore contested memories of the past, promote learning and critical thinking, and facilitate ongoing cultural exchange are more likely to advance social reconstruction.*⁹⁶

In northern Uganda the absence of a common narrative makes the exploration of contested memories, and indeed the prior question of whether it is best to remember rather than forget, critical. A few responses suggested that the mere exercise of talking to our research team had been a helpful process. For example, one respondent claimed that "Everything is in God's hands; we should stop worrying about what happened in the war because, even if we worry, these worries will not make the situation better. If you come and meet us like this then it gives us hope and can make us slowly forget what happened."⁹⁷

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Memorials never go anywhere; they are there to stay.

— FEMALE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION MEMBER⁹⁸

Our findings illuminate a need for memorials that are local and diverse, in the sense that even a local event may need to be memorialized in different ways by people with different religious and cultural beliefs. We also think that they should be informal, in the sense of focusing on memory rather than attempting to establish a definitive history. They should also be concerned with long-term processes rather than short-term outcomes. There is a need for the war-affected to have opportunities to reflect: the present, when most are engaged in economic recovery, and when the war continues elsewhere, may not be the right time. The stage is still very early in what is likely to be a long process in which affected individuals and families seek to discover and understand what happened to those they have lost and come to terms with their personal suffering. At the same time, communities will continue to struggle to develop a common narrative about the past while dealing with the internal and external tensions of the present.

Recommendations to those seeking to initiate memorial activities—civil society, government and donors:

- We recommend activities that seek to develop debate around the causes of the conflict and to assist victims and others affected to articulate their experiences of the impacts of the war. It is likely that for some people this will need to be a private, reflective process; for others a public testimony. Interventions will need to be long-term and be undertaken at a local level because communities affected by the conflict are distinct from each other in many ways, including in their experience of the LRA war, language, history, and culture.
- Especially in attempting to address the need for narrative consensus, however, memorialization must be careful to avoid politicizing events. The Barlonyo memorial is instructive in this regard; the president's dedication speech was taken as revealing government antipathy toward a group, thereby exacerbating intercommunal tensions. Such politicization can be counterproductive to victims and may endanger efforts promoting reconciliation and healing.

- Furthermore, poorly managed attempts at remembering risk reopening old wounds. Those involved in memorialization should take seriously the responses noted above that indicate not only healing and comfort resulting from memorials, but also feelings of envy and desires for revenge. Memorialization should exercise great caution in dealing with traumatic experiences of survivors and pain of loss, and remain conscious of possible negative impacts.
- Inclusion of names or numbers of victims should only be attempted where adequate records exist, sufficient resources are available to verify these, and there is widespread agreement among those affected that those numbers are accurate—in other words, in rare and exceptional circumstances. All such exercises should strive for maximum transparency around their criteria and methods.
- We also recommend memorial activities that perform some practical function related closely to the needs of victims' families and other survivors. Schools, health centers, roads and bridges, and scholarships for orphans can all function as symbolic and material reparations. We think they will be welcomed by affected communities, whether implemented by government, nongovernmental organizations, or the private sector. As symbolic reparations, we think that there is some evidence to suppose that these can function in terms of healing and reconciliation.
- Memorials can also play a role in promoting social healing. By publicizing their experiences, memorials may assist survivors in obtaining future support. Annual memorial services have, in cases noted above, drawn cultural, political, and religious leaders, who were called upon by the community to provide support.

Recommendation to traditional and religious leaders:

- We advise recognition that exclusively Christian memorial interventions can negatively impact traditional believers and vice versa. These constituencies may be blurred, overlapping, and representative of a spectrum of beliefs. However, it can be assumed that those killed in the war are likely to have relatives from constituencies at both ends of this spectrum, and attempts to recognize the needs of both need to be incorporated into any memorial activity that seeks to be inclusive.

APPENDIX: METHODS

Data collection was conducted through 22 focus group discussions, 25 key-informant interviews, and one “community dialogue.” All data was collected at eight principal locations in four Acholi and Lango districts, including three massacre sites. We talked to 280 people: 142 women and 138 men, ranging in age between 14 and 80, and with an average age of about 40. A number of different methods were used to identify focus group discussion members: snowballing from respondents to previous data-collection exercises, from individuals identified by local leaders, or from individuals known to JRP focal points. Selection was not random, and, while we believe that we have captured something of the range of views held on the memorials, identifying how widely these are held would require further, quantitative research.⁹⁹ Interview subjects were key informants, including religious, traditional, and community leaders, and victims, who had played a role in developing existing memorials. In Atiak, the biggest population center we visited, focus groups were selected demographically and for victim status: female elders, male elders, younger women, younger men, relatives of victims, and formerly abducted people. We were unable to replicate this in other more-rural locations, where we simply separated focus groups into men and women. The community dialogue was mobilized and conducted by one of JRP’s “focal points,” local researchers embedded in specific communities, and sought to bring together a broad cross section of the community in the locality.

Topics discussed with respondents included their perceptions of what should be remembered and what forgotten (both normatively and pragmatically), traditions and expectations of memorialization, their responses to the activities to memorialize the LRA war that have already taken place, and their narrative of the war and how it was evolving. Interviews and groups were conducted in Luo by bilingual researchers and recorded in English. As a consequence, translations of responses are literal and follow Luo syntax. These translations have been used for all quotations to preserve as far as possible nuances of

expression and meaning. However, this method lacks the rigor of transcribing responses in the original language in order to allow translations to be cross-checked for verification, a procedure we would have followed had resources allowed. Data was coded according to identified themes, analyzed, and cross-checked to establish our observations and conclusions.

We collected data in Acholi and Lango districts but not in other ethnic communities affected by the conflict; further research undertaken there could be useful. New monuments and memorial activities have been initiated since this research was carried out, including a prominent peace monument in Gulu town and a program in Acholiland by Ker Kwero Acholi, the traditional leadership, cleansing areas afflicted by angry spirits. Reactions to these also deserve further investigation.

In terms of transitional justice, and of northern cultural traditions, memorial activity is closely linked to both truth-seeking and reparations, and matters relating to these appeared repeatedly in the data we collected. Addressing these vast and complex issues is beyond the scope of this paper and hence these have been analyzed only in the context of memory and memorials. Much work remains to be done in these related areas.

JRP/ICTJ MEMORIALS RESEARCH

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. What important things do you remember about the war? What do you think everyone should remember, and why? Do you think it is changing as people move back home?
2. Are there things that it is best to forget about the war, and why?
3. Can memorials promote reconciliation and individual healing? How does this happen? What do you think the dangers of memorials are?
4. What don't we know about the war that we need to know? What do you personally still want to find out?
5. Do you think there are things we may never learn? How will this affect people?
6. What ways do families and individuals here have for remembering those they have lost?
7. What public ways for remembering people collectively have you seen or thought about, and do you think they help people?
8. Do you think that there are particular incidents, sorts of events, or groups of people who need to be remembered in a special way?
9. If you have friends or relatives who died in the war how do you think they would want to be remembered?
10. Which ways of remembering people do you think are most helpful to people who are left behind, the survivors?
11. a) How did people remember loss or suffering in the past, before the war? Will that work now for those who died or were lost or who suffered in the LRA war?
b) Does the location of someone's burial site, and if this is known, make a difference to how they are or should be remembered?
12. Who should take the lead in working on memorials? How should people be involved?

JRP / ICTJ MEMORIALS RESEARCH

Key Informant Interview Questions

1. What important things do you remember about the war? Do you think things are changing as people move back home? Does return affect how people remember the war?
2. Are there things that it is best to forget about the war, and why?
3. What don't we know about the war that we need to know? What do you personally still want to find out?
4. Do you think there are things we may never learn? How will this affect people?
5. What ways do families and individuals here keep the memories of those they have lost alive?
6. Tell me how the war has been memorialized publicly in this area.
7. How did this start? Who organized it?
8. What do you think it was meant to achieve? Were there specific problems that it was meant to address? Did you personally have expectations of it?
9. Do you think it has achieved these objectives? If so how? Have the impacts been at an individual and/or community level? Have there been unforeseen or negative impacts?
10. What has changed since the memorial ceremony started: The ceremony itself? The impact it has on people? People's expectations? People's needs?
11. What do you think should be done for the ceremony to work better? Or as well as or instead of the ceremony?
12. Do you think that there are particular incidents, sorts of events, or groups of people who need to be remembered in a special way?
13. If you have friends or relatives who died in the war, how do you think they would want to be remembered?
14. Which ways of remembering people do you think are most helpful to people who are left behind, the survivors?

15. a) How did people remember loss or suffering in the past, before the war? Will traditional ways work now for those who died or were lost or who suffered in the LRA war?
 - b) Traditional ways often emphasize important men, but many of those who suffered are women and children. Is this a problem?
 - c) Does the location of someone's burial site, if this is known, make a difference to how they are or should be remembered?
16. Do you think it should be political, religious, or traditional leaders who should take the lead in working on memorials? How should people be involved?

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ENDNOTES

- 1 See for example Human Rights Focus, *Fostering the Transition in Acholiland* and Justice and Reconciliation Project and Quaker Peace and Social Witness, *With or Without Peace*.
- 2 See Human Rights Watch, "LRA Slaughters 620."
- 3 This displaced population includes around 90% of the population of Acholiland, which at its peak numbered over two million people.
- 4 On the peace process, see Government of Southern Sudan, "Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation."
- 5 Beyond Juba, "Is the PRDP Politics as Usual?," 8.
- 6 The Government of Uganda's Justice, Law and Order Sector has established a working group examining the establishment of a special division of the High Court, traditional justice, options for interfacing between formal and traditional justice, and truth-telling. So far substantial progress has only been made on the first of these, with the passing in 2010 of the International Criminal Court Act and the establishment of a Special Division of the High Court to investigate and try international crimes. The Refugee Law Project has taken a lead on drafting a national-reconciliation bill that envisions establishing a truth commission on a broadly South African model.
- 7 See Pham et al., *Forgotten Voices* and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Making Peace Our Own*.
- 8 In *Symbolic Reparations*, 2, Naidu states that "symbolic reparations refer to measures that facilitate the 'communal process of remembering and commemorating the pain and victories of the past.' Such measures, which are seen as mechanisms to restore the dignity of victims and survivors, include exhumations, tombstones, memorials and monuments and the renaming of streets and public facilities."
- 9 Pham et al., *When the War Ends*, 34.
- 10 Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), "Remembering the Atiak Massacre," "Massacre in Mucwini," and "Kill Every Living Thing."
- 11 A more detailed methodology is included in the Appendix.
- 12 There are a number of monuments to victims of the LRA war in northern Uganda, often a simple roadside wooden cross. However other massacre sites remain unmarked. The locations chosen were sites of complex memorials involving different elements of ceremonies and structures.
- 13 Acholi and Lango are the names of the two subregions, as well as the tribes that populate them, that were most severely impacted by the LRA war.
- 14 JRP, "Remembering the Atiak Massacre," "Massacre in Mucwini," and "Kill Every Living Thing."
- 15 Steele, "Memorialisation," 3.
- 16 See Volkan, "Next Chapter," 22–5.
- 17 See, for example, Joseph, Williams, and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*.
- 18 Volkan, "Next Chapter."
- 19 See Adam and Adam, "Politics of Memory," 34–7.
- 20 See Verdery, *Political Lives of Dead Bodies*.
- 21 P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*.
- 22 P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*; Behrend, Alice Lakwena. See also Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*; JRP, "Roco Wat I Acholi," "Alice's Story," and "Abomination" for important insights on contemporary beliefs in the context of the LRA war.
- 23 "It was in the years 2005 and 2006 that we had the memorial services here in Abia but the following years had no memorial prayers organized because the members of the committee had all scattered back to their homes and it was difficult to get them together to organize the memorial prayer." Male focus group discussion member, 64, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 24 Male respondent, Atiak, November 5, 2008.
- 25 Male formerly abducted persons (FAP) focus group discussion member, 32, Atiak, November 4, 2008.
- 26 Male focus group discussion member, 53, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 27 Male respondent, 51, Abia, November 27, 2008.
- 28 Male respondent, 40, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 29 Male focus group discussion member, 53, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 30 Male focus group discussion member, 43, Palwong (Pabbo), November 6, 2008.
- 31 See Beyond Juba, "Tradition in Transition" and JRP, "The Cooling of Hearts."
- 32 Male focus group discussion member, 32, Okwany (Pabbo), November 7, 2008.
- 33 Male focus group discussion member, 27, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 34 Male respondent, 29, Pubec (Mucwini) November 21, 2008.
- 35 Male focus group discussion member, 20, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 36 Male focus group discussion member, 22, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 37 Female community dialogue participant, Anaka, December 4, 2008.
- 38 JRP, "Remember the Atiak Massacre," 13–14.
- 39 JRP, "Kill Every Living Thing."
- 40 Male respondent, 46, Mucwini, November 21, 2008.
- 41 Male focus group discussion member, 23, Gaya (Pabbo), November 7, 2008.
- 42 Male respondent, 46, Mucwini, November 21, 2008.
- 43 Finnström, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 186.
- 44 See Buckler, "Curtailed of Memory" and Steele, "Memorialisation."
- 45 Buckler, "Curtailed of Memory," 289.
- 46 Male focus group discussion member, 28, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 47 For eyewitness reports, see, for example, JRP's Justice and Reconciliation Project's "Remembering the Atiak Massacre" and Archdiocese of Gulu, "Memory of the Atiak Massacre." Justice and Peace News. November 2005
- 48 Interview with Atiak massacre survivor, Atiak Camp, February 26, 2007, reported in JRP, "Remembering the Atiak Massacre."
- 49 Male respondent, 29, Pubec (Mucwini), November 21, 2008.
- 50 Nor is this necessarily simply an issue of external attribution. There is a strong culture of collective clan responsibility for the crimes of individual members against other clans; and of collective family responsibility for intraclan crimes. In traditional justice systems there is a collective indebtedness to victims' clans.
- 51 Male respondent, Atiak, November 5, 2008. "Gomo Tong" translates as "bending of the spears," and, as noted, is the traditional Acholi ceremony performed to mark the end of conflict between two clans or with other tribes. See JRP's "Roco Wat I Acholi," 29.
- 52 Male focus group discussion member, 24, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 53 Male focus group discussion member, 44, Palwong (Pabbo), November 6, 2008.
- 54 Male focus group discussion member, 24, Palwong (Pabbo), November 6, 2008.
- 55 Many more-extreme interpretations of NRM culpability persist. For example, in many reported press statements in April 2010, Olara Otunnu—an Acholi, president of the Uganda People's Congress opposition party, and former UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict—accused President Museveni of funding the LRA and the UPDF of responsibility for many atrocities while disguised as LRA. See Kagenda, "Otunnu Links NRM to LRA", April 26, 2010
- 56 See Annan, Blattman, and Horton, *State of Youth*, 60–9 and JRP and Quaker Peace and Social Witness, "With or Without Peace," 4.
- 57 Sturken, "Wall," 33.
- 58 Male focus group discussion member, 41, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 59 Male focus group discussion member, 42, Palwong (Pabbo) November 6, 2008.
- 60 Female respondent, 58, Atiak, November 5, 2008.
- 61 Male focus group discussion member, 80, Mucwini, November 20, 2008.
- 62 Female focus group discussion member, 58, Jengari (Pabbo), November 4, 2008.
- 63 Male focus group discussion member, 29, Gaya (Pabbo), November 7, 2008.
- 64 Male focus group discussion member, 52, Mucwini, November 20, 2008
- 65 See Mugerwa, "Kony Sells," and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Sudan*, 51.
- 66 See Pham, Vinck, and Stover, *Abducted*, 18. This piece shows data collected by some reception centers, indicating that 49% of residents reported having seen other abductees killed by the LRA.
- 67 All quotations in this paragraph are from interviews conducted in November 2007 in the course of data collection for JRP's "Kill Every Living Thing."

- 68 Due to the fact that the UPDF detachment in Barlonyo was withdrawn shortly before the massacre, conspiracy theories have abounded. See JRP, “Kill Every Living Thing”
- 69 Refugee Law Project’s “Behind the Violence” gives figures of 170–220; JRP’s “Remembering the Atiak Massacre” gives figures of 200–300.
- 70 Note the report of the *Sunday Monitor*, “Govt Pays Shs6b to Ghost Kony Victims.”
- 71 See JRP, “Roco Wat I Acoli.”
- 72 Female focus group discussion member, 22, Atiak, November 5, 2008. Mato Oput is the much-discussed Acholi process following a killing. See JRP’s “Roco Wat I Acholi,” 54–71
- 73 Female focus group discussion member, 22, Atiak, November 4, 2008.
- 74 We know of no studies confirming this.
- 75 Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 116.
- 76 Reported to the author in conversations with a number of Acholi church and traditional leaders, including Catholic Archbishop John Baptist Odama and retired Anglican Retired Bishop McLeod Baker Ochola.
- 77 Harlacher et al., *Traditional Ways*, 114, which states: “The cultural identity of the Acholi is shaped not only by ‘tradition’ but also by Christian and Muslim faiths as well as by ‘modernity’. These three pillars of current Acholi identity are related to—and expressed through—certain beliefs, attitudes and practices on the ground (such as rituals, prayers, and court hearings). When developing interventions to support conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace building, this complex and dynamic blend of identities and beliefs must always be kept in mind.”
- 78 Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 113–21.
- 79 Female respondent, 51, Mucwini, November 22, 2008.
- 80 Male focus group discussion member, 50, Awer, October 27, 2008.
- 81 Male focus group discussion member, 32, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 82 Male focus group discussion member, 54, Okwany (Pabbo), November 6, 2008.
- 83 Female respondent, 79, Atiak, November 5, 2008.
- 84 Female focus group discussion member, 55, Atiak, November 5, 2008.
- 85 Male focus group discussion member, 76, Gaya (Pabbo), November 7, 2008.
- 86 Male focus group discussion member, 20, Atiak, November 3, 2008.
- 87 Female focus group discussion member, 59, Jengari (Pabbo), November 4, 2008.
- 88 Male FAP respondent, 22, Mucwini, November 22, 2008.
- 89 Male respondent, 49, Abia, November 26, 2008.
- 90 Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*. 185
- 91 P’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*.
- 92 Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza, “Social Reconstruction,” 153.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 157.
- 94 Female focus group discussion member, 30, Jengari (Pabbo), November 4, 2008.
- 95 Male elder, Atiak, November 5, 2008.
- 96 Barsalou and Baxter, “The Urge to Remember,” 2.
- 97 Female focus group discussion member, 42, Jengari (Pabbo), November 4, 2008.
- 98 Female focus group discussion member, 42, Jengari (Pabbo), November 4, 2008
- 99 The Tulane-Berkeley Initiative for Vulnerable Populations incorporated some of the issues raised in this report in their survey undertaken in Acholiland in May 2010 and published later that year: Pham and Vinck *Transitioning to Peace*. Results are consistent with their earlier findings in Pham et al. *When the War Ends*. The findings “demonstrate that respondents highly value truth seeking (89%) and for a variety of reasons. The most common reason, for respondents who supported truth seeking, was that knowing what happened during the war is important for historical purposes. Other reasons were so that people did not forget (33%), so that the truth would be known (30%), or so that the history would be known (17%). Some also valued truth seeking for identifying those responsible (15%). Those who did not support a truth-seeking process about the war most frequently said it was better to forget (35%), it would bring back bad memories (28%), or it was useless (19%).
- “Similarly, a majority of respondents (93%) believed it was important for future generations to remember what happened in northern Uganda. Only a minority viewed remembrance negatively, most frequently saying it would bring bad memories (42%), it was better to forget (28%), and it was useless (21%). To ensure that future generations remember the conflict, respondents proposed writing books (42%), teaching children (26%), and building monuments (13%). With respect to monuments, one in three respondents said they had already visited a monument or memorial for war victims, but most (90%) found such monuments important so that people do not forget (67%) and to pay respect to victims (19%). Such monuments, they said most frequently, should be built on the sites of violence and massacres (61%) and take the shape of a plaque with the names of victims (42%), a building for the community (29%), or a sculpture (16%).”



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This report examines the role memorials have played in Uganda's transitional justice process. Addressed to community members, conflict survivors, policymakers, and donors, it reviews existing memorials and offers recommendations to those seeking to initiate new memorial activities. It is based on research conducted in the Acholi and Lango subregions of northern Uganda involving the eponymous ethnic groups.