A MEMORABLE PROCESS IN A FORGOTTEN WAR:

FORGIVENESS WITHIN NORTHERN UGANDA

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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MALD THESIS
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> *"For to be social is to be forgiving"*
> --Robert Frost, "The Star Splitter"[1]
>
> *"In these quarters, the case for the utility of forgiveness rests primarily on a reading of geopolitical realities today and the experiences of many who have grappled with those realities on the front lines of peacebuilding and conflict transformation."*
> --William Bole, Drew Christiansen, and Robert T. Hennemeyer[2]

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The soft bellow of the cow-skin topped drums resonated from the road as the colorfully clad crowd slowly emerged from their seats under the blue plastic UNHCR tarps decoratively strung over the wooden benches. The mass of individuals, comprised of men and women of all ages and a myriad of skipping barefoot children, slowly gathered along the roadside in the bushy grasses, anxiously peering over each others' shoulders to witness the cleansing ritual about to take place for the newest group of returnees from the Lords' Resistance Army (LRA). With anticipation, the music began to crescendo, accompanied by voices and colorful dancing. Nervously shifting their noticeably thin legs and solemn faces, the returnees, mostly youth between the ages of twelve and twenty-five, formed a narrow queue off to the side. As the music climaxed, the first individual in line, a dark-skinned adolescent boy fourteen years of age, walked briskly with intent and determination, directing the sole of his left foot for the top of the white raw egg that awaited its breaking. Suddenly, the shell crumbled and the thick, yellow yolk burst forth, (much as these formally abducted children had fled from the LRA), then oozed in

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[1] Robert Frost, "The Star Splitter," *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949); also available from http://www.online-literature.com/frost/756/

[2] William Bole, Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Robert T. Hennemeyer, *Forgiveness in International Politics: An Alternative Road to Peace* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 31.

between the boy's toes, draping over the symbolically placed branches. Relieved smiles spread across the faces of spectators as the line of returning youth moved forward and each individual stepped on the raw egg. Laid naturally from a hen to symbolize purity, the egg had been placed at the intersection of the *Opobo* branch, slippery and soap-like representing cleansing, and the *Layibi* stick, used to open the granary and thus symbolizing nourishment. With the assistance of gentlemen from the community, young mothers who had been forcibly impregnated by the LRA commanders, grasped their children's foot to ensure that they too personally touched the yolk of the broken egg and received the cleansing. Immediately beyond the symbolically placed egg and branches, stood the Acholi chiefs and elders, adorned in the traditional long white robes worn over their western dress clothes. The returnees approached the proud-looking Paramount Chief who greeted each with a warm handshake as they nervously steered their eyes towards the ground, avoiding direct eye contact.[3]

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This Acholi traditional cleansing ceremony, known as *Nyono Tonggweno ki Opobo* in Luo, the local language, (stepping on the egg and Opobo branch) is performed throughout Acholiland, comprised of the Northern Ugandan districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader where the primary ethnic group are the Acholi, It is enacted when former LRA members, primarily abducted children, return to their communities after days, months and even years of living in captivity, in which they were often forced to be both the objects and subjects of horrifying acts of violence. The first component of an involved traditional Acholi reconciliation process, the cleansing ceremony brings hundreds of community members together to see, touch, and listen to those who were away from the tribe for an extended period of time. The several-hour long event

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[3] I attended two *Nyono Tonggweno ki Opobo* ceremonies during my fieldwork in Northern Uganda. The ceremony described took place on August 13, 2004 in Layibi, a few kilometers outside of Gulu town.

includes eating a meal together, dancing, singing, and listening to the prophetic wisdom of the Paramount Chief as well as invited guests of honor. At a particular cleansing ceremony, which took place on August 13, 2004 in Layibi Parish, just outside of Gulu town, Rwot David Onen Ocana II, the Paramount Chief of Acholi, related in Luo, "For us, war is not the way to resolve any problems."[4] He explained that Acholi solutions are peaceful negotiations. When there is killing, it is a problem for the entire clan. At a time when the International Criminal Court (ICC) representatives were lurking in all of the NGO offices in town, embarking on a preliminary investigation to raise charges against Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, Rwot (Chief) Ocana proclaimed that the Acholi people were an exemplar of forgiveness for the international community. While the ICC was not created as an institution to promote or sustain forgiveness, the Chief reflected in his comments what many in Northern Uganda civil society leadership believed: that the ICC is a pro-retributive justice institution and thus against tenets of restorative justice.[5] Instead of responding to the ICC that they had come to Acholiland at the wrong time, the Chief challenged the entire community to demonstrate to the ICC how the Acholi are an example of how real forgiveness is performed.[6]

The statistical realities of the war in Northern Uganda are grim, at best: an estimated 100,000 deaths; the forced displacement of over 1.6 million people into Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps; 20,000 children abducted for use as either combatants or sex slaves; and 40,000 night commuters, people who nightly flee their homes to sleep in town and evade further

[4] Rwot David Onen Ocana II, Paramount Chief of Acholi, Speaking at *Nyono Tonggweno ki Opobo* ceremony at Layibi Parish in Gulu, Uganda, August 13, 2004. Translation provided by Informant.
[5] Similarly, one civil society leader informant explained to me during a conversation on August, 19, 2004 that the ICC needed to learn about "forgiveness and reconciliation" from the people in Acholiland. He went on to suggest that the "eye for an eye" form of justice that the ICC was attempting to claim was not fitting in Acholiland, "where it is widely perceived here that this is primitive."
[6] Rwot David Onan Ochana II.

vulnerability.[7] A recent Medecins Sans Frontieres survey conducted in Pader district, a small town inside Acholiland, indicates that nearly all of the respondents "have been exposed to severe traumatic events since 2002: 63% report the disappearance or abduction of family member, 58% report the death of a family member due to the insurgency, 79% have witnessed torture, and 40% have witnessed a killing." In addition, suicide rates have proven alarmingly exorbitant.[8]

Despite the gravity of the situation in Northern Uganda, few in the international community are aware, let alone take action to alleviate suffering of the millions who are affected. Now extending for over eighteen years, the war in Northern Uganda remains one of the most forgotten humanitarian crises in the world. Medecins Sans Frontieres has composed a report every year for the past seven years highlighting the top ten most underreported humanitarian stories of the year. At the very top of the list for 2004 is the war in Northern Uganda.[9] Further, with the neglect of international attention comes a lack of funds to address the many humanitarian needs. A recent article quoted UN official Dennis McNamara stating that "only 43% of what is needed to meet the minimum humanitarian needs has been donated" for Northern Uganda.[10] Another recent piece compares the flood of funding and aid workers to the Darfur region of Sudan with the catastrophe in Northern Uganda where "the misery continues, virtually unnoticed by the outside world."[11] Father Carlos Rodgriuez, a Spanish Catholic priest who has worked in Acholiland for over ten years explains, "We don't have oil, we don't have mineral resources. This is not a place of strategic importance to anybody. This is why the world doesn't

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[7] "UN Urges End to Ugandan 'Horror,'" *BBC News*, October 22, 2004 (accessed October 22, 2004); available from http://bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/3943677.stm.
[8] Medecins Sans Frontieres, "Immense Suffering in Northern Uganda—Urgent Action Needed," November 8, 2004, (accessed November 11, 2004); available from www.msf.org
[9] Medecins Sans Frontieres, "Top 10 Most Underreported Humanitarian Stories of 2004," (accessed February 7, 2005); available from http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2005/top10.html
[10] Chris Tomlinson, "Two Other Conflicts Bedevil Sudan: Six Million Sudanese and Ugandans have Suffered Through Two Decades of War and International Neglect," *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* September 4, 2004.
[11] Maggie Farley, "Not All Crises Win World's Attention: Agencies Struggle to Reach Public," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 2004.

care about us."[12] Refugees International has labeled the people of Northern Uganda a "forgotten people"[13] and Chester Crocker et.al. has included it in their recent analysis of "forgotten conflicts."[14]

Yet amidst this forgotten crisis throughout the fertile region of Acholiland, ordinary civilians, largely led by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and the Acholi traditional chiefs and elders, have embraced a profound expression of forgiveness in both their conflict resolution and peace building work as well as in their personal encounters. Many speak openly of welcoming the former LRA members home in an effort to encourage as many as possible to abandon their life as soldiers in the bush and rejoin Ugandan Acholi society. Community members and NGO leaders proudly profess the role of *Mato Oput*, a renowned traditional reconciliation ceremony, as a method to appropriately handle those returning who have done great harm to others during the war. Indeed, in Northern Uganda, forgiveness is having a profound impact now, even as violence and the war persist.

This paper considers the process of forgiveness and how and why it is occurring in a locale that is often overlooked and forgotten by the international community. This thesis investigates how and why forgiveness is playing a significant role in Northern Uganda. It will elucidate the concept of forgiveness in an interpersonal as well as in a political framework by examining the various definitions of forgiveness, its operational limitations and benefits, its connections to the broader concept of reconciliation, and a detailed analysis of the role forgiveness plays within conflict resolution. This will be followed by exploring the application of forgiveness in the Northern Uganda context, presenting evidence of forgiveness throughout

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[12] "Killed in the Name of the Lord," *The Observer*, February 29, 2004; available from the March 8, 2004 Kacoke Madit e-newsletter http://www.km-net.org

[13] "Forgotten People: A Look Back," *Refugees International,* January 15, 2004 (accessed February 9, 2005); available from http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/1559/.

[14] Chester Crocker, et.al., "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Fate of Forgotten Conflicts," in *Taming Intractable Conflict: Mediation in the Hardest Cases*, (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2004).

society with an effort to understand how and why it is happening in Northern Uganda now, while the war is ongoing. At its core, this paper will answer the following questions: Why is forgiveness playing a central role in Northern Uganda at this time? What are the impacts of forgiveness on human relationships in Uganda and on the continuing political efforts to end the war, given that forgiveness is present at a comparatively earlier time than in other violent contexts? What are the salient lessons about forgiveness learned from the context of Northern Uganda? By engaging these questions, this analysis will demonstrate that locally fostered forgiveness can play an important role in conflict resolution, even while violence is ongoing.

Methodology

This thesis is essentially a case study analysis of one particular incident of forgiveness. I have chosen to focus on one unique case so as to more thoroughly explore the reasons behind its manifestations. The presentation of forgiveness in Northern Uganda is extremely memorable because it is occurring while the war is ongoing and because it appears to be influencing the resolution of the war.

The specific methodology utilized in this study includes drawing on secondary materials, both published texts and policy papers made available through the Northern Uganda civil society networks, supplemented by primary source interviews, surveys and public presentations which I attended in both Northern Uganda and Boston. I conducted eight interviews of traditional chiefs, civil society leaders, and academics in Northern Uganda during the months of July and August 2004.

Data were also collected with a questionnaire I designed, and the ARLPI edited and implemented in August 2004 in several IDP camps, schools, and civil society organizations in Northern Uganda. The ARLPI is an interfaith local NGO, established in 1998 to promote peace in Northern Uganda through peace-building programming, research and publications, and

national and international advocacy efforts. The purpose of the survey was to assess the current attitudes and perceptions of people about the conflict and the returning LRA members and its corresponding impact on the peace process and the communities. While survey administration was not rigorously scientific, the responses still have merit for my thesis, providing some of the unheard voices of Acholi civilians. Respondents were chosen by ARLPI staff and ARLPI peace committee members to reflect a variety of opinions: civil society leaders, students, IDP residents, and elders. In Kitgum, ARLPI staff visited four different IDP camps outside of the town to hold meetings, both general as well as specific meetings with local leaders and women's groups to gather opinions on the questions presented. As well, ARLPI staff conducted interviews with local leaders and also sent copies of the questionnaire to four different international and local NGOs involved in humanitarian and conflict-related operations. In Gulu, ARLPI staff circulated the questionnaire through the established peace communities in the IDP camps and through various civil society and education institutions throughout town. The questionnaire was translated from English to the local language, Luo, but was not pilot-tested. Both language versions of the survey were circulated and most meetings and interviews were conducted in Luo and translated into English afterwards. Most, if not all, of the respondents speak English as a second language; thus, responses may not be grammatically correct. At the time of analysis, I reviewed twenty-six surveys. The questionnaire is attached in Appendix I. Due to the sensitive nature of the perspectives collected through both the questionnaires and the interviews, the identity of informants is confidential.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL CONCEPTIONS OF FORGIVENESS

> *"Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."*
> --Hannah Arendt[15]

Before explaining how forgiveness manifests itself in the ongoing conflict in Northern Uganda, it is vital to explore the theory and review the literature already written on the process of forgiveness in both personal and political contexts. This chapter will undergo this task by defining forgiveness, comparing it to other responses to violence and wrongdoing, explaining its relation to both reconciliation and broader conflict resolution, and delineating between personal and political forgiveness. Further, I will outline both the benefits and limitations of forgiveness as a theory and a practice.

As wars come to a close, rarely does the cessation of violence mend relationships, mitigate feelings of resentment and hatred, or suggest the complete pacification of the root causes of conflict. Indeed, this phase of post-conflict reconciliation is extremely difficult as individuals involved within the communities may be at very different stages in terms of their willingness to participate in such a process. As well, reconciliation is a process that is carried out in a variety of different spheres and levels, political and personal, economic and psychological.

Within this broader category of reconciliation lives the unique process of forgiveness. Often affiliated with religious practices, forgiveness is a powerful transformation in which parties release feelings of resentment and bitterness towards the so-called enemy in an effort to

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[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 216.

focus on the future. Conflict resolution literature mentions the role of forgiveness in the contexts of several violent conflicts including South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Israel/Palestine.[16]

Yet today's accepted political norms do not readily encourage forgiveness. The political, cultural and socio-economic climate dictates that violence ought to be answered with further violence. Donald Shriver, a Protestant social ethicist, explains that there is much work to be done in order to achieve forgiveness within politics, or as he calls it, a "revolt against the inertia of history."[17] As humans, especially humans in conflict, people hurt one another—physically, psychologically, and economically. It is vital to explore how humans eventually respond and move on from that hurt, given that there are several ways to accomplish it, with and without forgiveness as a factor. Priscilla Hayner, Director of Outreach and Analysis at the International Center for Transitional Justice and author of Unspeakable Truths, writes in reference to the choice people face following mass violence: "Do you want to remember or forget?"[18] Yet, for the millions who survive and emerge from years of protracted violent conflict, neither of these options presents itself as a particularly easy or straightforward process. Digging into the details of the past can be very painful, but denying the experience of suffering and injustice can also be excruciating since people aren't validated or acknowledged for what they have endured.

Other Post-Conflict Options

Recently, truth and reconciliation commissions have become in vogue, such as was carried out in South Africa, encouraged by the influential leadership of Nelson Mandela and the support of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the South African Anglican church leader who led the

[16] See Scott Appleby, The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000); Marc Gopin, Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
[17] Donald W. Shriver Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 220.
[18] Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

Truth & Reconciliation Committee. Truth commissions have also been instituted in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Yugoslavia, and Uruguay.[19] The reasoning behind this practice, which involves extensive interviews and fact-finding missions to record what people endured during a previous period of violent conflict, is that "the best way to close old wounds is sometimes to open them again, because…the wounds were badly closed, and you still have to clean out the old infection."[20]

Beyond entirely forgetting the past or intentionally remembering what happened through truth and reconciliation processes, other options for moving beyond violent armed conflict include bringing perpetrators of crimes to justice through criminal investigations or handling such cases through customary law. Institutions such as the ICC or country-specific tribunals have become quite familiar in the international field of conflict resolution as possible venues to handle criminal cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity. To take account of cultural differences, others advocate culturally informed processes to contribute to the post-conflict reconciliation processes, such as *Mato Oput,* the traditional tribal reconciliation ceremony which the Acholi have performed in Northern Uganda for decades for crimes of serious magnitude.[21]

Definition of Forgiveness

While scientific research on the concept of forgiveness is on the rise, individual researchers' understandings of forgiveness are quite divergent. Some even say that the lack of a clear definition is one of the principal challenges in the field today.[22] "Defining forgiveness is

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[19] Yehudith Auerbach, "The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation," in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 149-175. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150.
[20] Hayner, xii.
[21] Sverker Finnstrom, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda,* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Library, 2003), 291.
[22] Michael McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament and Carl E. Thoresen,"The Psychology of Forgiveness," in *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I, Pargament and Carl E. Thoresen, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 7.

almost as problematic as determining its role in reconciliation."[23] The literature is broad, amorphous and rich with interpretations from a variety of disciplines, but for the purposes of illustrating the relevance of forgiveness, I will outline some of the more prominent definitions, which are pertinent to understanding the case of Northern Uganda.

Most scholars acknowledge that forgiveness in its essence is about human relationship. Essentially, it prioritizes relationship between people over dark feelings of revenge, no matter how natural, deserved or rational they may be. Donald Shriver, a Protestant social ethicist and one of the prominent scholars on political forgiveness says, "forgiveness, as a human event, means the commitment of members of a society to each other, because, in spite of evil, 'only in that relationship does life make sense' or continue in ways worth living,"[24] Shriver goes on to explain that in a political context, forgiveness, "is an act that joins moral truth, forbearance, empathy and commitment to repair a fractured human relation."[25] These four qualities are fused together in an effort to mend broken or damaged human relationship. In general, "forgiveness, while not disregarding the act, begins not with it but with the person. Forgiveness recognizes the deed, its impact having been and continuing to be lived by the victim, but transcends it."[26]

Some view forgiveness negatively as a reversal of moral judgment or as the remission of punishment.[27] Counter-arguments against forgiveness build on notions of "the desire for revenge is natural and therefore legitimate," "the desire for revenge is good because it is the foundation

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[23] Marcia Byrom Hartwell, "The Role of Forgiveness in Reconstructing Society After Conflict," *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance,* June 3, 2000, (accessed December 13, 2004); available from http://www.jha.ac/articles/a048.htm.
[24] Shriver, 28.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla, *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness,* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 95.
[27] Joram Graf Haber, *Forgiveness.* (Savage Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), 12-14.

of our sense of justice" and "revenge is morally acceptable because it lies at the core of retributive justice, which really is justice."[28]

Other scholars, religious leaders, and activists imply that forgiveness requires a belief in the possibility of human nature to do and be good rather than evil. They laud how the process of, "forgiving someone who had done a serious wrong requires the capacity to empathize enough, and re-frame enough, to distinguish the wrongdoer from the wrongdoing."[29] As a grassroots civil rights leader from Georgia put it so eloquently, "If you believe there is a spark of divine in every human being…you cannot get to the point where you hate that person, or despise that person…even if that person beats you…you have to have the capacity, the ability to forgive."[30] Forgiveness is a process of positive change, which sprouts from a negative, injurious, and often-violent experience.

To authentically forgive, one must first believe that human beings have the capability to choose to partake in a deeply personal, often difficult, process of releasing vengeful attitudes. Further, forgiveness rests on the notion that while humans carry out evil acts, they are not necessarily innately malevolent themselves. The acts are detestable but not the people who perform them. In most wars today, lines become quite blurred between civilians and combatants. In such situations, there is often a spillover of combatant activity into the civilian population, in which people carry out acts that they would not have under other circumstances. This distorted delineation between civilians and combatants in today's wars is evidenced by the fact that 90% of causalities in today's wars are civilians,[31] as seen in Northern Uganda and other contexts. Further, a spillover of combatant activity into the civilian population is evidenced in Northern

[28] Govier, 13-18.
[29] Ibid., 58.
[30] Ellis Cose, *Bone to Pick: Of forgiveness, Reconciliation, Reparation, and Revenge*, (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 4.
[31] RL Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1991* 14th ed., (Washington, DC: World Priorities Inc., 1991).

Uganda, where a recent Medecins Sans Frontieres survey conducted in Pader district of Acholiland explained that 5% of the population report having been forced to physically harm another person."[32] If you take the premise that all humans are capable of terrible wrongdoing, forgiveness is a very appropriate response, since victims may recognize that even they could be responsible for causing harm to another at times.

Guilt is also often related to forgiveness, for it is often guilt that links the perpetrator to the victim. "Guilt is in the spirit, and it arises from the consciousness of having wronged someone. [It] establishes a relation to the victim, to one's own Ego, and to any God/State believed in."[33] Beyond linking the perpetrator to the victim after the wrongdoing, guilt can also be the sensation that encourages the perpetrator to seek the forgiveness of the victim, as "the victim is the only one who can free the wrongdoer from his/her guilt."[34]

In the forgiveness literature, there is debate over what exactly is required for authentic forgiveness to occur. Johan Galtung, a prominent peace studies scholar, argues that in order for forgiveness to take place, it must be a bilateral procedure of conscious participation by both the victim and the perpetrator.[35] His argument is that only when both sides of the conflict are present can holistic transformation occur for both parties. In such situations, both an admittance of guilt and an apology by the perpetrator as well as a sign of acceptance by the victim are necessary. Other scholars like Margaret Holmgren say that forgiveness can be a unilateral process in which the victim acknowledges the wrongdoing and releases bad feelings towards the perpetrator.[36] She argues that the internal process of the victim "working through" the issues is what is paramount in the process of forgiveness. She states that, "provided the 'working

[32] Medecins Sans Frontieres, "Immense Suffering in Northern Uganda—Urgent Action Needed"
[33] Johan Galtung, "After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution," in *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 7.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 7-8.

through' is complete, forgiveness is always appropriate, whether or not the wrongdoer expresses remorse."[37]

From a psychological perspective, in which there are further divergent definitions of the term, there is one core aspect which streams through all of the different conceptions and that is, "when people forgive, their response toward (or in other words, what they think of, feel about, want to do to, or actually do to) people who have offended or injured them become more positive and less negative."[38] University of Wisconsin psychologist Robert Enright has laid out a four-stage process of forgiveness as follows: 1) acknowledgement of anger, hurt, and betrayal; 2) decision to forgive in which "you are opening yourself up to the possibility of answering abuse with compassion;" 3) initiation of the process of implementing the decision to forgive, often by engaging in discourse with the perpetrator and/or God; and 4) forgiveness alongside an emotional release.[39]

When defining forgiveness, it is paramount to recognize the religious roots of this terminology. Many of the world's faith traditions hold forgiveness in high esteem, most notably Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. "Patience with human failing...infinite compassion, and forgiveness, are seen as basic characteristics of God in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an."[40] While it may exist alongside an image of a vengeful God in some contexts, it is revered in many of the religious faiths around the world as a model of virtue:

> "Among the ethical resources within the Abrahamic traditions for peacemaking and conflict resolution, one of the most important in terms of building prosocial relationships is the way individuals and communities cope with moral failure of the individual. How does one recover from failure in basic personality dispositions as well as relationships? There are many ways, including profound

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[36] Govier, 62-3 with reference to Margaret Holmgren, "Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, no. 30 (1993): 341-51.
[37] Ibid.
[38] McCullough, 9.
[39] Cose, 40.
[40] Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace,*117.

> and extended periods of self-examination …..and ultimately, the request for, and/or receiving of unilateral or bilateral offerings of forgiveness."[41]

Due to its religious origins and any subsequent moral insinuations that may accompany it, forgiveness is often perceived as a very loaded term. While these origins must be acknowledged, if forgiveness is only remembered as a religious aspect reserved for those who have a particular faith, its capacity for empowerment and effective conflict management is lost.[42] Many may block consideration of it as a compelling contribution to conflict resolution and peace building simply because they want to maintain a secular perception by other political entities. Due to the moral, religious and ethic undertones of forgiveness, it is often overlooked for its strategic and political utility.[43] Appendix II provides further information on religious background to forgiveness.

Finally, while there are many relevant contributions to the definition of forgiveness, this paper will be based on the understanding that forgiveness is an internal process that is chosen freely by the victim. It is an act of releasing resentment, and in it, the victim acknowledges the wrong done to himself but distinguishes it from the perpetrator's innate being. While the bilateral process of an offered apology and acceptance does constitute forgiveness, I will assume that these are not necessarily required. In the foundation utilized for this paper, forgiveness can also be the unilateral release of resentment by the victim without any remorse or apology demonstrated by the perpetrator. This process of forgiveness is not excluded from any particular level in the following discussion—indeed, forgiveness can occur at an interpersonal level, within or between groups, including nation-states.[44] From the onset, I recognize that this is not a concept that can be readily explained in a consistent manner, quantified, or easily

[41] Ibid., 108.
[42] Ibid., 134.
[43] Bole, Christiansen, and Hennemeyer, 31.

operationalized. Likewise, Amartya Sen, in discussing abstract notions such as power and structural violence, explains the difficulty of conducting a study with amorphous terms. He highlights the importance of communicating through examples instead of more words,

> "But attempts at defining them [power, structure, and violence] exactly by other words have typically been inadequate and unclear. For this reason, among others, the alternative procedure, by exemplification, has many advantages in epistemology and practical reason in parts of the social sciences. The epigrammatic definition, which many social scientists seek, often cannot escape being misleadingly exact; it can be precise but precisely inaccurate. A rich phenomenon with inherent ambiguities calls for a characterization that preserves those shady edges, rather than being drowned in the pretense that there is a formulaic and sharp delineation waiting to be unearthed that will exactly separate out all the sheep from all the goats."[45]

In my study of the process of forgiveness in Northern Uganda, I will also attempt to communicate through illustrative examples.

Forgiveness as Part of Reconciliation

Reconciliation, like forgiveness, is about building a relationship between antagonists.[46] Often, the two terms are used interchangeably but it is important to delineate them for further understanding. "Just as forgiveness doesn't necessarily imply reconciliation, reconciliation doesn't necessarily imply or depend upon forgiveness."[47] John Paul Lederach, a scholar and conflict resolution practitioner from Eastern Mennonite University, defines reconciliation by suggesting that it, "represents a place, the point of encounter where concerns about both the past

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[44] Govier, 99.
[45] Amartya Sen, Foreword to *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, by Paul Farmer, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), xiv.
[46] John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 34.
[47] Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds Not Healed by Time: The Power of Repentance and Forgiveness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53.

and the future can meet.[48] He writes further to explain that the paradoxes of truth, mercy, justice, and peace meet within reconciliation.[49] These four elements are understood as follows:

> "*Truth* is the longing for acknowledgment of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experiences, but it is coupled with *Mercy*, which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning. *Justice* represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution, but it is linked with *Peace,* which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being, and security."

Some argue that within a climate of reconciliation, it is then ripe for forgiveness and healing to grow while others believe that forgiveness is "a phase in the process of reaching genuine reconciliation."[50] Galtung describes reconciliation as closure plus healing, "the process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after violence, providing a closure of the bad relation."[51]

One important distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation is that, "forgiveness can be unilateral, while reconciliation is always mutual."[52] Reconciliation is an exchange that can only really take place between the perpetrator and the victim.[53] Journalist and author Ellis Cose, explains,

> "But unlike forgiveness, which you can do on your own, which merely requires a certain softening of the heart, reconciliation requires a change in someone else, or at least a willingness on the parts of those who were estranged to form, if not a friendship, then at least something of an alliance; to agree, if nothing else, to be involved with one another—in a psychologically complex and intimate way."[54]

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[48] Lederach, *Building Peace*, 27.
[49] Ibid, 35.
[50] Auerbach, 156 with reference to John Paul Lederach, "Beyond Violence: Building Sustainable Peace," in *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. E. Weiner, (New York: Continuum, 1998), 236-245 and Ervin Staub, "Genocide and Mass Killing: Origins, Prevention, Healing and Reconciliation," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 367-382.
[51] Galtung, 3-4.
[52] Appleby, 197 with reference to Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Natures*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 14.
[53] Galtung, 4.
[54] Cose, 95.

But this in itself can pose a challenge—if reconciliation and forgiveness are reserved solely for the perpetrator and the victim, who delineates whom exactly are the victims and who are the perpetrators? Often there is great discrepancy and argument over who is permitted to participate in forgiveness and reconciliation. As is often the case in acutely violent multiparty conflicts, there may be multiple individuals and groups responsible for wrongs and recipients of offenses. Power dynamics also come into play as some leaders may offer forgiveness on behalf of a group of victims who are not necessarily ready to forgive. This action can lead to resentment and anger over who has the right to participate in the process and offer forgiveness.

Reconciliation, as a broader process of which forgiveness is a component, essentially implies a permanent restoration of a relationship[55] whereas forgiveness is about relationship but does not necessarily require sustained contact between former adversaries into the future. Both are processes that can take years to undergo. Shriver explains this when writing that reconciliation is, "the end of a process that forgiveness begins."[56] In reflecting on the conflict in Northern Ireland, Scott Appleby, A Notre Dame History Professor, writes,

> "The decisive lifting of its burden of memories of violence, betrayal, and oppression comes out, if at all, through reconciliation, which is best envisioned as the end point of a long process of listening to testimony and fact-finding, the identification of perpetrators, the payment of reparation to victims of war crimes and atrocities, and where possible, the healing of memories and the offering and acceptance of forgiveness."[57]

The bottom line is that forgiveness is one intricate aspect within the broader, bilateral (or multilateral) practice of reconciliation.

Forgiveness as a Dimension of Conflict Resolution

Typically, intrastate conflicts come to an end through some type of a signed peace agreement between the warring parties and/or a military victory of one party. Only after the

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[55] McCullough, 8.
[56] Shriver, 8-9.

treaty has been signed, the internally displaced and refugees have begun returning to their homes, and a detailed post-conflict reconstruction plan is set into place does genuine reconciliation and forgiveness usually enter into the picture.

Forgiveness as an explicit aspect of conflict resolution is a novel notion in literature and practice alike. William Bole, Drew Christiansen, and Robert T. Hennemeyer, in their study of forgiveness in collaboration with a colloquia held at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University in 1995, summarized the challenge of intersecting forgiveness to the field of conflict resolution and peace building: "The concept of forgiveness should not only act upon the secular policy world but also 'act back' upon the explicitly religious world."[58] While it has a role in the political world, it is also important for religious institutions to understand its capacity in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

While most can cite its presence in certain contexts, discovering the efficacy of forgiveness is a further grave challenge. In the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, analysts argue that "forgiveness had been real enough, but its utility in resolving the conflict is harder to prove or pinpoint."[59] Beyond measuring the impact of forgiveness, which will be discussed further in this paper, the appropriate questions "about where forgiveness lies in the course of peacemaking and conflict resolution"[60] remain unanswered. Gerard F. Powers, Director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, explains, "People don't necessarily see forgiveness as the next step. There's a timing question. Where is forgiveness? Is it at the beginning? When a war is over?"[61]

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[57] Appleby, 194.
[58] Bole, Christiansen, and Hennemeyer, 179-180.
[59] Ibid., 180.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid. with reference to Power's remarks during meeting of Forgiveness Working Group, May 2002.

Nearly all of the theoretical literature encircling forgiveness is included in books and articles about reconciliation. Forgiveness is virtually always an aspect of the post-conflict phase since for it to occur, it essentially requires a wrongdoing to have already taken place. Unfortunately, war offers an abundance of such offenses for victims to later forgive. Strategically, forgiveness is not a concept that is even articulated or suggested until much of the violence or contention is already over. "For some people, forgiveness is part of the process that helps to set their world right again. For others, it is a step that can only be taken—if at all—once a sense of normalcy and security have returned."[62] For both sets of such people, it remains a process that is said to occur at the end of a conflict. A study on coexistence projects explains this point cogently, "Bringing a political end to the conflict provides closure, and a sense of resolution is essential before a society as a whole can move forward."[63]

It is imperative to accentuate the notable absence of information in the literature on forgiveness and reconciliation about when exactly in a peace process an aspect of forgiveness does come into play. Present in the conflict resolution field are specific examples of reconciliation and forgiveness, most especially from the Balkans and South Africa. In both of these contexts, forgiveness is a social process that has occurred post-conflict.

South Africa is the notable exemplar of forgiveness in a political context and its role post-conflict as demonstrated by the plethora of articles and books documenting and reflecting on how forgiveness played a role there. After decades of the oppressive Apartheid regime, Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected Black president of the country, led a campaign of forgiveness in which many South African citizens embraced forgiveness in the transition to democracy instead of violent revenge against the former white regime. Through the Truth and

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[62] Cose, 46.

Reconciliation Commission, which Archbishop Tutu led, South Africans had the opportunity to tell their stories of the oppressive past and then under the charismatic leadership of Mandela and Tutu, focus upon recreating a better future. Tutu explains, "True forgiveness deals with the past, all of the past, to make the future possible. We cannot go on nursing grudges even vicariously for those who cannot speak for themselves any longer. We have to accept that what we do we do for generations past, present, and yet to come."[64]

In the Northern Uganda context, forgiveness is making an appearance in both a personal and political fashion while the war is still ongoing. Indeed, the unique timing of this expression is worthy of further investigation, which this paper will attempt to unravel in ensuing chapters. Why is forgiveness happening now in Northern Uganda? What are the implications of it occurring at this stage? Can we expect a different impact than if it occurred in the conventional post-conflict phase?

Political Forgiveness

When examining the concept of forgiveness, it is crucial to elucidate from the beginning the differences between interpersonal and political forgiveness (also referred to as person-to-person forgiveness and group forgiveness) to determine whether the concept of forgiveness can be applied to a political context such as Northern Uganda. "Forgiveness as an interpersonal concept is familiar enough among people of many beliefs and cultures, but forgiveness as a political possibility is less widely understood."[65] The notion of collective forgiveness has been gradually fostered by shifts in the international system: a rise in communal conflicts, a new generation of once-deprived people becoming more aware of the historical injustices done to

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[63] Aneelah Afzali and Laura Colleton, "Constructing Coexistence: A Survey of Coexistence Projects in Areas of Ethnic Conflict" in *Imagine Coexistence: Restoring Humanity After Violent Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Antonia Chayes and Martha Minow (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 6.
[64] Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 279.
[65] Bole, Christiansen, Hennemeyer, 42.

them, and a rising importance in moral and spiritual values in the public arena. All of these factors have given rise to conflict-ending strategies shifting "their focus from conflict resolution to such concepts as reconciliation and forgiveness that reflect more correctly the spirit and practice of this 'New Age.'"[66] In a political context, forgiveness, "is an act that joins moral truth, forbearance, empathy and commitment to repair a fractured relationship."[67]

Trudy Govier, a philosophical scholar, explains the philosophical challenge of political forgiveness when she writes, "For forgiveness to offer a way of healing ethnic and religious conflicts, it must first of all be possible for groups to forgive one another. If groups are entities that cannot have attitudes and emotions, would it make sense to think that groups could forgive?"[68] As Govier outlines, philosophically speaking, for forgiveness to have a role in politics as Archbishop Desmond Tutu argues in his book referencing past conflicts in Rwanda, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, and the Middle East, forgiveness must be possible between groups yet, "group forgiveness requires some conception of corporate agency."[69] There must be a group psyche of sorts but determining how it is composed and communicated is extremely difficult.

In the literature on forgiveness, few authors address the nuances of political forgiveness and how or if groups can collectively forgive other groups. Both Donald Shriver and Joseph Elder touch on it conceptually, but fail to address the philosophical questions. Govier, however, tackles the issue and states, "to make sense of the idea that groups could be the subjects and objects of forgiveness, it is required that: 1)groups can be agents responsible for wrongdoing 2)groups can suffer wrongful harm and 3)groups can have—and can amend—feelings, attitudes,

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[66] Yehudith Auerbach, 151. Examples of literature demonstrating this shift include Gardner-Feldman, 1999; Kriesberg, 1998; Montville, 1993; Rothstein, 1999.
[67] Bole, Christiansen, Henemeyer, 44 with reference to Hennemeyer in "Forgiveness in Conflict Resolution: Reality and Utility—The Bosnian Experience" in *Three Dimensions of Peacebuilding in Bosnia: Findings from USIP-Sponsored Research and Field Projects,* ed. Steven M. Riskin, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999..
[68] Govier, 78-79.
[69] Ibid., 78-81.

and beliefs about various matters, including harms they have suffered at the hands of others."[70] She then goes on to establish all three of the aforementioned presuppositions, concluding that forgiveness between groups is possible. Given the collective nature of groups, Govier explains that, "whether forgiving its enemies is a real option for a group will depend on its culture, teachings, and public deliberations, and on the individuals who come to occupy leadership role within it."[71]

Forgiveness in Comparison

When defining forgiveness, it is crucial to outline what forgiveness is not. Different from condoning, excusing and forgetting, forgiveness is the process of overcoming attitudes of resentment and anger that may persist when one has been injured by wrongdoing. Forgiveness has the potential to provide important benefits to both the perpetrators and the victims of a crime, a positive that those advocating forgetting also claim. Yet in forgiveness, by intentionally releasing the victim from her negative feelings of bitterness and potentially harmful fixation on wrongs of the past, an opportunity for victims arises.[72] For the perpetrators, forgiveness releases the person from guilt as well as the threat of revenge for previous behaviors. It is uncertain whether one party has more to gain than the other in the gesture of forgiveness.

Indeed, forgiveness is not the same as condoning a behavior. In forgiveness, a person must articulate, "what was done was wrong but that the wrongness of the act has not determined his overall attitude to the agent."[73] The one forgiving implies that the action done was indeed wrong and unjustified. Forgiving, by no means, implies that the action done is excusable or understood; in fact, it acknowledges that the act was wrong. At the same time, forgiveness involves regarding the person as fallible, distinct from his/her acts, and capable of

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[70] Ibid., 87.
[71] Ibid., 98.
[72] Ibid., 48.

improvement.[74] In order to maintain some sense of what is morally acceptable and what is not, there is often significant "inward emotional and mental pressure not to forgive, since forgiveness can signal acceptability, and acceptability signals some amount, however small, of condoning."[75]

Forgiveness is also often conflated with forgetting. Martha Minow, legal scholar and author of Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence, outlines how "instruments of forgiveness such as amnesty laws often institutionalize forgetfulness.[76] Under closer examination, in forgiveness, individuals must explicitly not forget. Using the example of former South African President Nelson Mandela, in his outreach to South African whites post-apartheid, clearly he remembered the isolating years he spent in the prison cell as well as the oppression that blacks suffered, but it was not remembered with a spirit of bitterness and revenge. "Typically, to forgive is to remember—but in a way that is not bitter and resentful, not cultivating of the victim identity, or of grievance and hatred."[77] The issue is not whether to remember, but how to remember.[78] "Like forgetting, forgiving permits starting over. But unlike forgetting, political forgiveness requires that the past be recalled and acknowledged for what it is."[79]

And while forgiving is dissimilar from both condoning and forgetting, one must also understand its oppositional relationship with vengeance: "to forgive is to let go of vengeance; to avenge is to resist forgiving."[80] Minow explains "vengeance and forgiveness are marks along

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[73] Ibid., 55.
[74] Ibid., 59.
[75] Gobodo-Madikizela, 103.
[76] Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 15.
[77] Govier, 60.
[78] Ibid., 61.
[79] Peter Digeser, "Forgiveness and Politics: Dirty Hands and Imperfect Procedures," *Political Theory,* Vol. 26, No.5 (Oct., 1998): 716.
[80] Minow, 21.

the spectrum of human responses to atrocity."[81] Vengeance, justified or not, is the process of enacting retribution while forgiveness is about overcoming or releasing these emotions, meanwhile resisting further violence and wrongdoing.

What of Justice?

The strongest argument against the practice of forgiveness is the perception that forgiveness short-circuits justice since it does not require the wrongdoer to do any particular action to undo his/her hurtful actions.[82] If a victim easily forgives a perpetrator some would argue that the perpetrator might not feel any disincentive from behaving badly another time, causing more injury. While forgiveness doesn't have to be at odds with justice, it does, at times, require striking a balance between attaining peace and justice at the end of war.[83]

As forgiveness is often believed to undermine justice in its implementation, those arguing for justice proclaim sentiments echoing conceptions such as, "How could I ever forgive him for what he has done to me and my family?" and "If there are not efforts put in reforming him, how will he learn to not do such a thing again?" Interestingly in the Northern Uganda case, many ordinary Ugandan civilians want to focus on restoring their lives and homes, planning for a more hopeful future rather than undergoing expensive, intricate justice tribunals, often advocated by the West. Marc Gopin, conflict resolution and religion scholar, explained that in cases of extreme violence such as mass murder or genocide, there are no realistic approaches to ever fully serving justice.[84] Minow expands on this point:

> "..no response can ever be adequate when your son has been killed by police ordered to shoot at a crowd of children; when you have been dragged out of your home, interrogated, and raped in a wave of "ethnic cleansing;" or when your brother who struggled against a repressive government has disappeared and left

[81] Ibid.
[82] Digeser, 701-702.
[83] Marc Gopin, "Forgiveness as an Element of Conflict Resolution in Religious Cultures: Walking the Tightrope of Reconciliation and Justice," in *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 87.
[84] Marc Gopin, phone conversation on November 17, 2004.

> only a secrete police file, bearing no clue to his final resting place. Closure is not possible."[85]

As Minow argues in her book, there are significant deficiencies in any transitional justice approach. Additionally, the capacity of the judicial system must be considered. Often in these severe cases of violence, the question of whether or not justice is being undermined by enacting forgiveness is a moot point because it may never be possible to achieve true justice in such contexts. The wrongs inflicted are of just too great a magnitude to ever be fully addressed through judicial means.

Another explanation for the slight turn against justice-centered initiatives is the cost and resources required. In poor environments, residents may likely prefer that limited funds be expended on socioeconomic development rather than ensuring that justice be done by the perpetrators of crimes. In Uganda, one of the thirty poorest countries in the world, according to the Human Development Index Report of 2004,[86] widespread poverty may indeed explain some of the emphasis on forgiveness and deflection of justice programs in order that resources be allocated for basic needs of food, protection, education, and healthcare. One 56-year old mother whose daughter was abducted in Northern Uganda in 1996 and never returned explained, "We have lost too much and restitution is just impossible, nobody can compensate us, this is why I am for unconditional forgiveness to the rebels because only forgiveness can restore what we have lost. For us, parents of abducted children, justice as punishment is not a priority. I don't believe in putting out fire with petrol."[87] Two women in their mid-twenties, who spent seven years each

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[85] Minow, 5.

[86] World Vision, *Pawns of Politics: Children, Conflict and Peace in Northern Uganda*, (Kampala: World Vision, 2004), 10. Available from http://www.child-cights.org/PolicyAdvocacy/pahome2.5.nsf/cractionnews/49B263F8D988FD6488256F1C004C960A/$file/Pawns_Of_Politics.pdf). The Human Development Index Report is a survey conducted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

[87] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Position Paper on Possibility of Intervention by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Northern Ugandan Conflict*, (Gulu: ARLPI, April 30, 2004), 37.

with the LRA, responded to the question of how justice can be done to the victims of war: "Justice? Just help us to have a better future. We have nothing. We need land, studies, and housing."[88]

In discussing justice, it is imperative to mention the concept of restorative justice, a mechanism that approaches justice differently from the mainstream criminal justice system that is prevalent throughout the West, often described as retributive. Becoming widely known in the 1990s, the main tenets of restorative justice are that a breadth of individuals are involved in the justice system, including community members, victims, and offenders. Additionally, restorative justice centers on reconciling parties and finding innovative ways to repair the injuries caused by the crimes.[89] Through a restorative justice lens, those who pursue forgiveness in Acholiland or in other contexts are not undermining justice, rather they are seeking it in another form. A recent briefing paper issued by the Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) on the International Criminal Court investigation highlights this point:

> "It is worth mentioning a few words about the Acholi justice system, which is based on compensation, reconciliation, and reintegration. The main objective of the justice system is to integrate perpetrators into their communities with their victims, through a process of establishing the truth, confession, reparation, repentance and forgiveness…The ICC system of justice is based upon western-style legal systems, which in many cases contradict traditional justice procedures."[90]

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[88] Ibid, 10.

[89] Heather Strang, *Repair or Revenge: Victims and Restorative Justice*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Heather Strang and John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Auckerman, Miriam. "Extraordinary Evil, Ordinary Crimes: A Framework for Understanding Transitional Justice." *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 2000. pgs.39-97; available from http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/hrj/iss15/aukerman.shtml

[90] Civil Society Organizations for Peace In Northern Uganda (CSOPNU), *The International Criminal Court Investigation in Northern Uganda: A CSOPNO Briefing Paper*, (Gulu: CSOPNU, February 1, 2005); available from email: csopnu@yahoo.com.

Further, some advocate restorative justice under the premise of permanency since retributive justice seems to have a limit, which does not address longer-term root issues as well as restorative justice.[91]

Interestingly related to justice, many of the respondents in an ARLPI study on the ICC, answered the question, "How can justice be done to the victims of the war?" with requests for the Ugandan government to pay compensation and amenities, since they "failed to protect us and for many years it has minimized the problem and thus allowed it to drag on and on."[92] Another responded, "All the justice I want to be done to me is just the war to end."[93] One social worker for formerly abducted women shared, "There is no real justice without forgiveness."[94] This highlights that the ultimate justice seems be sustainable war cessation.

Limitations of Forgiveness

Forgiveness can be an incredibly powerful dimension to the resolution of conflicts worldwide, but there exists much controversy and limitations over its realization. Does forgiveness undermine justice? Can it discard feelings of resentment to which victims are entitled after surviving traumatic experiences? Does it bury the past, and thus the collective identity and common consciousness from which a nation's people come?[95] By forgiving, especially if done too quickly, can it propel further wrongdoing in the future since the perpetrators aren't held accountable for their actions?[96]

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[91] Academic Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 16, 2004.
[92] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Position Paper on Possibility of Intervention,* 8. This quote was made by a group of seven displaced persons in Bobi camp.
[93] Ibid, 2.
[94] Ibid, 11. This quote is from a 38-year old.
[95] Auerbach, 155.
[96] Ibid., 155.

In general, forgiveness is a very demanding process, effectively requiring a victim's "commitment to eradicating his or her resentment to the wrongdoer."[97] This is an extremely arduous act, given that resentment is an intensely powerful emotion.[98] Others suggest that, "an act of self-disclosure [forgiveness] does not necessitate the elimination of resentment, it is still a demanding moral act because it requires a particular form of conduct on the part of the victim."[99] As will be mentioned later in the section on the promotion of forgiveness, the burden of forgiveness is nearly always on the victim. Indeed, it is not always a practice that comes easily for people; some even suggest that it is a discipline, which must be learned.[100]

As mentioned earlier, another concern related to forgiveness is how it is perceived as related to a morality or religion. Very often in popular culture, forgiveness is thought of as a Christian virtue associated with Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, and thus outside of the realm of secular or non-Christian traditions.[101] Govier explains, "It was Jesus of Nazareth who discovered and taught the power of forgiveness. But because Jesus was a religious leader, communicating his message in spiritual and religious language, it has often been assumed that forgiveness is meaningful only in personal contexts where it emerges from a kind of Christian love."[102] By its association with Christianity or other religions, some will reject it immediately as they may believe that by buying into or exploring the ideas of forgiveness, they are buying into a type of religious evangelization.

There are also several methodological difficulties to exploring the notion of forgiveness. First, forgiveness in itself is a very internal experience that is extremely difficult to quantify or prove, even when occurring at a group level. "Forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation are

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[97] Digeser, 701.
[98] Ibid., 702.
[99] Ibid., 705.
[100] Shriver, 233.
[101] Haber, 3.
[102] Govier, 80.

deeply personal processes, and each person's needs and reactions to peacemaking and truth-telling may be different."[103] Indeed, we can never really tell whether genuine forgiveness has taken place or not.[104] To simply say the words, "I forgive you" does not necessarily signify that authentic forgiveness has taken place. The word "forgive" is not performative like "promise."[105] It is not an event but rather a process, which requires "working over, amending, and overcoming attitudes."[106] Forgiveness is often a process involving much personal anguish and struggle. Certainly, it is not a process to be considered lightly, especially given the violent backgrounds that often precede such decisions. Bryan Hamlin, a scholar on international re-armament issues, writes, "To forgive anyone particularly after a life and death struggle, takes a difficult decision…[it] is followed by the recognition that people can 'no longer change the pattern of life for the better by changing their frontiers, their systems, and their laws of compulsion of judgment and justice, but only by changing ourselves."[107]

Further, forgiveness is complicated by the fact that it is a process, which applies to both individuals and collectives as outlined earlier in this chapter. Given that forgiveness is difficult to measure on an individual level, within groups it is even more complicated because there is multitude of personalities undergoing their own personal processes of handling emotions, not necessarily simultaneously. There may be factions of a group that are prepared to forgive and others that are not.

Benefits of Forgiveness

Despite the limitations of its use and study, forgiveness can be an incredibly powerful dimension to the resolution of conflicts worldwide, especially relevant to the current political

[103] Hayner, 155.
[104] Digeser, 703.
[105] Govier, 43.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Bryan Hamlin, "Forgiveness in International Affairs." (London : Grosvenor Books in association with For a Change Magazine, 1992), 5.

context and the ways and types of wars being fought today. Some of the proponents of forgiveness speak loudly of the healing dimensions of forgiveness. Philosopher Jeffrie Murphy writes, "forgiveness heals and restores; and, without it, resentment would remain as an obstacle to many human relationships we value."[108] In many ways, when authentically embraced, forgiveness allows for an individual to detach himself or herself from dark, haunting feelings of resentment and bitterness. It can be a transformative process for the victim and the perpetrator alike. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt describes forgiveness as a source of creative rebirth, which permits us to break harmful cycles of resentment and wrath.[109] Govier also writes, "When we forgive, we gain a fresh perspective that releases us from bitterness that may unhealthily tie us to the past."[110] Robert Enright, a psychologist and leader in the school of thought that suggests that forgiveness is as much a gift to the forgiven as to the forgiver, "sees forgiveness as a route to personal freedom, a way of rejecting the self-imposed, self-reinforcing label of victim and escaping an ultimately soul-destroying maze of anger and resentment."[111] One woman who lost her brother in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, described her decision to reject vengeance, embracing forgiveness when she expounded, "These terrorists had taken my brother and I wasn't going to let them take anything else."[112] Forgiveness allows the victim to have the last word over the perpetrator. "[Forgiveness] 'humanizes' the victims precisely by protecting them from either mimicking or dehumanizing the oppressors."[113]

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[108] Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.
[109] Arendt, 236-242.
[110] Govier, 61.
[111] Cose, 23.
[112] Ibid, 22.
[113] Appleby, 195 with reference to Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

Another important positive aspect of forgiveness is its relation to self-respect. In the act of forgiveness, the victim identifies a previous behavior directed at him/her and identifies it as hurtful and wrong. This intentionality requires self-respect in that the victim is implicitly saying that he/she deserves better treatment.[114] This self-respect is also a sign of strength. For people who are able to effectively carry out forgiveness, there is even a sense of pride. Indeed, Desmond Tutu describes it well in the first chapter of his book, <u>No Future Without forgiveness</u>:

> "Yes, the world saw a veritable miracle unfolding before their eyes. They witnessed the almost unbelievable. Instead of the horrendous blood bath that so many had feared and so many others had predicted, here were these amazing South Africans, black and white together, carrying a relatively peaceful changeover and transfer of power."[115]

For those who risk engaging in the difficult but rewarding process, which is forgiveness, and emerge with a transformation emotionally, spiritually, and/or politically, they experience a strengthening sense of unification. "Like adopting an angle of repose, forgiveness is a kind of weapon that victims can use to reassert their worth vis-à-vis their government. To be able to forgive another implies a form of power that can raise those who have been harmed and lower those who have gained something by doing wrong."[116] Forgiving the perpetrator provides the victim with dignity, something many are seeking after humiliation or wrongdoing. In the case of Northern Uganda, as evidenced in the comments of Rwot Acana at the cleansing ceremony referenced at the beginning of this thesis, embracing forgiveness is a source of pride for the Acholi people. The recent CSOPNU briefing paper expanded on this point:

> "Mechanisms such as *mato oput* and *bending of the spears* are ancient Acholi rituals which, despite many years of war and displacement are still being practiced in the sub-region, and have the support and confidence of the majority of Acholis and their traditional leaders….shouldn't communities be allowed to

[114]Murphy, 16.
[115] Tutu, 10-11.
[116] Digeser, 716-717.

> handle the conflicts in their own manner, especially if their manner is most likely to bring peace to the affected community?"[117]

Implicit in these comments is a pervasive attitude throughout Acholiland: "We don't need outside experts telling us what to do with former LRA members. We have our own cultural tradition of *mato oput* which means something to us." Given the internal nature of forgiveness on behalf of the victim, this sense of dignity is generated even in cases when forgiveness is unilateral and the perpetrator does not acknowledge the wrongdoing.

A further benefit of forgiveness is that an authentic process of reconciliation is initiated, paving the way for two former adversaries to recreate a future together, if both are willing participants in the process. It is an opportunity for energies to be directed towards a future relationship as well as a reconstruction of a more equitable society that meets the interests of all. "Inserting forgiveness into politics poses its own dangers and possibilities. But when it is appropriate and successful, it may reestablish a just and equitable relationship between injured citizens and their government."[118] In South Africa for example, a case that many who revere forgiveness constantly point to, a comprehensive reconciliation process has contributed to increased cooperation between blacks and whites and a redistribution of power where a multiracial group of individuals are political and societal leaders.

Finally, some individuals like Desmond Tutu see forgiveness as a nonviolent response to a very violent act. In the process, those enacting forgiveness are breaking a dangerous cycle of retribution. He explained his reasoning as he spoke to a group of Rwandans after the genocide:

> "I told them that the cycle of reprisal and counter reprisal that had characterized their national history had to be broken and that the only way to do this was to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, to move on to forgiveness, because without it there was no future."[119]

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[117] Civil Society Organizations for Peace In Northern Uganda (CSOPNU).
[118] Digeser, 718.
[119] Tutu, 260.

Certainly, in many of the armed conflicts today, the professed reasons for the war are just a sliver of the central root causes. Particularly in Africa, many of the wars have links back to divisive colonial practices or exploitative extractive industries, which have operated for decades. In these contexts especially, forgiveness has a potential capacity to break a destructive cycle of violence and authoritative leadership. Upon reflecting on the case in South Africa, Bishop Peter Storey, a South African Protestant leader, said,

> "[T]he primary cancer may be, and was, and will always be, the apartheid oppression, but secondary infections have touched many of apartheid's opponents and eroded their knowledge of good and evil. One of the tragedies of life, sir, is it is possible to become like that which we hate most"[120]

If a victim doesn't choose forgiveness in dealing with the end of a harmful violent conflict, what will they choose instead? If it is any type of revenge or destructive violence, indeed the victim will have transformed him/herself into a perpetrator against others, only furthering injury. Often in similar situations, the victim or subordinate group decides, "that the only effective strategy for pursuing justice is violent confrontation. Yet violence tends to beget more violence. The cycle often escalates quickly to the point where the ensuing struggle becomes an even greater violator of fundamental human rights than the initial injustice."[121] Appleby concludes that, "A politics of forgiveness thus may be the most promising way to break the vicious cycle of charges and countercharges of political victimization."[122]

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[120] Ibid, 136-37.
[121] Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, "Justice Without Violence: Theoretical Foundations" in *Justice Without Violence*, ed. Paul Wehur, Heidi Burgess, and Guy Burgess (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 7.
[122] Appleby, 195 with reference to Norman Porter, "Reconsidering Reconciliation," 13.

Chapter 3: Historical Background on the War in Northern Uganda

"Lyeci Aryo Ka Lwenyo Lum Aye Nongo Peko"
When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers
--Acholi proverb

Beyond understanding the overarching theories of forgiveness and its role in politics, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, it is imperative to also be aware of the historical background so as to more fully comprehend the relevant application of forgiveness in Northern Uganda. Thus, this chapter will provide a concise backdrop to the conflict in Northern Uganda, presenting the key events with brief analysis.

The conflict plaguing Northern Uganda has roots in the British colonial legacy, which ended in 1962 when the Republic of Uganda gained its independence. Utilizing indirect rule, the British colonizer used the infamous "divide and conquer" tactic of employing primarily people from the South of the country as civil servants, emphasizing education and training for government positions and other civil duties. Northerners, on the other hand, were prepped for employment in the military and other fighting forces.[123] In a 1987 publication, Amii Omara Otunno, a prominent Ugandan historian, notes the prevalence of Northerners in the army:

> "…the African sector of the Army was not very representative of the ethnic composition of the country as a whole. The largest contingent was recruited from the north, especially from the people of Acholi…By 1914, Acholi had become the main recruiting ground for the KAR [King's Africa Rifles], a pattern which was continued in the post-colonial period."[124]

The feature of an internal North-South divide remains a prominent concern when discussing the war in the North and possible ways forward to peace. Indeed, the "socio-economic division

[123] Paul Jackson, "The March of the Lord's Resistance Army: Greed or Grievance in Northern Uganda?" *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 13, no. 3 (2002): 29.
[124] Robert Gersony, "The Anguish of Northern Uganda," (USAID, August 1997), 6 with reference to Amii Omara Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda 1980-1985,* Kampala, 1987.

between north and south has fueled continuous ethnic violence"[125] since colonialism. Analysis suggests that is one of the major underlying factors of the war: "deep-seeded divisions between northern and southern Uganda, a divide that has engendered a fear of being dominated by either regions or ethnic groups, and has served as a barrier to national unity."[126]

The violent insurgency itself, which has plagued the land of Northern Uganda for nearly two decades, originated in 1986 shortly after President Yoweri Museveni, a southerner, came to power in Kampala through a violent insurrection. After the take over, Acholi ex-soldiers fled back to the north of the country in reaction to the new southern-led government's initiative to hunt and persecute former soldiers for previous atrocities committed, especially in the Luwero Triangle where the former government army is reported to be largely responsible for estimates of up to 300,000 deaths.[127] Many of the fleeing Acholi soldiers continued on through Acholiland into Southern Sudan, where they sought refuge and eventually formed a rebellion called the Ugandan People's Democratic Army (UPDA).[128] As UPDA means dwindled and forces demoralized in late 1986, Alice Lakwena, a twenty-eight-year old Acholi woman who was a so-called spirit messenger, took over to guide military operations. After initial success, her Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) was defeated just outside of Kampala.[129] Following a brief attempt by Severino Likoya Kiberu, Alice's father, to lead government resistance, Joseph Kony, a cousin of Alice, began mobilizing forces by late 1987.[130] Kony, a self-proclaimed mystic prophet, provided an opportunity for frustrated Acholi citizens to mobilize against the new southern leadership in Kampala. Beyond just a political outlet, Lakwena's HSM and Kony's group,

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[125] Jackson, 29.
[126] Refugee Law Project, *Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences and the Search for Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda, Working Paper No. 11*, (Kampala: Refugee Law Group, February 2004), 10
[127] Gersony, 9.
[128] Ibid., 20.
[129] Ibid., 25.
[130] Ibid., 29-30.

which has now been renamed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), offered spiritual redemption to the Acholi people who feared an end to their ethnic group with the rise of Museveni because of previous contentions and violent skirmishes with former southern regimes.[131] Lakwena argued that the Acholi would soon find themselves marginalized due to their dominance in the national army that fought Museveni in his guerilla campaign to attain power.[132] She believed that they needed something new to overcome these challenges and she presented a spiritual world, which formulated the core center of the Acholi identity.[133] Paul Jackson expands on this point further, "Not only did the leadership through Alice and later Kony inspire a great deal of followers to believe them, but the foundation of Acholi ethnicity lies within the development of a spiritual existence. A war based on fear of ethnic extinction, therefore requires a degree of ethnic renewal in response; and in essence this was what drove the HSM and LRA."

An heir to Lakwena, Kony embarked on a similar campaign of spiritual redemption and political opposition in which his goal was to mold Uganda into a country, "ruled in accordance with the Biblical Ten Commandments."[134] Following two years of relative tranquility in Northern Uganda, negotiations took place between the LRA and the Ugandan government in early 1994. Before any treaties could be finalized, the peace efforts collapsed for reasons not completely understood. It is suggested that some soldiers of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), the Uganda military, grew tired of negotiating with an enemy that they thought was soon to be defeated anyway, while others argue the Acholi politicians in exile undermined the process because they felt there was more to gain from war than negotiating with Museveni. Regardless, Kony accused Acholi elders of betrayal and Museveni gave a one-week ultimatum

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[131] Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, "Kony's Message : A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda," *African Affairs* 98 (1999): 22.
[132] Refugee Law Project, *Behind the Violence,* 5.
[133] Jackson, 49.

for the LRA members to come out from the bush and hand over their weapons.[135] This "finally drove Kony over the edge" and he turned his movement against his own people, drastically changing his policy and strategy.[136] Many Acholi also believe that this LRA shift of targets from the Ugandan military to the civilians is due to the formation of the "Arrow Brigade," a civilian defense unit that the Ugandan military urged civilians to join in order to "fight the rebels using any means they had, even bows and arrows."[137] This taking up of arms by Acholi civilians was apparently viewed as a betrayal by the LRA for it was at this point that the LRA launched massive atrocities on the Acholi civilian population, abducting children to fill their ranks, and starting formal relations with the Sudanese government, from whom they received assistance for many years. The Sudanese government was willing to provide support to the LRA in retaliation for the Ugandan government's support of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), a Sudanese rebellion in the South of the country which had been engaged in a civil war with the Khartoum government for years.[138] In Northern Uganda, "fear led to despair led to a grab at a perception of Acholi identity constructed around sprits. This identity led to the only course available: redemption through internal ethnic cleansing coupled with a crusade against the soldiers of the evil spirits."[139]

To counter this uprising, the UPDF deployed forces to combat the "rebels" in the northern Acholi region. In September 1996, the government forcibly moved thousands of Acholi into internally displaced people's camps (IDPs), "to protect the innocent civilians as well as

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[134] Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) of the United Nations, "IRIN Web Special on the Crisis in Northern Uganda," (accessed October 10, 2003); available from http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/uga_crisis/default.asp
[135] Doom, 24.
[136] Ibid., 25.
[137] Human Rights Focus (HURIFO), *Between Two Fires: The Human Rights Situation in Protected Camps in Gulu District,* (Gulu: HURIFO, February 2002), 7.
[138] World Vision, 11.
[139] Jackson, 49.

making it easier for them [the military] to pursue the LRA."[140] In March 2002, the Ugandan government and the UPDF military forces launched *Operation Iron Fist*, "a military campaign intended to wipe out the LRA by attacking its Southern Sudanese sanctuaries."[141] Unfortunately, this offensive was incentive for the LRA to retreat back into Northern Uganda in a massive upswing of violence against civilians. Based on UN estimates, approximately 8,400 children were abducted by the LRA between June 2002 and June 2003 alone, bringing the running total of registered abductions since 1991 to over 20,000 children.[142]

The LRA is an exemplar of functional violence,[143] forcing abducted children to beat, torture, and even kill other children or former community members. Once the children have participated in severe violence, they undergo significant psychological stress that then distinguishes them from their former community, ensuring that the LRA becomes their new source of identity. Further, the compulsory perpetration of violence builds up the manpower of the LRA, in fact, fueling the war. Indeed, if the LRA did not employ tactics of abducting children and forcing them to become murderous soldiers, their ranks would be dwindling and the strength of the entire insurgency movement would be at stake. Whether the LRA leadership makes conscious decisions to employ such tactics of manipulating violence is unknown and perhaps irrelevant. The mere fact that they do is an underlying variable of what keeps the war in Northern Uganda alive today.

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[140] Bill Law, "No respite in northern Uganda," *BBC News*, October 5, 2003; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/3165894.stm

[141] Human Rights Watch. *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*. (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 2003), 3.

[142] Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) of the United Nations, "IRIN Web Special on the Crisis in Northern Uganda."

[143] "Functional Violence" is a concept studied and utilized in humanitarian studies. Stemming from the theories of Mark Duffield and Phillpe Le Billion, the concept attempts to illustrate how violence is not enacted by chaotic madmen but rather is a tool used by actors who have calculated effective tactics of violence in order to reach their goals. See Mark Duffield, "Complex Emergencies and the Crisis of Developmentalism," in IDS Bulletin, Vo. 25, No. 4, 1994; Mark Duffield, "Post Modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection." in *Civil Wars* 1(1): 66-102, 1998; and Phillipe Le Billion, "The Political Economy of War: What Relief agencies need to know," *Humanitarian Practice Network Paper #33*, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000.

Chapter 4: Evidence of Forgiveness in Northern Uganda

> *"Forgiveness is not necessarily a discrete transaction between two individuals. It is also a social process that blends elements such as forbearance from revenge and the will to eventually reconcile."*
> --Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer[144]

In Northern Uganda, a region that knows the grim realities of war all too well, the notion of forgiveness is evident in the political, cultural, and interpersonal spheres. Its embodiment in a multitude of aspects of society demonstrates its prominent presence throughout society. This chapter will illustrate the various characterizations of forgiveness within Acholi society including the Amnesty Law, cultural ceremonies, and the reflective words of people living in Northern Uganda.

The Amnesty Law

In the political sphere, the Amnesty Act, which provides amnesty and pardon to those involved in political insurgencies throughout the country, was passed in January of 2000 in the Parliament of Uganda. Within the act, amnesty is defined as "a pardon, forgiveness, exemption or discharge from criminal prosecution or any other form of punishment by the state."[145] The background to the Act, which is described in the pre-amble, follows,

"Whereas it is common knowledge that hostilities directed at the Government of Uganda continue to persist in some parts of the country, thereby causing unnecessary suffering to the people of those areas:
AND WHEREAS it is the expressed desire of the people of Uganda to end armed hostilities, reconcile with those who have caused suffering and rebuild their communities:
AND WHEREAS it is the desire and determination of the Government to genuinely implement its policy of reconciliation in order to establish peace, security, and tranquility throughout the whole country:"[146]

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[144] Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer, 2.
[145] Parliament of Uganda, *The Amnesty Act 2000*, "Part 1-Preliminary" in African Rights, *An Act of Forgiveness: A Guide to the Amnesty Act 2000,* (Kampala: Africa Rights, August 2001).
[146] Ibid.

The Amnesty Law grants amnesty to any person who has engaged in armed rebellion against the Government of Uganda since January 26, 1986, when the current administration took power.[147] A person claiming amnesty must renounce and abandon all involvement in the insurgency.[148] The ideas in the Act itself were initiated and eventually cultivated into law from the concerns and determined advocacy done on behalf of many ordinary Ugandan citizens. After the failed 1994 peace talks led by Betty Bigombe, an Acholi woman and former Minister of State in Office of the Prime Minister, the people of the North began to mobilize in a grassroots fashion, vehemently calling for a peaceful resolution to the war as well as an "enactment of a comprehensive amnesty."[149] This push for amnesty was likely propelled partly by the ongoing Uganda-Sudan negotiations, which culminated in the Nairobi agreement in December of 1999. Due to these negotiations, many believed that the LRA and the SPLA would sincerely cease receiving government support, thus depleting their means to fight, eventually allowing the "rebels" to come home.[150] An ARLPI assessment on the implementation and impact of the Amnesty Law explains, "The insistence of the people won the day. Following cabinet level canvassing of popular opinion throughout the country, and detailed representations from Northern Uganda, the government accepted the considered proposals enacting a comprehensive amnesty law based on the principle of reconciliation."[151] After initial resistance, the government accepted the notion of amnesty with a legislative proposal in 1998 that was similar to an earlier presidential pardon of 1987, which excluded certain offenses from pardon. People from the North, though, called for a comprehensive blanket amnesty and the government began accepting

[147] African Rights, *An Act of Forgiveness: A Guide to the Amnesty Act 2000,* (Kampala: Africa Rights, August 2001), 1.
[148] Ibid, 6.
[149] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, the Women's Desk of Caritas Gulu and the Justice and Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese, *Seventy Times Seven: The Implementation and Impact of the Amnesty law in Acholi,* (Gulu: ARLPI, May 2002), 7.
[150] Ibid., 7.
[151] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Seventy Times Seven:* 7.

such proposals, of which the ARLPI contributed several. "Support for the idea of a blanket amnesty emanated from the communities affected by conflict and therefore can be said to reflect the aspirations for reconciliation of the victims of the conflict."[152] The comprehensive Amnesty bill was finally passed on December 7, 1999 and eventually became law on January 17, 2000 when President Museveni made his final approval. The Amnesty Commission, the body designed to implement the Amnesty Act, was not officially appointed until July 2000 and did not open offices in Gulu and Kitgum towns until February of 2001 and July of 2001 respectively.[153]

Under the Amnesty Act, there are four types of people eligible for amnesty: combatants, those who collaborated with the insurgency, those who committed other crimes to support the insurgency, and those who assisted the insurgency in any fashion.[154] Those seeking amnesty must report to designated individuals and declare their weapons.[155] The Amnesty Law grants these individuals an Amnesty certificate, which provides them with demobilization, reintegration, and resettlement assistance and also protects them from prosecution and punishment.[156] Since the inception of the law nearly five years ago, a substantial number of people, including individuals from the North, have been granted Amnesty certificates. According to Justice Peter Onega, Chair of the Government's Amnesty Commission, as of July 15, 2004, "13,231 persons had taken advantage of the blanket amnesty offered by the Commission. Of this figure, 5,000 are said to be ex-LRA."[157]

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[152] Ibid., 7.
[153] Ibid., 7.
[154] African Rights, *An Act of Forgiveness*, 4.
[155] Ibid., 7.
[156] Ibid., 5-11.

[157] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal Investigations of the Lord's Resistance Army by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and Its Implications on the Search for Peaceful Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda,* (Kampala: Refugee Law Project, July 28, 2004), 7; available from http://www.refugeelawproject.org.

Cultural Ceremonies

In the cultural arena, forgiveness is upheld through Acholi traditional beliefs and rituals such as the *Nyono Tonggweno ka Opobo* (stepping on the egg and Opobo branch) cleansing ceremony, an event that involves a symbolic cleansing for people who have been away from the tribe for several months or more and have been contaminated by outside pressures, acts, and influences. This observance, which was described in the introduction of the paper, has drawn much attention recently with an increasing number of returnees from the LRA managing escape or surrender in the mid-months of 2004. Forgiveness, as evidenced by this cultural ceremony, is an intrinsic component of the Acholi worldview.

Further, at the very core of the Acholi pride for their cultural wisdom on forgiveness is the traditional reconciliation ceremony called *Mato Oput*. The last step in an involved reconciliation process, which involves "an investigation of the circumstances; an acceptance of responsibility; and an indication of repentance. The elders lay down terms of compensation and reconciliation is sealed by sharing a bitter root drink from a common calabash."[158] This ritual is one that many Acholi regard with very high esteem as an example of how their community manages to collaborate effectively and prevail despite the horrific suffering and violence they have endured during the war. Dennis Pain, a sociologist who conducted detailed in-country consultations pertaining to the conflict in Northern Uganda in the late 1990s, explains the ceremony further,

> "Between groups the process required a delegation of elders to investigate the fault and identify the cause and for those concerned to accept their responsibility. The acceptance of responsibility is a group acceptance—no so-&-so, son of X, but <u>we</u> have done this. Then the compensation is determined, traditionally cattle or girls, and lastly reconciliation occurs with the "bending of two spears" and *mato*

[158] Dennis Pain, "The Bending of Spears: Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda," (London: International Alert, December 1997), 82.

> *oput*. 'There should be individual *mato oput* for children at the sub-county level and a final *mato oput* between groups-Acholi, Government and LRA-at a public event.'"[159]

Sverker Finnstrom, an anthropologist who did extended fieldwork in Northern Uganda from 1997 to 2002 reflects further on the reconciliation process amongst the Acholi,

> "Accordingly, reconciliation also has two sides, most informants in Acholiland argued….the ritual performance [of mato oput] manifests equality. Members of both the offending and offended parties consumed the bitter root, always on neutral ground in the uncultivated bush, symbolically selected on the path between two homesteads. They were always occasions of great feasting and happy feelings, everyone sharing food and drink….In the Ugandan case, this would imply that all parties involved must step out and genuinely admit their respective wrongdoings if they are to be able to promote reconciliation…Reconciliation, my informants constantly remarked, must be preceded by peace talks and conflict settlement."[160]

Mato Oput is a traditional ritual that has been performed for years as Finnstrom concludes that, "in other words, compensation and reconciliation rather than revenge or blood vengeance is the institutionalized Acholi way of handling disputes, homicides and unnatural deaths."[161] Yet, one could explain the rising Acholi adherence to the traditional justice mechanisms by their lack of confidence in the formal legal systems, which has been partly eroded because of the conflict.

> "With formal justice struggling to maintain a presence in the north, people have been actively seeking out the traditional institutions. In times of strife it is understandable that people should place their trust in customs handed down over generations and they should be drawn to traditional arbitrators who use a language and concepts that they understand. But there have also been very practical reasons for the resurgence in the use of traditional mechanisms, they are low-cost and accessible."[162]

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[159] Ibid, 82.
[160] Sverker Finnstrom, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda,* (Uppsala University Library: Uppsala, Sweeden, 2003), 302.
[161] Ibid, 291.

In Their Own Words

Perhaps, the most fitting manifestation of the presence of forgiveness in Northern Uganda today is illuminated through the words of the Acholi people. In everyday rhetoric, the underlying recurrence of forgiveness cannot be denied. Initial survey data of the attitudes and perceptions of communities toward returning LRA members further authenticate the notable presence of forgiveness today. Individual and group responses to the questions of "How do you feel about these former LRA commanders and members (wives and children) coming out of the bush?" and "How would you feel about either returning children or ex-LRA commanders living within your community/families?"[163] reveal authentic manifestations of forgiveness. The vast majority exhibit positive views towards the LRA with many communicating, "they are welcome,"[164] "we appreciate their efforts of coming out,"[165] "I feel good and happy to welcome them back home,"[166] "I'd like to thank God and warmly welcome whoever wants to come home as these commanders did,"[167] and "I feel these former LRA commanders and members [wives and children] should be forgiven whether it was their own plans to join the LRA or not their own making."[168] There is a noticeable distinction in the comments surrounding those members of the LRA who were abducted and forced to partake in violence and those who joined the LRA on their own behalf. As the respondents in one IDP camp in Kitgum town explained, "We are very happy with their return. But we are not happy with those who joined LRA on their own interest so we feel they should be tried in court of law."[169] Another responded, "they should come back

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[162] African Rights, "Traditional Justice: Looking Forward to the Past," *Northern Uganda: Justice in Conflict*, (London: African Rights, January 2000), 61.
[163] This ARLPI Questionnaire was developed in August 2004 and can be found in APPENDIX I of this paper.
[164] ARLPI "Attitudes and Perceptions of Communities on Returning LRA Members" Research Questionnaire Responses, Survey V.
[165] Survey X.
[166] Survey W.
[167] Survey B.
[168] Survey DD.
[169] Survey N.

home because the people are ready to forgive them since these rebels did not know what they were doing, take for instance the abductees were just forced to the bush and also forced to kill innocently. So we really don't blame them but the blame goes to Kony himself."[170]

Along those same lines, while all but two of twenty-six surveys initially analyzed communicated positive attitudes of welcome and acceptance of former LRA members leaving their life in the bush and returning to society, there was more overt concern about former LRA members returning to live in their former communities. One responded, "For me as a student, I'm not used to their behaviors and the way they live. So for that, I encourage that they should be separated from the communities in their own areas."[171] A similar response was, "I would suggest that they should first be given a place where they settle down before taking them to that particular area. This is because the people come out of the bush are affected by various thoughts and they are confused."[172] Several respondents suggested that the returnees should be segregated from the rest of the community and live in a camp of their own where they can learn civilian norms once again. One respondent wrote,

> "I feel so scared because I will be having that feeling of killing ….I feel that the children from the LRA should be first given some special place without coming the community where people live because they will be having the spirit jealousy and rebellion, which would make difficulty for people to live with them. I feel about this because first of all the will not be loved by other people living in that area because the people living in that [area] may be in position to kill them. Because one of their relative might have been killed by the LRA."[173]

Likewise, another respondent explained,

> "These ex-LRA commanders living within our community/families is not really very bad but there is fear from the local community that since these people are just from the bush, they are traumatized they will still cause commotion in that some of them still have the mentality of the bush so they could still be kept in places like GUSCO, World Vision [reception centers] for proper meriting. The

[170] Survey H.
[171] Survey L.
[172] Survey B.
[173] Survey E.

> ex-LRA commanders could also be absorbed but experience has shown us a lot for instance Brig. Omaka burned his uncle alive after returning, this feeling hurts the community though the people may forgive but the government could keep them elsewhere so that they try to forget about the past experience in the bush."[174]

Yet amidst this prevalence of forgiveness of the LRA members, there certainly are clusters of Acholi people who do not embrace forgiveness and instead, see other routes as more effective for managing returning LRA members. The influence of the civil society and religious leadership's call for forgiveness is widespread within Acholiland, yet there are obviously pockets of people who pose opposing views. One such respondent professed,

> "They [the LRA commanders] are used to getting what they want. Are we again the ones to unconditionally tolerate (ie be oppressed) so as to please them who are never required to tolerate us? There is talk these newcomers give on the radio of returning home which I feel is either ignorance or deliberate lie since all are displaced. We want to have our homes where we can go and stay unmolested. I fear that for those inducted into antisocial behavior, they will occasionally be violent even without direct provocation. For some whose attitudes is progressive in working to maintain themselves or study, I have nothing against them but can collaborate with them."[175]

As noted in this respondent's reference to no one living in their rightful homes (four out of five people in Acholiland have been displaced into IDP camps[176]), some civilians feel so frustrated with the overall situation that considering forgiveness is a further exhausting. Indeed, as is typical in war situations, there is a multitude of perceptions and emotions and not one pure consistent, "voice of the people." One survey respondent provided the most comprehensive summary when she wrote, "the feelings about either returning or ex-LRA commanders living

[174] Survey H. Name of Brig. has been changed to keep confidential.
[175] Survey I.
[176] United Nations OCHA, *When the Sun Sets, We Start to Worry…": An Account of Life in Northern Uganda*, (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations OCHA/IRIN Publication, November 2003), 8.

within our community/families are mixed up taken the atrocities committed. Some would be happy and others might not."[177]

Beyond the words of many of the Acholi people, forgiveness is also exemplified in social interactions. It is particularly witnessed between those returnees from the LRA and civilian communities who receive back siblings, children, and neighbors who were with the LRA, often by force, for a certain amount of time. An assessment of the impact of the Amnesty Law conducted by ARLPI, Caritas Gulu-Women's Desk and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Gulu Archdiocese recorded that, "all people interviewed in communities answered that they have forgiven the returnees, especially since most returnees had been forced to join the rebellion by abduction. However, when pressed, people admitted having difficult problems of relationship with returnees."[178] From the returnees' perspective, the study revealed that the majority of returnees interviewed were welcomed and had positive experiences with their communities, with 70% of female returnees experiencing this and only 57% of males.[179] This may be explained by the fact that often women are forced to cook and perform sexual slavery while male members are trained for combat and are directly involved with the atrocities perpetuated back on the Acholi communities.[180] The study suggests that it is easier to receive, forgive and reintegrate those that were not direct combatants.

Sen's suggestion that illustrative examples can give shape to abstract concepts is particularly germane for forgiveness in Northern Uganda. Although forgiveness remains a difficult process to quantify, its existence in Acholiland is noted by the examples presented in this chapter. The creation and implementation of the Amnesty Law, the Acholi cultural rituals

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[177] Survey A.
[178] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Seventy Times Seven,* 18.
[179] Ibid, 18-20.
[180] Els De Temmerman, *Aboke Girls: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2001) and Rosa Ehrenreich, "The Stories We Must Tell: Ugandan Children and the Atrocities of the Lord's Resistance Army," *Africa Today* 45 (1999): 3.

continually performed, and the words and attitudes emanating from the Acholi people all serve as evidence of forgiveness in action in Northern Uganda.

Chapter 5: Why Forgiveness Now?:
The Possible Reasons Behind Its Manifestations

> *"There is life after conflict and repression—that because of forgiveness there is a future"*
> --Archbishop Desmond Tutu[181]

While the presence of forgiveness in both verbal expression and cultural ceremonies is conspicuous, attempting to understand how and why it is playing a role now in Northern Uganda, while the conflict persists would puzzle any conflict resolution scholar. Is it because of the prevalence of religious traditions in Acholi society such as Christianity and Islam? Or is this manifestation of forgiveness due to the personality of key civil society and religious leaders? Is it because all of the other methods employed to end the reign of warring terror have thus far failed and so forgiveness is a last resort to employ? Is there a profound cultural tendency that the Acholi have which makes forgiveness a more suitable choice than it is for other populations? Does it have anything to do with the fact that, for the most part, the Acholi are forgiving their own kin returning from the LRA rather than some estranged enemy? This chapter will explore all of these questions and the possible explanations for why forgiveness is entering the story at this point of the war in Northern Uganda.

Religion

> *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"*
> --Jesus Christ, before his crucifixion

Plastic rosaries dangling from the defined necks of residents of IDP camps, an ordination of four Catholic priests that draws over 1,000 people on a Saturday afternoon, the piercing cry of the mosques five times throughout the day, and the clamor of the Sunday afternoon revivals in the overflowing Protestant churches are all examples of the prominent voice of religion within

[181] Tutu, 279.

Northern Uganda. Religious demographics in the North are as follows: approximately 70% Catholic, 25% Anglican, 5% who are of other faiths, including .5% who are Muslim.[182] People in the North strive to find meaning to the horrifying war that they experience and many find solace, inspiration and hope in these faith-based institutions and traditions. As people delve deeper into the particular religious intricacies, they also are exposed to and preached to about the importance of mercy and forgiveness. As discussed extensively earlier, forgiveness has its original roots in religious traditions.

As previously mentioned, the ARLPI is a local NGO, which was formally inaugurated in February 1998 with Nelson Onono-Onweng, the Anglican Bishop of Northern Uganda as its founding Chair of the Board of Directors. At the epicenter of the movement that encourages forgiveness of the LRA, the initiative began several years earlier after renewed attacks in Kitgum following the failed 1994 peace talks. At that point in time, Anglican and Catholic church leaders decided to form an "ecumenical initiative to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves."[183] Offering training workshops, public prayers and demonstrations, ARLPI brings together individuals from the Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim traditions. At their first official *Bedo Piny pi Kuc* (sitting down for peace) conference in 1997 in London, members concluded that, "'the insurgency cannot be won by the gun; and subsequently called for dialogue between the government and the LRA, an amnesty and efforts at reconciliation through the Acholi traditional practice of mato oput."[184] Now with a staff of over fifteen people and a Board comprised of nearly twenty individuals, ARLPI is the leading peacebuilding entity in Northern Uganda, working with other Acholi civil society organizations, the Ugandan government, and

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[182] Gersony, 6.
[183] Carlos Rodriguez, "The Role of the Religious Leaders," in *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the Violence in Northern Uganda*," ACCORD Issue 11, ed. Okello Lucima, (London: Conciliation Resources, 2002), 59.
[184] Carlos Rodriguez, 59.

leaders within the Diaspora. Fr. Carlos Rodriguez remarks, "The event [the peace conference] marked a turning point, and the unity of the Anglican and Catholic churches was in itself a symbol of reconciliation given their history of division among political lines."[185] An example of reconciliation itself among faith traditions, ARLPI's voice is strong throughout the country but particularly in the North, often publishing press releases promoting negotiations, the Amnesty Act, and the dismantling of the IDP camps in the newspaper and over the radio. Through all of this publicity, "the religious leaders emphasize the complementarity of the Acholi reconciliation system of *mato oput* with the Biblical understanding of unconditional forgiveness."[186] In their May 2002 publication entitled, "Seventy Times Seven: The Implementation and Impact of the Amnesty Law In Acholi," they self-describe themselves in the following manner,

> "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative…firmly state their deep belief in the power of forgiveness…Both our religious traditions and the Acholi culture of "Mato Oput" tell us that to overcome this cycle of sixteen years of violence and horrendous atrocities we must move beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, in which victim and perpetrator are reconciled…It is from this perspective of forgiveness as the only way to transform our situation of violence in Acholi…"[187]

Failed Methods

> *"People in Northern Uganda would accept any option that would bring immediate peace."*
> --Dr. Fred Oola, formerly abducted child[188]

In searching for why forgiveness is playing the prominent role that it is within Northern Uganda, one cannot overlook how the other options implemented for conflict resolution have failed to bring closure to the war. While it is not impossible for these options to lead to cessation of the war, especially if used in intricate collaboration, they have not resulted in peace for nearly the past two decades. Indeed, there are great deficiencies in each of the following options that

[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Seventy Times Seven,* 25.

are currently engaged by those involved in the peacebuilding scheme in Northern Uganda: the military option, diplomatic negotiations, and the International Criminal Court investigation. In order to claim these methods as “failed” though, it is important to understand what a successful option includes. Clearly, an optimal outcome would lead to the end of the war, which would be marked by the absence of violence on behalf of both the LRA and the government, a signed peace agreement between the two parties, and confidence of the civilian population that hostilities were indeed over. This section will examine each of the aforementioned options and the reasons behind their respective failures to terminate the war with underlying hypothesis that the failure of a multitude of conflict resolution methods could serve as the primary reason why forgiveness now has such a prominent role.

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[188] Fred Oola, Presentation given at the Kennedy School of Government, Carr Center for Human Rights, Harvard University, September 24, 2004.

Military

During the eighteen-year insurgency, the Ugandan government has allocated millions of dollars and manpower hours towards military operations in the Northern region. Since the beginning of the conflict in the North, the war has cost the Ugandan government an estimated US$1.3 billion dollars, of which 28% is comprised of direct military expenditures.[189] This extremely high cost with few tangible results leads many to question whether a military solution is possible. Indeed, "the government has largely attempted to defeat the LRA militarily, while paying little regard to the effects of its strategy on the population or to the wider factors that underlie the conflict."[190] The longevity of the LRA insurgency creates significant doubts as to the capacity and/or will of the UPDF to end the violence. Further, "the failure to end the war by December that year [2002] as promised by Museveni and his generals as well as the spread of fighting to the districts of Soroti and Katakwi in 2003"[191] marked what many perceived as both a military failure and a stain on Museveni's international standing.

The nature of the conflict itself lends particular difficulty to a military solution, since estimates reflect that the LRA is comprised of over 80% abducted children, forced to participate in combat against the UPDF and the civilian populations.[192] This unique aspect of the rebellion discredits the army's normal primary measurement of success, a body count, as both misleading and even injurious. "Whenever the army kills a number of LRA, more are abducted…when the army fires rockets and heavy artillery, most of the casualties are child soldiers. The government

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[189] World Vision, 32 with reference to CARE International/ Civil Society Organizations for Peace In Northern Uganda (CSOPNU). "The Net Economic Costs of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-Region of Uganda," September 2002.
[190] International Crisis Group, *Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict*, (Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 14, 2004), 1.
[191] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal Investigations*, 3.
[192] Tim Large, "Crisis Profile—What's Going on in Northern Uganda," *Alertnet*, September 21, 2004, (accessed January 14, 2005); available from http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/10957583889.htm

gave assurances that Operation Iron Fist would not affect its efforts to rescue abductees but military operations often continue to be clumsy, bloody, and indiscriminate."[193]

As a rebellion group enacting guerilla warfare, the LRA utilizes violence as both a means and an end to create terror and further discredit the Ugandan government. Since they seemingly hold no aspirations to defend territory nor are deeply impacted by their own casualties, the LRA requires an unconventional response, and the Ugandan military has failed to defeat them. A recent International Crisis Group report analyzes, "The emphasis on expensive conventional systems such as tanks and attack helicopters rather than improved mobility, intelligence, and communications has left the army short of the tools it requires to counter the LRA militarily. It needs to develop new structures, acquire the right equipment and develop sound counter-insurgency strategy and tactics."[194]

Part of the military strategy to curb the insurgency is coordinating the use of militias with the UPDF. The militias, formally known as the Local Defense Units (LDUs) are comprised of local civilians who receive minimal training and a weapon to protect their community against the threat of the LRA. Taking names such as the Arrow Boys[195] or the Rhino Group,[196] these militias have become particularly popular in the Northern region of Lira, recruiting several thousands of civilians.[197] Recruitment by the Ugandan military operates under the guise of "to prove you don't support LRA, [you must] fight them. It goes alongside intimidation and in particular capitalizes on the poverty, redundancy and the dire need for protection in the society. These situations are created and maintained by the existence of displacement people's camps."[198]

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[193] International Crisis Group, 14.
[194] Ibid., 15.
[195] This is the name for group in Teso region led by Captain Mike Mukula, Minister of State for Health.
[196] This is the name for the group in Lira region which is led by Musa Echweru, the Soroti Regional District Commissioner (RDC).
[197] International Crisis Group, 15.
[198] Civil Society Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 8, 2004. The informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005.

Strategically, the militias are to secure the roads and protect the IDPs while the UPDF can move into the bush and take the offensive against the LRA. Yet, as LRA massacres continue, as referenced by the Barlonyo attack in February 2004 in which over two hundred people were killed within one IDP camp,[199] the army remains weak and ineffective, even when collaborating with local militias.

Another imperative dimension to consider when weighing the military option is the ever-growing mistrust between the Acholi population in the North and the Ugandan military due to forced displacement and human rights violations. First, Ugandan soldiers were the agents largely responsible for implementing the policy of forced displacement into "protected villages" in 1996. This act in itself is heavily despised by many residents in the North, who were forced to leave their homes and their land and relocate into congested quarters where they became reliant on World Food Program handouts for sustenance. While some residents moved voluntarily to be closer to army detachments for protection, most of the civilians were relocated against their will.[200] A Human Rights Focus report includes the testimony of an elder male from Omokokitunge village and how he arrived at Lalogi IDP camp:

> "On the 5th August 1996, I saw a UPDF [Army] helicopter land in our village at a site where about 400 UPDF [Army] Mobile Unit soldiers had camped. I learnt that the soldiers gave a letter to a middle-aged man to take to the LC 1 [village-level local councilor]. The letter, am told, was an order from above informing everybody in the area to relocate to the roadside because in a day or two a helicopter would be sent to bomb all the bushes and houses in that area, and so anyone who stays behind will be killed. The UPDF [Army] was already bombing the villages before this letter of 5th August, so this letter was just to inform the people that the villages would be bombed more indiscriminately and all houses and bushes would be burnt down."[201]

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[199] "Uganda Rebels 'Burnt my Family Alive,'" *BBC News*, February 24, 2004; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3513039.stm
[200] Human Rights Focus, 23.
[201] Ibid., 19.

Many other residents complain of their homesteads being set afire by the army shortly after they left for the camps and prevalent throughout the region is suspicion that the government is stealing Acholi land.[202] Indeed, it is not a policy looked upon favorably by many Acholi civilians. Even today in many of the NGO offices in Gulu town, colorful posters hang with the messages "Dismantle the camps" and allusions to the dignity of returning to one's home. Many Acholi leaders point to the camps as the root of Acholi cultural deterioration, holding the military responsible for their lost sense of dignity. Certainly, as the International Crisis Group concludes, "many of the humanitarian problems facing the population in the conflict areas result from displacement."[203] The IDP camps are also prime targets for continuous LRA attacks, "further undermining the confidence of the population in the army."[204] Many residents complain that they feel little to no protection at all from the army soldiers who ironically are housed in the epicenter of the camps, leaving the residents' huts as a peripheral boundary of protection around their detachments. There are also allegations that the LRA especially punishes those who live in the IDP camps because they are government-mandated enclaves and thus demonstrate cooperation with the Ugandan government.[205]

Loss of trust between the Acholi civilian population and the army can also be attributed to corruption and mismanagement including alleged instances in which the UPDF forcibly brought members of LDUs from Eastern and Northern Uganda to fight in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), an operation largely believed to be a means for natural resource exploitation.[206] Corruption within the military has also led to extreme mistrust between the

[202] Ibid., 20 and International Crisis Group, 14.
[203] International Crisis Group, 22.
[204] Ibid., 15.
[205] Human Rights Focus, 37.
[206] International Crisis Group, 15 and Civil Society Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 8, 2004. As per the person's request, the informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005.

Acholi people and the government, eroding their willingness to cooperate with the government towards an effective military solution to the war in the North. An ICG report explains,

> "Corruption and mismanagement are believed to consume approximately a quarter of the defense budget. The types of corruption vary widely and include: low-level theft and extortion from civilians; creation of "ghost soldiers" whose pay is pocketed; acquisition of faulty equipment (from uniforms to helicopters and tanks—usually as a result of a bribe or personal business association); and exploitation of resources in the Congo, including the suspicion that this was the motivation for the intervention."[207]

A final factor of the mistrust, which undermines the feasibility of the military option, is the rampant human rights abuses perpetuated by members of the Ugandan military against Acholi civilians. Human rights agencies conclude that this abuse includes arbitrary arrest, summary execution, ill treatment, torture, assault, killings, rape, defilement, child recruitment for child solders, and inhumane conditions of detention in unauthorized locations.[208]

In summary, a military option appears to have failed and remains infeasible, especially if utilized alone. This failure is marked by unfulfilled promises to end the war militarily, a spread of the conflict to other regions of the country beyond Acholiand, a military strategy that does not match the nature of the insurgency, poor coordination between UPDF and LDUs, and a loss of trust between the Acholi and the UPDF, fueled by forced displacement, corruption, and rampant human rights violations. Even if the army had the capacity to effectively defeat the LRA, this option would "not solve the North-South divide or produce national reconciliation," two central causes feeding into this violent conflict.[209]

Negotiations

Like the military option previously outlined, attempts at a negotiated settlement between the LRA and the Ugandan government have proven unsuccessful in bringing a conclusion to the

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[207] International Crisis Group, 16.
[208] Human Rights Watch and Human Rights Focus, 43.
[209] International Crisis Group, 18.

war in the North. Their failure can be attributed to a perceived lack of political will and coordination on behalf of both the government and the LRA, an unwillingness to release power on both sides, and the introduction of terrorism rhetoric, following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

Historical review concludes that the most significant of all negotiations between the Ugandan government and the LRA took place in 1993 and 1994 under the leadership of Betty Bigombe. An Acholi woman appointed by President Museveni, Bigombe led and executed delicate shuttle diplomacy between high ranking members of the LRA, including Joseph Kony, and ranking officers in the NRA (the Ugandan military's name at the time). After months of letter writing and confidence-building measures, several face-to-face meetings eventually took place in remote uncultivated parts of Acholiland. At the time, Kony expressed authentic interest in abandoning the fight in the bush and rejoining Acholi society, outlining several requirements for any peace agreement including a ceasefire, amnesty, traditional rituals performed by Acholi elders, and clinics for ill LRA soldiers. Significant obstacles in the negotiations began to emerge, though, as "preparations got underway for a meeting between Kony, Bigombe, and possibly President Museveni to reach a comprehensive settlement. The LRA delegation believed that the NRA was behaving arrogantly."[210] Neither side wanted to concede any of its perceived power and thus displays of ego were prevalent. According to Bigombe, while relatively supportive of her efforts towards negotiation meetings, President Museveni "did not openly support the initiative in order not to appear to have 'failed in defeating the rebels.'"[211]

In fact, both sides strived to propagate images that their engagement in peace talks was not a result of any lack of military strength. The message they tried to communicate was "we

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[210] Billie O'Kadameri, "LRA/Government negotiations 1993-94" in *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the Violence in Northern Uganda*," ACCORD Issue 11, ed. Okello Lucima, (London: Conciliation Resources, 2002), 40.

could destroy you militarily if we wanted to." Many familiar with the war in Northern Uganda argue that negotiations are simply not possible given the personalities of the parties' leaders, Kony and Museveni. No member of Ugandan civil society has even personally met with Kony for the past ten years, not even the government's Presidential Peace Team, pointed out an Acholi legal and conflict resolution academic.[212] This coupled with Kony's vision of himself as a cosmic prophet presents great challenges for effective negotiations. Museveni is often called a "man of the gun" having led a guerilla campaign throughout the country in the early 1980s to remove Milton Obote from power following the 1980 presidential elections, which he alleged were fraudulent. In 1985, Museveni with then President Tito Okello, signed the Nairobi agreement, but one month later, he seized Kampala. "For some, this gave rise to a profound mistrust of Museveni and his commitment to his agreements-a persistent theme of his opponents ever since."[213]

Many Acholi blame the failure of the 1994 peace talks on President Museveni's ultimatum, which he pronounced when addressing a crowd at Kaunda Ground, just outside of Gulu town during Pope John Paul II's visit in February of 1994. "He announced that the LRA had seven days to surrender, otherwise the government would defeat them militarily," summarizes Billie O'Kadameri, a journalist and analyst with Bigombe during the 1993-94 peace talks.[214] Within a couple of weeks, the LRA was reported to have crossed the border into Southern Sudan to establish military bases, returning to Uganda after a brief period with "more sophisticated weapons including landmines."[215] Whether the LRA had always been partaking in the peace negotiations simply to buy time in order to shift their operations to Southern Sudan or

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[211] Ibid., 37.
[212] Academic Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 16, 2004.
[213] Catherine Barnes and Okello Lucima, Introduction to *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the Violence in Northern Uganda,* ACCORD Issue 11, ed. Okello Lucima. (London : Conciliation Resources, 2002), 37.
[214] O'Kadameri, 41.
[215] Ibid.

if the President had shattered the entire process with the bold seven-day ultimatum, prospects for a negotiated settlement quickly dissipated.

Acholi elders again tried to instigate talks with the LRA leadership in 1996, but two of them were killed when the LRA commanders thought the elders were government decoys. Apparently, the elders ignored warnings from Major General Salim Saleh and Paramount Chief Acana, because "they claimed this information was a trick by Bigombe to sabotage their efforts because her own attempts had failed in 1994."[216] While unclear whether this assertion is true or not, ownership of the peace process, though not a prominent reason for why negotiations have failed to bring peace thus far, remains a delicate issue in Northern Uganda as it is in many violent contexts around the world.[217]

After a lapse of communication with the LRA, in 2001, Kony decided he wanted to meet and discuss the prospects of a negotiated settlement again with Acholi elders and religious leaders. Informal meetings were conducted between parish priests, traditional chiefs, and LRA commanders twelve kilometers outside of Pajule in the district of Pader over twenty times through early 2003. Coordinating security for these meetings was extremely complicated, resulting in a UPDF open-fire attack at one meeting, severely injuring trust between the rebels and Acholi civil society. At the last of a series of meetings in 2003, the government officials arrived late and disorganized, upsetting the LRA leadership enough to call off the meeting.[218]

In addition to lack of political will and poor coordination by both the government and the LRA, the labeling of the LRA as a terrorist group following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States has also contributed to the failure of negotiations. In December 2001, the U.S.

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[216] Ibid.
[217] Academic Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 16, 2004.
[218] Acholi Traditional Leader Interview, Gulu town, August 12, 2004.

State Department issued a comprehensive list of global terrorists, of which LRA was included.[219] As a close political ally of President George Bush and with a national budget of which the donor community covers approximately fifty percent,[220] the Ugandan government shortly thereafter created the anti-terrorism laws, which "provides the government with the right to shut down medias thought to be spreading terrorist rhetoric, and to arrest and detail without warrant any actor suspected of terrorist activity."[221] President Museveni is reported to have said, "We in Uganda know very well the grievous harm that can be caused to society by terrorists, having suffered for many years at the hands of Kony."[222]

The labeling of the LRA as "terrorists" is problematic for dialogue primarily because according to U.S. government rhetoric, one cannot negotiate with terrorists. Amidst a political climate where the word "terrorist" has powerful connotations much like "communism" did to the United States government during the Cold War era, relating the LRA to terrorism de-legitimizes any of their goals, painting them as a group of mindless individuals who have no merit in any of their claims, certainly not a group suitable for rational negotiations. It also further stigmatizes abducted children who manage escape from their LRA commander captives. Certainly, the means that the LRA employs are publicly disapproved by all familiar with the Northern Uganda conflict, but some who dislike Museveni find merit in their political reasons for fighting the government:

> "a)to remove dictatorship and stop the oppression of our people, b)to fight for the immediate democracy in Uganda in order to bring about national harmony and

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[219] U.S. Department of State, *Statement on the designation of 39 organizations on the USA Patriot Acti's "Terrorism Exclusion list"* as of December 5, 2001, (accessed February 7, 2005); available from http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2001/6695.htm
[220] International Crisis Group, 17.
[221] Liu Institute of Global Issues, "The Coalition for Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda: Report of the International Delegation of Civil Society 25 January—5 February 2004, Working Draft" (Vancouver: Liu Institute of Global Issues, University of British Columbia: March 2003), 11; available from http://www.up.ligi.ubc.ca/DelegationReport.pdf
[222] Finnstrom 154-155 with reference to United Nation/IRIN online news September 12, 2001; *The Monitor* 15, 19, 23 of Oct 2001; *The New Vision*, October 10, 2001.

unity and equal opportunity for all Ugandans, c)to see an end to gross violations of human rights and dignity of Ugandans d)to ensure the restoration of peace and security and rule of consent and law in Uganda e)to bring to an end the repressive policy of deliberate marginalization of groups of people who may hold different beliefs from that of the NRM."[223]

"Hopes for a negotiated settlement to the protracted conflict"[224] were rekindled again recently in late 2004 when an LRA spokesman, "Brigadier" Sam Kolo, communicated to the BBC that the LRA was keen on restarting talks with government officials. In mid-November, President Museveni proclaimed a seven-day limited ceasefire, which was extended several times. On December 29th, a Ugandan government delegation finally met LRA leaders in Kitgum district, again facilitated by Betty Bigombe, but within hours, the LRA rejected the prescribed settlement. On New Years Day, President Museveni publicly proclaimed in Gulu town, "The UPDF will hunt for LRA leaders, especially Joseph Kony and his deputy Vincent Otti, and kill them from wherever they are if they don't come out."[225] Shortly thereafter, members of the LRA ambushed a supply truck of government forces just ten kilometers west of Gulu town.[226] Indeed, hopes were shattered amongst the people of Northern Uganda much like in 1994 and 2002 when "similar efforts [were made] towards a truce with a view to embarking on peace talks failed due to continuing mutual mistrust," reported the Pan African News Agency.[227]

As recent as February 4, 2005, the Ugandan government and the LRA have agreed to an 18-day ceasefire covering a limited area on the border between Kitgum and Gulu districts in Northern Uganda. This truce is to allow space for LRA members who wish to come out of the

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[223] Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, "Statement by the Lord's Resistance Movement/Army (LRM/A) paper submitted by LRM/A representatives to KM2000 Secretariat," included in *Meeting the Challenges of Building Sustainable Peace in Northern Uganda: Proceedings, presentations and other contributions to the KM2000 Conference*, (London: Kacoke Madit, 2002).
[224] Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) of the United Nations, "Lasting Peace Still Elusive," January 5, 2005 (accessed January 5, 2005); available from http://www.reliefweb.int.
[225] Ibid.
[226] "Ugandan Government, Rebel Truce Flops," *Pan African New Agency*, January 2, 2005, (accessed January 5, 2005); available from http://www.reliefweb.int.

bush to pass freely as well as for further negotiations to take place.[228] Yet at the time of submitting this thesis, there has still not been a concrete agreement reached.

International Criminal Court

On January 29, 2004, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, announced the initiation of preliminary investigations into crimes committed by the LRA in response to a formal referral submitted by President Museveni in December of 2003. Despite a flurry of grave concerns expressed by agencies working in Northern Uganda, a public announcement was made on July 28, 2004 that the ICC "would commence a formal investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the LRA."[229] Being the first case examined by the ICC, this investigation of the LRA and its pending subsequent trial is a landmark for both the newly formed ICC and the people of Uganda.

The primary concern about the ICC investigation's ability to contribute positively to the cessation of the war is that it is not rooted in the wisdom and traditions of the local people of Northern Uganda. This respect for local understanding is crucial for any type of international intervention, but explicitly so in the Northern Uganda context as ARLPI explains in their position paper on the ICC: "Given the complex and localized nature of the LRA origins, belief systems, and behavior, any intervention that would be put in place to address the issues of the conflict need to be firmly rooted in local knowledge if they are to achieve lasting success."[230] Specifically, there is question over whether the Prosecutor has taken into account the political context in the decision to move forward with the ICC investigation. In particular, concern is expressed over both the timing of the investigation while the war is still ongoing and also the

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[227] Ibid.
[228] "Uganda Reinstates Temporary Northern War Truce," *Reuters*, February 3, 2004 (accessed February 5, 2005); available from http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L0342026.htm
[229] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal Investigations,* 1.
[230] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Position Paper on Possibility of Intervention*, 3.

public nature of the ICC communication, both of which could lead to increased attacks by the LRA on civilian populations. While it is not possible to directly link specific massacres to particular announcements, "the announcement of the ICC investigation has the potential to raise the stakes in the conflict and make the LRA become even more elusive and aggressive…it may increase the incentive, especially of LRA leadership, to fight and avoid capture at all costs."[231] The Civil Society Organization for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) recently issued a briefing paper on the ICC investigation in Northern Uganda in which they proclaim that, "it is widely felt that the investigation gets in the way of the fragile peace process and that it shows disrespect for the traditional Acholi ways of conflict resolution."[232]

Along with political context, the ICC investigation brings to light different interpretations of justice. The ICC, founded as part of the Rome Statute in 1998,[233] was created in the framework of international justice, which emphasizes punishment and accountability. Many people in Northern Uganda, though, operate within local frameworks of restorative and rehabilitative justice as referenced in the comments of many surveys and statements conducted by local NGOs. The Refugee Law Project writes in their statement on the ICC,

> "According to the majority of the people who support the Amnesty Law, criminal justice—in this sense, punishing the LRA leaders for the crimes they have committed- must lead to an end of the conflict. Seen from their perspective, criminal justice is a process of confessions, forgiveness, cleansing, reconciliation, responsibility, restoration, rehabilitation, stability, and continuity. Unlike the adversarial nature of existing national and international concepts of criminal justice, the sense of justice described here is consensual and restorative with the primary aim of re-establishing social cohesion and ending communal violence."[234]

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[231] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal Investigations,* 6.
[232] Civil Society Organizations for Peace In Northern Uganda (CSOPNU).
[233] "The International Criminal Court," (accessed February 8, 2005); available from http://www.icc-cpi.int/about.html
[234] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal*, 8.

Beyond contradicting local history, traditions, and perspectives, there is a genuine question over whether the ICC investigation is being instituted as a genuine method for conflict resolution at all. Because of its name and initiation by President Museveni, many point to its political nature. Some argue that the referral of the LRA to the ICC was not made with a genuine motivation for justice or peace, but to boost a damaged international reputation after the failure of Operation Iron Fist. This is evidenced by Museveni's signing a pact not to surrender US citizens to the Court but his agreement to surrender his own citizens, "when it benefits his own political agenda."[235] Mr. Ocampo, the Chief Prosecutor, aware of the political nature of Museveni's decision to file the case, explains that the ICC has the potential to bring both peace and justice to Northern Uganda, if handled properly and with the cooperation of negotiators, Acholi leaders, and government officials from both Sudan and Uganda.[236]

Like both the military options and the negotiations previously discussed, the International Criminal Court initiative, while indeed still in a beginning stage, has thus far failed in bringing promising progress towards war cessation. While evidence of the impact of the ICC investigation process is still quite limited, the public announcements and subsequent reactions in Northern Uganda tend to demonstrate its futility as a tool to bring lasting peace.

Cultural Explanations

"Notice that culture appears as a sort of optical or perceptual illusion here: although always a presence, it can best be seen when thrown into relief by the quality of difference."

---Kevin Avruch[237]

[235] Ibid, 5.
[236] Luis Moreno-Ocampo, Public Presentation, Class, and Conversation at Harvard Law School, Harvard University, January 20 and 21, 2005.
[237] Kevin Avruch, Culture & Conflict Resolution, (Washington DC: USIP, 1998), 58.

The civilians who are embracing the notion of forgiveness in Northern Ugandan today are largely members of the Acholi tribe, one of twenty-seven tribes in Uganda.[238] In exploring the questions of how and why one would choose forgiveness in responding to the eighteen year rebellion and why at this particular time, some scholars turn to cultural reasoning. Perhaps, the Acholi live within a social structure that nourishes forgiveness on a more sophisticated level than in other populations, particularly those from the West. A Ugandan mother of a daughter who was abducted in 1996 explains, "There is also a cultural aspect about the way we deal with these cases, and I believe it is better to do things according to our local culture."[239]

One can partly attribute the embodiment of forgiveness in the North to the communal nature of life in Acholiland. Arendt, argued that forgiveness, along with the keeping of covenants, were the two actions that showed the greatest sense of hope for political change. She suggested that this was the case because of how the two actions depend on interactions within a society.[240] Social life in Northern Uganda is of a communal nature, much more so than in most Western societies where individual achievement is stressed and rewarded over community collaboration. In Acholi society, people function in a system where children are cared for by extended relatives, employed children pay the school fees of their siblings, and neighbors live close to one another, working the land together (when that was permissible before the war), not requiring formal land deeds.

Professor Hizkias Assefa, a leading scholar and practitioner in reconciliation and peacebuilding around the world, spoke to this theme when he was asked how forgiveness could be fostered. He shared that in his experience those who had the hardest time forgiving were the most educated, and closest to power. He suggested that those in more traditional societies

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[238] "The History of Uganda, " (accessed February 6, 2005); available from http://www.government.go.ug/static/history.htm

[239] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Position Paper on Possibility of Intervention*, 6.

seemed to be more inclusive, accepting, forward thinking, and focused on how best to reform and transform the future.[241] He alluded to the impact of the institution of western education as a reason for the unforgiving nature, while calling for an examination of how it formulates a judicial zero-sum mindset.[242] While this is an opinion of just one expert in the field, it is imperative that we consider how culture plays into people's readiness to forgive.

The Refugee Law Project explains that the influence of culture in handling crimes committed by community members:

> "in some traditional communities, such as the Acholi and the Kakwa, there is no death penalty or prison sentence for the 'convicted' murderer. However, this is not to say that those who commit crimes are not made accountable. There is punishment and accountability. For example, a person who commits murder not only might be required to make material restitution to the family of the bereaved, but also might be assigned the responsibility of taking care of the family for the rest of his/her life. Particularly for communities such as those living in northern Uganda, which live in extreme poverty and marginal conditions, this 'replacement' of the role and service of the deceased usually seems more 'just' than punishing both communities by imprisoning or killing the offender."[243]

The previously discussed ARLPI study on the ICC also generated some interesting ideas about how culture has played a role in the Acholi's readiness to forgive. One 35-year-old male social worker involved with the psychosocial support of formerly abducted children explained how he felt a sense of forgiveness was inherent in the Acholi culture:

> "There can be no justice without forgiveness. This is something deeply embedded in our Acholi culture and here the role of the cultural traditional leaders is crucial. People who have caused problems in the community go through traditional rituals and are forgiven. People receive them in the community and life goes on. I don't see any problem of victims and perpetrators living together."[244]

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[240] Arendt, 212-223.
[241] In this particular instance, Professor Assefa referenced the indigenous Mayan people of Guatemala and their attitudes post civil war.
[242] Hizkias Assefa, "Prospects and Challenges of Reconciliation and Peacebuilding: Reflections on Cases from Africa and Latin America," Lecture given at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, October 12, 2004.
[243] Refugee Law Project, *Position Paper on the Announcement of Formal Investigations,* 8.
[244] Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Position Paper on Possibility of Intervention,* 11.

As described, Acholi culture does not include capital punishment for any person, no matter the magnitude of the crime. An ARLPI statement explains cultural proceedings for handling crimes of a severe nature:

> "Instead, provision was made for forgiveness and reintegration. In the event of a member of the community committing a serious crime, the culprit's clan would take on the guilt as a community. The quest for peace and reconciliation compelled the offender's community to accept collective responsibility that was followed by collective repentance and remorse for the murder committed. Once genuine repentance was received from the offender's community, the victim's community would choose the option of forgiving in good faith. This commendable form of restorative justice is done by restitution and reconciliation in a public ceremony known as "Mato Oput," performed with plenty of symbolic actions to reconcile the two communities."[245]

Sense of Family

> *I feel very much happy to have them back because they are our brothers and sisters."*[246]
>
> ---ARLPI Survey Respondent

Uniquely characteristic of the conflict in Northern Uganda is the fact that the insurgency group is primarily of the Acholi ethnic background, the same as the majority of the civilians whom they attack. The individuals responsible for perpetuating much of the violence experienced in Northern Uganda are not only of the same lineage as the civilians who are largely the targets of their actions, but they are also often their children. Eighty-five percent of the LRA are abducted children who are forced to participate in violence against their own communities.[247] In an *Observer* newspaper article written just after the colossal attack in Barlonyo camp last year, the author presents the experience of a 14-year old female night commuter whose father was killed by the LRA and whose cousins were abducted the year before. They write,

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[245] Ibid., 4.
[246] Survey DD.
[247] Angelina Acheng Atyam, "Bring My Daughter Home," *Wall Street Journal,* June 2004.

> "Then Florence said something you hear again and again in this beleaguered town [Gulu]. 'We should forgive them for what they have done. If we kill them, it is also bad.' This is the tragedy of Acholiland. The people here want to forgive because the rebels who oppress them are their children and siblings. Father Carlos Rodgriguez, a local priest, explained: 'A lot of LRA commanders are in their late teens or early twenties and were abducted perhaps nine or ten years ago where they were easy to manipulate and brainwash.'"[248]

Venturing only slightly outside of Acholiland, it does not take long for one to sense the significant alteration in attitude and emotions towards the LRA by the civilian population. Even in the nearby Teso and Lango regions, sentiments towards the LRA differ greatly from that of many people in Acholiland. After the severe February 21st attack in Lira district last year which killed approximately 200 people,[249] there was increased animosity among the Lango population directed at the Acholi, since the majority of the LRA who ruthlessly attacked them were Acholi. At a peace demonstration held to protest the massacre three days after the horrific attack, the environment transformed into a violent riot "marred by ethnic lynchings and gunfire. Shots from security forces dispersed hundred of demonstrators who beat three women and a man to death, accusing them of sympathizing with Lord's Resistance Army rebels responsible for the mass killing near the town Saturday."[250] The public lynching was recorded as directed at persons of Acholi background for revenge as they were likely to sympathize with the majority Acholi members of the LRA.[251]

An important and potentially revealing contrast exists between the Acholi response to the LRA and the response of other ethnic communities. Within Acholiland, after grim, colossal attacks in recent months and years, there is a notable absence of revenge. The Acholi people

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[248] "Killed in the Name of the Lord."
[249] "Uganda Rebels 'Burnt my Family Alive.'"
[250] "Five killed as Uganda Peace March Turns Violent," *Reuters*, February 25, 2004. Available in February 27, 2004 No 42 KM E-Newsletter www.km-net.org
[251] Andrew Harding, *BBC News*, February 25, 2004, (accessed January 12, 20005); available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/video/39854000/rm/_39854828_uganda10_harding_vi.ram and "Acholi, Langi Must Not Fight," *The Monitor,* February 27, 2004; available in February 27, 2004 No 42 KM E-Newsletter www.km-net.org.

have even avoided the creation of LDUs because of their historical negative experience when they created and utilized their own militia, the "Bow & Arrow Brigade," from 1989-1992:

> "the government army used political mobilizers and former rebels to recruit civilians into militias to fight the rebels. As the government did not trust the Acholi people they were not given guns and had to use their home made hunting bows and arrows and machetes, hence the name 'Bow and Arrow Brigade.' They were only given guns at a much later stage when they incorporated or annexed to the Army as a Local Defense Unit. It did not take long before they were taken from their localities for "further training" and fully absorbed into the army made to fight in other places. As many of them never returned, some communities and opinion leaders in Acholi ask government to return the first LDUs before recruiting others."[252]

Almost immediately after the Acholi began arming themselves, massive attacks against the civilian population began, often purposefully not killing but mutilating individuals to serve as a reminder to the rest of the population of the threat and power of the LRA. An informant explained that, "it [the militias] is what prompted rebels to start war against civilians."[253] Indeed, following the formation of the LDUs, there was a significant influx in "major revenge killings and atrocities against citizens."[254] In a statement after the massive attack at Barlonyo in February 2004, the Refugee Law Project assessed, "use of regional militias has served to increase tensions between different ethnic groups."[255]

The LDUs certainly are, at least, partly responsible for the shift of the war from being primarily between the rebels and the government to its present status of violence between the rebels and the civilians. The notion of "violence begets violence" seems to have proven true in Acholiland, leading also to their distaste for the military option as a means to end the war.

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[252] Civil Society Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 8, 2004. The informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005. and International Crisis Group, 15.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Frank Van Acker, "Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: the New Order No One Ordered," IDPM-UA Discussion Paper 2003-06 (Antwerpen, Belgium: University of Antwerp, Institute of Development Policy and Management: October, 2003), 48.
[255] Refugee Law Project, *Statement on the Outbreak of Ethnic Violence in Northern Uganda*, February 27, 2004; available from Kacoke Madit March 8, 2004 e-newsletter at www.km-net.org

Indeed, “no one would willingly start a militia like that again in this place,” explained the same informant when contrasting the lack of militias in Acholiland today with the militias that sprouted up in the regions of Lira and Soroti in 2002.[256] As a result, many in Lira and other regions now are known to believe that the conflict has been long in Acholiland because the “[the Acholi population] support rebels.”[257] While untrue for the vast majority of the population who desperately want the war to end in order to be able to leave the deteriorating IDP conditions and return to their land, this mentality only furthers cleavages between citizens in Acholiland and those in the rest of the country. Indeed, the people in Acholiand view the war differently. “We have suffered and that is why we don’t eagerly form such militias.”[258]

Further, many of the reports and interviews with Acholi individuals suggest a profound desire for the LRA to abscond their life in the bush and its associated violence and return home. Given that this unrelenting push for nonviolent means to end the war and its corresponding encouragement of LRA members to come home is predominately emanating from the voices of the Acholi, it can lead one to conclude the important role of kinship in one’s willingness to forgive. Certainly, the more the adversary is familiar or humanized to the forgiver, the easier it is to forgive.

Yet, some will argue that forgiveness is actually more difficult when it involves related parties. Ellis Cose explains,

> “There are those who want to save or resurrect a relationship with a parent, a lover, or a spouse. And the price of resurrection is often forgiveness—a forgiveness that, in some sense, may be harder to grant than forgiveness to a stranger. For a stranger, even a stranger who murders your daughter, had no relationship with you to violate. He committed a terrible act; but there was no betrayal of trust, since he had been granted no trust to violate.”[259]

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[256] Civil Society Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 8, 2004. The informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Cose, 33.

In this perspective, the existence of an established relationship such as that between family members can make forgiveness more difficult to enact because, "For close relations—a mother, a lover, a spouse—things are considerably different. One is not seeking merely to be released from pain, but also to understand, deepen, and perhaps redefine a relationship."[260] However, I maintain that because of the fact that one has had and continuously desires a sustained relationship with family members, an individual will be more likely to consider and initiate the process of forgiveness than if the perpetrator was an estranged unknown. Further, surely there are greater rewards if the victim is able to authentically forgive when the perpetrator is known, as they have the possibility of re-establishing and even strengthening a former relationship.

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[260] Ibid.

Chapter 6: Analysis of the Explanations and the Impact of Forgiveness

"Things are mixed up"
---Traditional Acholi Chief[261]

Deciphering exactly why forgiveness is playing the role that it is in the conflict resolution process in Northern Uganda is extremely difficult given the intricate, internal nature of the concept of forgiveness as well as the complex historical, political, and economic dynamics of the war in Northern Uganda. Through all of this investigation, it has been crucial to bear in mind the possibility that this perception of forgiveness witnessed in Northern Uganda may be just that, a perception. There is no data available to accurately conclude that indeed forgiveness is what is occurring and pushing the peace process forward. Simply because the Acholi are less willing to mobilize militarily against the LRA, previous initiatives with negotiations and the ICC have been unfruitful, and they proudly profess the power of their cultural reconciliation processes does not necessarily signify that they are embracing forgiveness with each and every returning LRA member to their communities. Yet, one must acknowledge the significance of the expression of forgiveness throughout society in the many interviews and conflict analysis reports as well as informal conversations and local political activity. At the District Headquarters office in Gulu town this August hung a banner created by members of a youth ensemble holding a several day workshop on peacebuilding. On the simple white cloth were the words and symbolism of forgiveness. It plead for Kony, the LRA ringleader, to "come home." Rarely in our world, do we observe this type of forgiving attitude towards individuals allegedly responsible for massive crimes against humanity.

[261] Acholi Tradition Leader Interview, Gulu town, August 12, 2004. He made this comment in reference to the current situation in Northern Uganda after nearly two decades of violent warfare and tireless efforts on the behalf of many entities to bring closure to the war.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the possible explanations for why forgiveness is taking place: the influence of religion, the fact that other conflict resolution methods have failed, cultural behaviors and attitudes, and a persevering sense of family amongst the Acholi. While it is not possible to definitively state that it was one of the aforementioned reasons over another, my study leads me to believe that it is a combination. Both the strong influence of religion that bolsters forgiveness as well as cultural traditions and leaders that maintain symbolic mechanisms of forgiveness, certainly contribute to a pervasive readiness to forgive amongst the Acholi people.

Unique to the war in Northern Uganda, though, is that the insurgency group is of the same background as the targets of much of their violence. Beyond being from the same family in the broad sense of the word, the majority of the rebellion group is comprised of their own abducted children, who are forced to participate in violence against their own people. Through the experience of living and working in Gulu this summer and as demonstrated in the ARLPI questionnaire data, I am convinced that the fact that the war in Northern Uganda is largely a war fought against the will of both the majority of the combatants and the civilians, facilitates the forgiving mentality of many of the Acholi civilians. Because so many of the LRA are individuals who are coerced to participate in violence or face their own imminent death, many civilians are able to easily separate the wrongdoing and the person who did the action more freely than might be possible in another context where the wrongdoing was known to be intentionally conducted according to the will of the perpetrator.

In addition to the LRA being largely comprised of coerced extended community members, another significant factor that explains why forgiveness is occurring now is the simple fact that people are extremely tired of war. As referenced in Chapter Five, the utter failure of other conflict resolution methods has left people weary. After nearly two decades of violence

and fear in their communities, most Acholi will do almost anything to bring a close to the war. It has weighed on their hearts and their relationships for too long. Livelihoods have been decimated, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases have run rampant, social and cultural institutions have been eroded. Jan Egeland, the UN Under Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, is quoted: "The conflict in Northern Uganda is the biggest, forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today."[262] As they have seen numerous attempts to end the war end in dismal failure including military operations, diplomatic negotiations and recent ICC investigations, many in Northern Uganda would do almost anything to ensure that the violence ceases and they have the ability to return to their homes and begin farming their lands again.

Further, in the middle months of 2004, the Amnesty Law, also called "An Act of Forgiveness,"[263] appeared to be making some significant strides in bringing former LRA members home. From the beginning of 2004 through the middle of July, there were an estimated 519 former LRA members including 22 senior commanders who surrendered and came out of the bush.[264]

Given the dire need for a sense of progress, many Acholi were elated with the perceived success of amnesty and forgiveness, thus continually emphasizing its importance. The feeling of utter exhaustion among the Acholi coupled with the recent signs of success that forgiveness have presented contribute to its application at this point in the conflict.

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[262] "War in Northern Uganda World's Worst Forgotten Crisis: UN," *Agence France-Presse*, November 11, 2003; available from http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/e1f176894430fdeec1256ddb0056ea4c
[263] African Rights, *An Act of Forgiveness.*
[264] Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) of the United Nations, "Uganda: Prospects for Peace in The North," July 23, 2004 (accessed August 17, 2004); available from http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=42351&SelectRegion=East_Africa

Impact of Forgiveness

No matter what the precise factors for the portrayal of forgiveness in Northern Uganda, it is necessary that the impact of it be examined. As forgiveness is a factor much earlier in Northern Uganda than in most wars, its impact on both the political processes and relationships within the country are markedly different than in most conflict situations.

One major impact of forgiveness in Northern Uganda is that it abets reintegration of formerly abducted children. As children and adults leave the LRA, most of them enter into three to six month rehabilitation programs, such as those offered through World Vision in Gulu, Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), Concerned Parent's Association in Kitgum or Rachel's Rehabilitation Center in Lira. Beyond attending to physical ills and teaching livelihood skills, these rehabilitation centers offer months of psychosocial support through counseling. After an allotted amount of time, the returnee is eventually returned to their families, usually now relocated to the IDP camps. This process of reintegration is very delicate as family and community members may have unpleasant emotions and/or perceptions of the returnee because of what he did while they were in captivity. Fostering the value of forgiveness can certainly ease this process, so that the returnee does not have strong fears that she will be attacked upon returning to the community. This, in turn, contributes, to the returnee's ability to heal and contribute to his community once again.

Another impact of forgiveness in Northern Uganda is a unified Acholi community. The process of forgiveness is a delicate, complex one and there seems to be a certain amount of camaraderie that is generated among those who embrace forgiveness together. As it is occurring in Northern Uganda, forgiveness essentially places the burden of resolution of the war into the people's hands. It puts aside military efforts, political negotiations and the ICC involvement, all factors that have been primarily initiated and driven by entities from the outside. Forgiveness,

on the other hand, is forged by the Acholi people and there is thus, local communal ownership in peacebuilding. One civil society informant who has done extensive research in the IDP camps explains the unheard voice of the Acholi people:

> "The interests of the IDPs is just peace and they forgive both sides including government that they see doing the same to them…the ICC appears to want to punish one side and yet the IDPs see it differently and question if the whole world is more of a victim than they themselves. The people's cry is both side[s] are wrong and should just end the suffering and they are forgiven. No winner only loser is the people who have paid enough for other wrongs."[265]

In Northern Uganda, forgiveness appears to be the choice of the people who have suffered at length themselves. The sustainability of this emphasis is likely to be high since it is the local Ugandans who are driving this effort.

One danger in this unification of the Acholi, though, is that it could further separate the population from the rest of Uganda. Already markedly apparent are historic North-South tensions, leading back to colonialism, but a more unified community of Acholi could be perceived as a threat by the ethnic groups throughout the rest of the state. Forgiveness of LRA members may contribute to further segregation of the Acholi by populations that do not understand the political context of the war in the North. To Ugandans from other regions, they could just simply see a civilian population that is welcoming back murderers into their families and communities.

Related to the Acholi unification, another impact of forgiveness is that it does not further a mentality of violence as a means to resolve disputes. The Refugee Law Project furnishes a summary of the history of violence in Uganda:

> "Uganda's post-colonial history of violent coups, numerous armed rebellions and lack of accountability for such violence provides the critical backdrop for understandings why the war broke out the way it did in northern Uganda. Indeed,

[265] Civil Society Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 8, 2004. The informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005.

> given this history of accessing power though violent means, the armed rebellion in the north against the NRM [former name for Museveni's government] regime was seen as the normal course of political business."[266]

Given this background, one could argue that a military solution simply furthers a belief in violence as a viable and effective way to end problems. Frank Van Acker, a former research fellow at the Institute of Development Policy and Management and the Faculty of Applied Economics, University of Antwerp explains:

> "At the core of the conflict lies the failure of subsequent Ugandan leaders to construct and consolidate a modern state that legitimizes and promotes collective aspirations, and to wield the magnitudes and levels of power a modern state conveys, other then by divide-and-rule tactics. The perception of various communities that their environment was already violent, that they have been violated by the state and that violent acts are therefore simply responses to the violence they have experiences, is a significant feature of Ugandan politics."[267]

By fostering forgiveness instead, a genuine impact is the emphasis put on the possibility of finding nonviolent means to end conflict.

The most remarkable impact of forgiveness occurring at this point in the war in Northern Uganda is its contribution to ending it. The practice of forgiveness has encouraged former LRA members to abandon the violent insurgency and rejoin Acholi society. This is referenced by the high number of returnees who left the LRA in the mid months of 2004, claimed their amnesty, participated in *Mato Oput*, and were seemingly forgiven and welcomed back to the Acholi community. In July and August of 2004 alone, Amana Mbabazi, Uganda Defense Minister, noted that "250 children rescued and 202 rebel fighters had defected."[268]

Of particular importance among these returning LRA commanders is Brigadier Kenneth Banya, the former fourth highest commander in the LRA, who left the insurgency on July 14,

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[266] Refugee Law Project, *Behind the Violence,* 7.
[267] Van Acker, 10.
[268] Fortunate Ahimbisbwe, "North Doing Better, " *The New Vision,* August 22, 2004.

2004. While it is unsubstantiated whether his departure from the LRA was due to capture or surrender, his subsequent public presentations were the beginning of a movement of LRA commanders leaving their posts in the LRA to claim amnesty and rejoin civil society.[269] Commitment to forgiveness by the Acholi population has communicated to many in the LRA that there is hope for a "normal civilian life" after the LRA. While still a horrifying experience, forgiveness provides a more promising future, one in which the LRA experience doesn't have to be the final defining experience of one's life. Although still a struggle, there is hope that one can yet have positive experience after their time with the LRA such as the opportunity to attend school, live in harmony with other family members and start a family of one's own. Many of the returnees who safely re-enter Acholi society and begin reintegrating take the opportunity to encourage former comrades to return. Mega FM, a popular Gulu-based community radio station, frequently airs programs in which LRA returnees speak of their successful escape and reintegration experiences, encouraging others in the bush to also return.[270] Since many in the LRA have access to the radio, these messages are heard by those who are still in captivity. As more individuals leave the LRA, many hope that the force of the group is slowly diminishing. Although it is impossible to track the exact levels of LRA membership, with time, some hope that forgiveness could eventually dissolve the LRA, thus ending the war.

One interesting question that the early occurrence of forgiveness in the conflict raises is whether or not it communicates permissibility of the LRA behavior. Does the embodiment of forgiveness in Northern Uganda teach people that a rebellion of the sort that has been conducted by the LRA is an appropriate means for communicating grievances because in the end, one will

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[269] This is based off information I learned at an "Advocacy for Cross Border Dialogues Between Religious Leaders from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan" workshop held July 20-23, 2004 at the Acholi Inn in Gulu town. There were approximately sixty participants in attendance from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan and Brigadier Kenneth Banya addressed the participants.

[270] Rachel Rinaldo, "Amnesty Via the Airwaves," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, September 26, 2004 (accessed February 10, 2005); available from http://www.ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=25617

be integrated back into the community with little retribution? Yet, given the extreme severity of LRA behavior, the response to the above question is negative. Despite any political alliance with an LRA agenda, there is a notable absence in literature, conversations, interviews and public meetings of condoning LRA behavior by anyone. Instead, there is a repeated referral to LRA acts as repulsive tactics.[271] Also, the personal psychosocial struggles of those who have returned from the LRA make it unlikely that forgiveness in Northern Uganda would encourage similar LRA rebellions. Witnessing the anguish of those who return from the LRA, even if they are embraced with forgiveness, is a powerful antidote to the actions of the LRA. Field notes that I collected in August 2004 expand on this point,

> "They [the Catholic priests] said that even if Kony came back to Acholiland, they'd welcome him and give forgiveness. As priests, they said they often have former rebels come to them for forgiveness and reconciliation. Father Odung[272] said, "they come weeping." Maybe that is part of it—that these religious (due to their role and sacrament of reconciliation) have seen that the majority of rebels don't want to have done what they have done—and that is why forgiveness is seemingly so easy."[273]

While a natural concern that extending forgiveness too much or too early in a conflict could lead to a perceived permissibility of violent behavior, there is little indication that this is likely to be an authentic concern in the context of Northern Uganda.

[271] Liu Institute of Global Issues, 9.
[272] The name has been changed to protect the individual.
[273] Field Notes from August 21, 2004.

Chapter 7: The Promotion of Forgiveness:
Lessons Learned and Conclusions

"Our conclusions are tentative and our study is only a beginning…..but we are persuaded that forgiveness is real, it can be inspired and encouraged, and it has a genuine role in conflict resolution."
--Robert T. Hennemeyer[274]

Extrapolating the experience of forgiveness in Northern Uganda to other contexts is a challenging task since one cannot impose or mandate forgiveness. I will begin this chapter by discussing the difficulty in promoting forgiveness in any context followed by the unique lessons to be learned from the Northern Uganda case, recommendations for future research and a conclusion. The issue of promoting forgiveness must be approached with great care. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist who served on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, explains, "One simply has to guard against prescribing forgiveness, for to do so cheapens the process."[275] Like development, forgiveness is a process, which must be adapted to the various contexts in which it operates.

Forgiveness is often only effective and sustainable in terms of conflict resolution when it is chosen freely by the actors in the conflict and not imposed by any authority or intervening institution. Minow describes this well in her book:

> "Fundamentally, forgiveness cannot be commanded. No friend, cleric, or official can force another to grant forgiveness to an offender. A victim who considers forgiving must summon compassion, benevolence, love, or a profound sense of the flaws shared by all human beings, victims, and offenders alike."[276]

Certainly, forgiveness must be locally grown and driven by parties in the conflict, civilians included, who want to embark in the process. One of the reasons why there is even discourse on how forgiveness can be utilized more often is because, "victims themselves sometimes seem to

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[274] Bole, Christiansen, and Hennemeyer, 186 with reference to Robert T. Hennemeyer, "Forgiveness in Conflict Resolution: Reality and Utility—The Bosnian Experience," 42.
[275] Gobodo-Madikizela, 97.

be looking for an opportunity to forgive, because they see this as something that can bring an end to a life of hatred, which ties them so inextricably to the perpetrator."[277]

A vital feature to bear in mind when contemplating the promotion of forgiveness is that the burden of forgiveness is often on the victim.[278] This dilemma begs the victim to ask, "What is in it for me?" Besides the release of feelings of resentment, hatred, and bitterness, Galtung suggests, "in addition to psychological mechanisms, some restitution might do much good."[279] When the perpetrator makes a gesture beyond an apology to compensate for injury done to the person or community, it facilitates the forgiveness process. In general, though, most authors agree that because the burden lies on the victim, it is his/her decision whether or not to embrace forgiveness and under what conditions. No one seems to suggest an occasion where it would be wrong for a person to choose not to forgive.[280]

One of the central arguments against forgiveness is the notion that forgiveness is a non-sustainable process. Some argue that, while something to be revered, it is certainly not a process that the majority of human beings are capable of doing. It is thus reserved for the Martin Luther King Jrs., the Mother Teresas, the Mahatma Ghandis, and the Nelson Mandelas of the world. Others like Desmond Tutu, disagree,

> "Just as those who have been capable of the most horrendous atrocities turn out to be ordinary human beings like you and me, so too those who have demonstrated noteworthy instances of the capacity to forgive could easily be the man or woman living down the street. Wonderfully, forgiveness and reconciliation are possibly anywhere and everywhere and have indeed been taking place, often unsung, unremarked.[281]

[276] Minow, 20 with reference to Joanna North, "Wrongdoing and Forgiveness," Philosophy 62 (1987): 499-508.
[277] Gobodo-Madikizela, 97.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Galtung, 8.
[280] Norvin Richards, "Forgiveness" *Ethics*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Oct 1988): 77-97.
[281] Tutu, 155.

Another component, which is essential to bear in mind when thinking of promoting forgiveness, is the cultural sensitivity that must be rendered in its promotion. In the encouragement of forgiveness, it is tempting to be ethnocentric and end up promoting a process, which is not only irrelevant but also even offensive to particular contexts. Gopin writes,

> "Forgiveness is a basic theme in monotheist traditions but its character and parameters are interpreted in widely different ways across religions and across cultures as it pertains to reconciliation. Its theological significance, and more important, the parameters of its use in peacemaking are completely different among, and even within, the various religious expressions of the monotheisms."[282]

In many religious and cultural traditions, there are specific customs that embody the process of forgiveness. In order to be effective practitioners in the peace-building sphere, one must not only study and understand these internal frameworks, but one must also work in harmony with these frameworks. As Galtung states, "Cultural eclecticism is a must in the field of reconciliation; we cannot draw on any one culture alone."[283] Indeed, as Michael Henderson's The Forgiveness Factor demonstrates, there are not only different perceptions and definitions of forgiveness, but also different expressions of it.[284] For some, it may be a conversation and a verbal acknowledgment. For others, forgiveness can be manifested in a ceremony or with a physical embrace.

Although there are grave precautions in any recommendations of forgiveness, there are also countless positive possibilities that can emerge from forgiveness, as outlined in this paper. The imperative issue then is that international bodies must not impose or direct forgiveness in

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[282] Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54.
[283] Galtung, 19.
[284] Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*, 164 with reference to Michael Henderson, *The Forgiveness Factor: Stories of Hope in a World of Conflict*, (Salem, OR: Grosvenor Books, 1996).

any fashion, yet forgiveness ought to be considered a viable option from which victims of mass violence can choose.

Lessons Learned from Northern Uganda

While the exhibition of forgiveness that has and is occurring in Northern Uganda is specific to their circumstances, there are important lessons for other communities and war-torn regions. One of the most important insights from the Northern Uganda case is that there can be constructive nonviolent options for ending divisive, violent wars. Forgiveness is not just a lofty ideal, it has pragmatic, concrete benefits.

Secondly, forgiveness is more likely when the perpetrator has been humanized to the victim. In Northern Uganda, the fact that the LRA is largely made up of Acholis, the same ethnic group as the victims, has facilitated forgiveness within the greater Acholi community. Further, since the LRA are predominantly abducted children who are coerced into participating in violent atrocities against their former communities, it is easier to welcome back and forgive them.

Another lesson from Northern Uganda is the ability of forgiveness to break a historical cycle of violence. While it is yet to be fully seen, in Uganda, one can understand how forgiveness has the potential to break a pattern of violence as the automatic response to injustice and grievance. Forgiveness has the capacity to empower parties to remember the past but put energies toward a renewed future.

Finally, while not yet conclusive because the war in Northern Uganda is still ongoing, there is reason to believe that forgiveness can facilitate post-conflict rebuilding. As referenced in Chapter Seven, one of the most significant factors of forgiveness has been how it has facilitated the process of reintegration of former LRA members into their communities. It has encouraged members to seek amnesty and risk escaping the LRA in order to return home.

Further Research

To fully comprehend the case of forgiveness in Northern Uganda, there is great need for further investigation into some of the nuances of the forgiveness process that did not fit into the parameters of this thesis. Specifically, a systematic Institutional Review Board-approved study of the reasons behind people's embrace of forgiveness should be conducted in Northern Uganda and other contexts. This particular paper has done preliminary work that could be built upon in a future investigation by highlighting several possible explanations for the manifestation of forgiveness including religion, the failure of other means to end the war, cultural explanations, and the sense of family among the Acholi. Future research ought to be of an ethnographic, qualitative nature and would include a large number of systematic interviews that inquire why people feel so open to forgiveness along with a systematic analysis of which reasons seem to have the most credence. In particular, it is worth assessing whom exactly the Acholi are willing to forgive. One interesting question that deserves further exploration is if and how the Acholi are willing to forgive the UPDF soldiers and/or Ugandan government for their failure to protect them as well as various human rights violations. Some have even argued that the UPDF are nearly equally responsible for the terror reigned upon the people in the North,[285] yet sentiments of forgiveness and reconciliation are less evident than for the LRA. Why is it? Is there more pragmatic utility for the Acholi to forgive the LRA than the government? Further research ought to tackle these questions.

Another avenue for further research is a comparative analysis of acutely violent contexts to examine if and how forgiveness has played a role in disparate places. A comparison would allow the researcher to make more generalizable conclusions about how and why forgiveness occurs globally. While assessing which explanations of forgiveness have the most credence for

[285] Human Rights Focus.

Northern Uganda is very valuable in itself, further insight could be garnered from an in-depth analysis of other contexts. For example, the theory that forgiveness has occurred in Northern Uganda because of cultural explanations leads one to ponder how and if forgiveness has played a role in other communal cultures such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan. Similarly, the explanation that suggests that forgiveness occurs when all the other conflict resolution methods employed have failed calls the researcher to think of Israel-Palestine, and India-Pakistan. Similar links could be made with violent conflicts in which religion plays a role. The one explanation that seems to be unique to Northern Uganda is the sense of family that is an element of LRA-Acholi relationship. Further research of a cross-cultural comparative nature could elucidate and confirm these suppositions.

Once there is more refined analysis for why and for whom forgiveness is being cultivated in Northern Uganda, practitioners and scholars alike can more clearly reflect and consider how and if those factors can be promoted in other violent contexts. Provided the impact is generally positive as this paper concludes, we must consider if we are to foster more forgiveness in the world, it is imperative that we consider what it is that propels individuals and communities to forgive. Why are certain people in particular circumstances more readily able to forgive and what can be done to encourage others, ourselves included, to foster and engage in forgiveness?

Conclusion

This paper is an effort to illustrate the application of forgiveness in Northern Uganda, specifically studying how and why it is playing a role at an uncharacteristically earlier time in the scope of the forgotten conflict. Outlining some of the various definitions and theoretical implications of forgiveness as a component of conflict resolution, I attempted to highlight how forgiveness provides an opportunity for personal and political transformation if parties so choose. It can be a healing, self-respecting act, which breaks cycles of violence and remains a

forward-focused endeavor. Yet, there are limitations to forgiveness such as it being a difficult process, its undermining or being perceived to undermine ideals of justice, and its association with organized religion. Further, it is quite difficult to quantify or prove its authentic existence.

In this paper, I defined forgiveness as a personal process, freely chosen by a victim in which he/she can release a sense of resentment. Making a clear distinction between the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing, forgiveness is an opportunity to bring people together after mass violence so together they might create a more just and equitable existence without inducing further violence or causing more harm.

Primarily a notion that is fostered and encouraged in the post-conflict phases of violent conflict, the second half of this thesis has provided evidence of forgiveness in Northern Uganda. Specifically, I furnished possible explanations for its manifestation at this stage including religion, the failure of other means to end the war, cultural explanations, and the Acholi sense of family. In my analysis, I concluded that while it is impossible to ascertain exactly why the Acholi are choosing forgiveness in Northern Uganda at this time, the fact that the LRA are largely abducted Acholi children forced to participate in violence seems is fundamental to understanding why forgiveness is so professed among the Acholi. Further in my analysis, I outlined the impact of forgiveness: its effect on facilitating reintegration of former LRA members, its influence in unifying the Acholi people, its contribution to ending a cycle of historical violence, and ultimately, its capacity to contribute significantly to the resolution of the war.

Finally, the last chapter discussed the promotion of forgiveness, evincing the important considerations in encouraging forgiveness in other contexts beyond Northern Uganda. Beyond any spiritual and moral expositions for enacting forgiveness, as demonstrated in this paper, there may be logical utility in forgiving, as difficult as it may be at times. As referenced in this

particular case, there is value in moving beyond the religious perceptions of forgiveness to exploring its possible contributions to conflict resolution. It can make a pragmatic contribution to war cessation; it can break a historical cycle of violence, presenting hope for the management of future conflicts; and it can facilitate post conflict reconciliation and reintegration. Further, a final lesson learned from Northern Uganda is that forgiveness is easier to enact when the one who is to be forgiven is somehow humanized to the forgiver.

The humanitarian situation in Northern Uganda is deteriorating with increasing speed due to the continuous warfare. Archbishop Odama explained on a recent advocacy trip to New York:

> "We have lost much in this war. The greater part of the population lives in confinement; it is like being imprisoned. The worst thing a person can live through is to wake up every morning to see the suffering of their children and be powerless to even be able to get them simple things like water, let alone food. Due to the security situation, it is impossible [to cultivate the land]. Some people have died. Then there is our culture, which is deteriorating. For some children, 'peace' means having a gun which to shoot the enemy! Their play mimics the violence. They draw scenes of conflict. They have inherited violence as a culture, the complete opposition of what we want. Then there is education, which is very low. We have poverty levels of 67 percent, compared to the national average of 35 percent. The camps are breeding grounds for violence…We are disappearing in various ways: the gun, education, HIV/AIDS, our children…our most cherished in society, are recruited by the government and the rebels and then must confront each other, they must kill each other. Then, there is the phenomenon of 'night commuters'…what is the future of the Acholi? And think of it, the LRA abducts children to fight the government that failed to protect them in the first place. We need some sanity, as we are fighting the hostages! The government fails to protect them, we as parents fail to protect them, and the international community fails to protect them. No more discussion please, this is an SOS."[286]

After over eighteen years, the Acholi civilians of Northern Uganda are aching for comprehensive resolution and reconciliation, so that they can begin planning and working for future generations. Amidst the ensuing conflict today, locally fostered forgiveness appears to have made important

[286] Liu Institute of Global Issues, 2 with reference to Archbishop Odama, 28 January 2004 to UN OCHA, New York.

strides in bringing closure to the violence, perhaps beginning to answer their own SOS and presenting the rest of the world with extraordinary points for reflection and consideration.

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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES FROM FIELDWORK IN NORTHERN UGANDA JULY-AUGUST 2004

Eight Interviews Conducted During Fieldwork:
1.Staff Member at Reception Center, Gulu town, July 29, 2004.
2. Civil Society Informant, August 8, 2004. Per this person's request, the informant was contacted to review comments before submission of thesis and the person returned revised comments on February 1, 2005.
3. Acholi Traditional Leader Interview, Gulu town, August 12, 2004.
4. Academic Informant Interview, Gulu town, August 16, 2004.
5. Civil Society Informant, Gulu town, August 18, 2004.
6. Civil Society Informant, Gulu town, August 18, 2004.
7. Civil Society Informant, Gulu town, August 19, 2004.
8. Civil Society Informant, Gulu town, August 21, 2004.

ARLPI "Attitudes and Perceptions of Communities on Returning LRA Members" Research Questionnaire Responses. Of twenty-six surveys collected, I have referenced fourteen of them in this thesis. They are codified as Survey V, Survey X, Survey W, Survey B, Survey DD, Survey N, Survey H, Survey L, Survey B, Survey E, Survey H, Survey I, Survey A, and Survey DD.

Rwot David Onen Ocana II Paramount Chief of Acholi. Speaking at *Nyono Tonggweno ki Opobo* ceremony at Layibi Parish in Gulu, Uganda, August 13, 2004.

Information attained when attending "Advocacy for Cross Border Dialogues Between Religious Leaders from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan" Workshop held July 20-23, 2004 at the Acholi Inn in Gulu town. There were approximately sixty participants in attendance from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan and Brigadier Kenneth Banya addressed the participants.

APPENDIX I

ARLPI "Attitudes and Perceptions of Communities on Returning LRA Members" Research Questionnaire

PURPOSE: The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the current attitudes and perception of people about the conflict and its impact of the peace process. The information collected will be used for the purpose of directing ARLPI programming and for increasing the social understanding of this war and its effect on the communities. Responses should be kept anonymous and respondents should be told that their responses will not be affiliated with their names in any forthcoming report.

FORMAT: This research will be conducted in community meetings at four different IDP camps in Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, and Lira districts. Notice of meetings should be given a few days before the meeting with the invitation that any and all persons interested should attend. Some of the meetings will be mixed and any and all persons interested can attend. Other meetings will have a target group in presence such as a women's group, children, or local leaders. All meetings should be conducted in the local language of Luo so that all respondents can understand. The research assistant will record all responses by writing them down. An ARLPI staff or research assistant will later translate the responses into English and finalize the findings into a short report to inform ARLPI and it stakeholders.

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Name of camp:__________________
Location of camp____________________
Date, time, and duration of meeting:_________________________
Describe environment of meeting (classroom, religious building, outdoors, etc.)__________________________
How many individuals are present at the meeting? __________
# of females present/#of males present__________
Type of group (general, women's group, local leaders, children, etc)_________________

QUESTION GUIDE

1. Given your lived experience, describe how the past few months have affected your thinking of the likelihood of war termination (the recent news of LRA commanders coming back from the bush)?
2. How do you feel about these former LRA commanders and members (wives and children) coming out of the bush?
3. What should be done with the adults returning from life in the bush with the LRA? and what about the children returning from life in the bush?
4. How would you feel about either returning children or ex-LRA commanders living within your community/families?
5. What are your thoughts about former LRA members becoming part of the UPDF?
6. What do you foresee as the most suitable option to bring this war to an end? Why? (If there are more than one option mentioned, rank them in order of preference.)

7. What are your thoughts regarding the Amnesty Law? Are you aware of the amendment to the Amnesty law that is being discussed? (If not, objectively offer a brief explanation and then proceed with the following questions. If respondents are familiar, then directly proceed with the following question.) What do you think of such an amendment? What are its implications on this war ending?
8. Are you aware of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its proposed investigation of Joseph Kony and other commanders of the LRA? (If not, objectively offer a brief explanation and then proceed with the following questions. If respondents are familiar, then directly proceed with the following question.) What kind of implications will this have on war termination?
9. With the current military activity in Southern Sudan, will this war come to an end soon? How?
10. What other concerns do you have that you want to be included and ARLPI to be aware of?
11. What is the role of student in the peacebuilding process?
12. Any issue for us?

APPENDIX II

Religious Background to Forgiveness

For **Christians**, forgiveness is a central component of the faith, stemming from the notion of "original sin." The Christian faith preaches that Jesus Christ forgave humans for their sinful nature, thus to emulate forgiveness is, in fact, a divine action. After all, the crucifixion and "death of Jesus [was] for [the] sake of forgiveness."[287] In Christianity, "believing in forgiveness is a sine qua non of believing in the living reality of God for them….its centrality to the life, death, message and 'living presence' of Jesus."[288] Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ was a man who took on the sins of the world, suffered for it, and then offered forgiveness for all who believed in his dying for the world's sins. For some Christians, forgiveness is a key component to restoring a relationship with God, since one must be forgiven for their sins to live without their burden.[289] Believing in forgiveness has become synonymous with believing in God.

In the **Jewish** tradition, forgiveness also has an important role. "*Teshuva*, the capacity to transform oneself or a community, is considered to be one of the most sublime elements of faith in a good, forgiving God."[290] Forgiveness can only be initiated and granted by the victim in the context of Judaism.[291] Related, true repentance comes only when the perpetrator stands in the same situation with the same dilemma in which they had earlier made a hurtful choice and resists it.[292]

Much of the references to forgiveness in the **Islamic** tradition are to Allah's kindness and divine nature. While there is not the same notion of humans being alienated from God as there is

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[287] Marc Gopin, "Forgiveness as an Element of Conflict Resolution in Religious Cultures: Walking the Tightrope of Reconciliation and Justice," 88.
[288] Gopin, Holy *War, Holy Peace*, 111.
[289] Ibid., 116.
[290] Ibid., 117.
[291] Auerbach, 158.
[292] Gopin ,*Holy War, Holy Peace*, 117.

in Christianity, humans are encouraged to forgive to please Allah.[293] In Islam, forgiveness is essentially contingent on human repentance. Gopin writes, "as in Judaism for the most part, the emphasis is on a bilateral process of change involving initiative from the sinner, and forgiveness as inextricable from that bilateral process."[294] In Islam, while people have the right to avenge for past evil with more evil, it is recorded that "those have the highest reward who, even when they are justifiably angry, can forgive (42:37)."[295] Also like Judaism, the conception of forgiveness in Islam, *Tawba*, is a demanding process involving three different phases, including a confession of sin, repentance, and a commitment to not repeat the act.[296]

Within **Buddhism**, forgiveness also has a home. In Buddhist tradition, since there is a belief in *Karma*, the idea that those human beings will have successive existence after human death, "proper retribution or reward is ensured by cosmic forces; therefore, it need not be a matter for human concern."[297] Instead, "we can seek to understand how the wrongdoer was led to offend, and we should feel compassion for that person."[298] This compassion and understanding are often seeds of forgiveness. The Dalai Lama, the world leader of Tibetan Buddhism, has referenced the importance of forgiveness in his speeches, "I believe one should forgive the person or persons who have committed atrocities against oneself and mankind."[299]

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[293] Govier, 161.
[294] Gopin, *Holy War Holy Peace*, 129.
[295] Ibid., 133-34.
[296] Auerbach, 158-159.
[297] Govier, 161.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid with reference to Simon Wiesenthal (ed.), "The Dalai Lama" in *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, revised and expanded edition, 1998), 130.