Fear and power in northern Uganda: A symbolic interactionist approach

by

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I learned that courage was not the absence of fear,

but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid,

but he who conquers that fear.

Nelson Mandela

Abstract

This thesis explores how fear is used as a communication strategy to create and enhance power in conflict setting. I drew the data from six in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in northern Uganda, a region that was ravaged by war for over two decades, as well as from my own experiences of fear in the field, because terror shaped the very nature of my interactions in Uganda. Building on symbolic interaction theory, the analysis explores how the participants created the meaning of "fear" through symbols, culture, language and experiences during and after the war and how fear was used as an agent of control externally and as a dis-enabler internally. The findings support the idea that fear, perceived or otherwise, is strategically important because of its influence on conflict outcomes.

Keywords: Child soldiers, Conflict communication, Fear, Lord's Resistance Army, Power

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I will never forget my first visit to Kampala. I thought I knew how it felt to be scared but I had never spent time to think what fear really meant until the day I was held at gunpoint, at a crowded bus terminal in the Ugandan capital. I was getting ready to embark a bus heading to Gulu, a city located in northern Uganda, east of the Nile and close to the Sudan border, when someone snatched my luggage and two other men pointed their guns at me and asked for 5,000 Ugandan Shillings (approximately $2). I was petrified with fear but somehow I managed to take out my wallet and pay. Eventually, I got my luggage back and found the bus to Gulu, paid the ticket and a tip to the driver, and sat down next to a woman who was holding a child on her lap. I was still in shock but when I told her what had just happened to me, she simply laughed it off. She told me about the fear she experienced when she was subjected to forced sexual slavery during the war in northern Uganda and how she gave birth in the bush. During the 6-hour bus ride to Gulu, a man who introduced himself as Paul shared the horrors he had lived through. With tear-repressed voice, he told me how three of his children had been stoned to death before his own eyes and how he was still afraid the rebels might return and kill the rest of his family. I was in Africa to do research on conflict communication but after the incident in Kampala and other similar experiences I had in northern Uganda, I ended up getting to know a fear-based culture and reshaping my thesis to focus on fear after it became so real to me. Fieldwork after violent conflict is often academically and personally challenging; however, I think that my personal experiences of fear in the field made me more open to the ways in which other people experience the dangerous world.

Once heralded as the Pearl of Africa, northern Uganda was ravaged by war for over two decades. Initially rooted in a rebellion against the Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA), the conflict was transformed by the guerilla group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) into a brutal war that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and in which children were abducted, trained, and turned into soldiers. The government of Uganda and the LRA held peace negotiations in 2006-2008, in Juba, South Sudan, but Joseph Kony, the LRA's leader, refused to the sign the peace agreement. In 2013, Kony was thought to be hiding somewhere in the Central African Republic.

Although scholars agree that communication is an essential feature of conflict (Putnam, 2006) and the war between the LRA and the government of Uganda ended in 2006, research on the war participants' perceptions of the LRA's strategic use of fear during and following the war has not been expansive (Vinci, 2005), nor well documented. My contention is that fear, perceived or otherwise, manifested or communicated since the war, is important because it influences conflict outcomes directly. Threats that manifested into fear in northern Uganda included conflict narratives, rumours, ceremonies of reconciliation such as *mato oput* which are rituals of forgiveness of war-related crimes, messages delivered by community radio stations, the most popular platforms for public debate in Uganda (Goretti, 2009), as well as messages sent by guerilla fighters to communities by engaging in acts of violence and destruction. In this latter case, the messages were not about violence and destruction, but rather were encoded in such activity; they were part of a larger process of communicating a message, and thus the violent acts became a communication process (Tuman, 2009) leading to the social construction of fear (Matusitz, 2013).

The objective of my research is to describe and document perceptions and attitudes associated with the role of fear used as a communication strategy in creating and maintaining power in northern Uganda. I used a cross-disciplinary model to analyze fear in conflict setting because, as the literature review will show, very few studies have placed fear in social, cultural and political theory so far (Fisher, 2012a; Kagan, 2012; Lemke, Larsen, & Hvidbak, 2011).

My primary research question is: how was fear applied as a form of communication and managed by those who experienced the conflict both during and after the war in northern Uganda? Subsequent questions are: how was fear manifested by those who experienced war; how did the participants' interpret fear in conflict circumstances; how were fear and power embedded in everyday interactions in post conflict Uganda; and what strategies did the participants use to manage fear?

The literature review explores scholarly work grouped into three categories: 1) "the epistemology of fear" explores the varying definitions of fear and introduces the concept of "fearanalysis"; 2) "fear and power in armed conflict" discusses the relation between emotion and power, including Foucault's (1983) notion of "productive power"; and 3) "fear and communication in armed conflict" explores scholarly literature that looks at the role of communication in conflict and how language, symbols and religious texts are also used as an agent of control during violent conflict.

For the interviews, I applied a symbolic interaction framework to explore the experiences of six participants who lived through the conflict in northern Uganda. These participants described various communication strategies used to create fear, during and after the war. For my research I considered fear, not only during micro level interactions (a psychological perspective)

as an individual emotion and experience, but also during macro level interactions (a sociological and functionalist perspective), exploring the function of fear as a strategy used by the LRA and the Ugandan government to maintain control and create power. I also considered fear from a transdisciplinary perspective, that is, all kinds of professional and academic disciplines were brought to the table in order to explore meanings of the concept of fear in different contexts and time settings, during the war in Uganda and after the war, as perceived by the study participants. Finally I added my own experiences of fear in the field and how that helped me contextualize the phenomenon of fear as an abstract of others' experience.

Significance of the research

My research provides an understanding of how the self and identity are formed when individuals experience strong emotions, during and after violent conflict. Such an understanding is useful to how governments respond to armed conflict and for strengthening community level programs that focus on rectifying wrongdoing and healing the wounds of victims and perpetrators. Although my research focuses exclusively on guerilla fighting in Uganda, the interpretative framework may help assess other forms of criminal behaviour, such as gang affiliation (Ulmer, 2007; Warr, 2002).

In Africa, whether in conflict or peace, cultural rules provide the basis for how Africans express their feelings and emotions; some of the core value orientations across African cultures include reverence for social status or authority and a strong relationship to the metaphysical world (Nwosu, 2009). Indeed, the participants discussed how religious faith and rituals were used during and after the war to create fear and enable power. This aspect is important because, except for a heavy focus on media studies, scholarly inquiry on human communication in Africa

has not been expansive (Nwosu, 2009). Therefore, this paper aims at contributing toward building an understanding of the role of fear, as an emotion, and how it was used as a communication strategy in the African culture.

Limitations

The limitations of my research were centred on the selection criteria of the participants. I had to limit the interviews to the city of Gulu for safety reasons, as travel to certain locations in rural areas required an escort, which meant that I was unable to visit a number of war-torn communities in Gulu district. Also, I didn't interview women affected by the war; there were many girls who were abducted during the conflict and forced to serve as "wives" to the rebels. I am sure that some of these survivors would have brought a different perspective to the research. However, I decided that the emotional impact of having the women relive the experience was not appropriate, nor necessary for my research. This thesis focuses on communication strategies related to the conflict in northern Uganda and it is not intended to address political or other issues.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Epistemology of fear

Most scholarly literature on the subject of fear has been traditionally dominated by discourses that view fear from a psychological or medical framework, with very few studies situating it in a social, cultural or political context (Fisher, 2012a; Kagan, 2012; Lemke et al., 2011). My contention is that the epistemology of fear, or how we come to experience or learn about fear, is important if we want to enhance our knowledge and understanding of fear and how to manage it.

In physiological terms, fear has been defined as a physical and emotional response to a perceived danger or pain (Daddis, 2004; Keating-Biltucci, 2011) and from a psychological perspective, fear is characterized by avoidance behaviours such as fight, flight, or freeze responses (Sylvers, Lilienfeld, & LaPrairie, 2011). Fear was described by Freud (1920) as *fright*, in which a person faces an unexpected dangerous situation, *fear*, which is focused on a definite object, and *anxiety*, which is the state of mind in anticipation of danger. Researchers, such as Keating-Biltucci (2011) and Rachman (1990), indicated that fears are a learned response from observing family and society, as well as a part of the human experience, and that fear evolved as a mechanism to protect humans from life-threatening situations. Consequently, early humans who were quick to sense fear were more likely to survive. Moreover, many fears are constructed to protect against other fears and sometimes against fear itself (Glassner, 1999), an attitude that some researchers consider to be positive. For example, when discussing the fear of crime, Gray, Jackson, & Farrall (2011) pointed out the role of "functional fear" (p. 77) which they defined as

low-level worry that helps individuals anticipate the threat and prepare by prompting adaptive

vigilance and routine precaution. By contrast, Furedi (2006) viewed the fear of fear as a

"problem":

> One of the distinguishing features of fear today is that it appears to have an independent
>
> existence. It is frequently cited as a problem that exists in its own right disassociated from
>
> any specific object. Classically, societies associate fear with a clearly formulated threat -
>
> the fear of death or the fear of hunger. In such formulations, the threat was defined as the
>
> object of such fears. The problem was death, illness or hunger. Today we frequently
>
> represent the act of fearing as a threat itself. A striking illustration of this development is
>
> the fear of crime as a problem in its own right. (p. 1)

According to Rachman (1990), most people are more afraid when they are alone.

Consequently, fears can be inhibited by the mere presence of other people, a phenomenon which

he called "social buffering" (p. 60). In combat for example, the proximity and the support of a

cohesive group contribute significantly to the control of fear (Rachman, 1990). In the 19th

century, soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder gained strength from closed physical contact. By

the beginning of the 20th century, long-distance weapons required soldiers to disperse and

combatants in both world wars found it more difficult to conquer fear. According to Daddis

(2004), contemporary battlefield also produces the anxiety of being alone. Even though it is

possible to think ourselves out of fear because fear is often fueled by imagination and not always

determined by objective threats (Keating-Biltucci, 2011; Rachman, 1990; Walklate & Mythen,

2008), it takes great effort because fear tends to override reason (Begley, Underwood, Wolffe,

Smalley, & Interlandi, 2007).

When exploring the phenomenon of fear from a transdisciplinary perspective, Fisher (2012b) introduced the term of 'fearanalysis' as a "method of analyzing fear from individual and universal perspectives" (p. 3). Fisher (2012a) indicated that fear is not just an emotion, but a complex phenomenon that individuals always attempt to manage, whether they realize it or not. Meyer and Miskimmon (2009) argued that political or economic control is achieved when people form threat imageries that induce a strong range of emotional responses, such as fear and anger. Threat imageries result from different types of threat arising from the interpretation of events and information (Meyer & Miskimmon, 2009). Further, other scholars identified the function of media as the grapevine through which fear is circulated in society and thus media become a tool for social control (Glassner, 1999; Matusitz, 2013; Walsh, 2009). Brissett (2003), in a bibliographical essay on fear, explored the role that fear plays in other fields, such as terrorism, conspiracy theories, postmodernism, the arts, and political and ethical philosophy.

Nwosu (2009) posits that in an African context fear is juxtaposed with feeling of shame. Gehm and Scherer (1988) make the distinction between issues of public (shame) and private (guilt). Tangney and Dearing (2002) note specifically that shame is "seen as arising from public exposure and disapproval of some shortcoming or transgression," while guilt is "seen as a more 'private' experience arising from self-generated pangs of conscience" (p. 14). However, Tangney, Marschall, Rosenberg, Barlow & Wagner (1994) conducted a study that concluded shame and guilt occurred, at least as descriptive words, in both experiences while alone and within the presence of others. For my research, I used the anthropological definition of shame, focusing solely on the experience of shame as an emotion stemming from interactions with others. According to Nwosu (2009), what matters most in Africa is the shame that a particular

behaviour brings to the family or to the community as a whole, rather than the guilt of the behaviour as reflected on the individual. Here, fear is socially constructed and used to maintain power over individuals, with shaming of families and community as a culturally embedded tradition. The notion of fear being socially constructed within a collectivist society was explored during my interviews.

Fear and power in armed conflict

Dahl (1957) proposed what is probably the best known definition of power in the political science field, in North America: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (p. 202-203). Another classic definition was attributed to Weber (1968) who stated that power is "the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (p. 152). Arendt (1972), on the other hand, posited that "power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert" (p. 44) and that power is not the property of an individual, but it belongs to the group that brings it into existence. She made the distinction between violence and power, stating that violence does not provide a basis for power: "violence is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength" (p. 46). She further argued that getting rid of power would not solve problems, such as oppression and injustice; on the contrary, an attempt to eliminate relations of power would most likely lead to even more violence. She denied that the use of force can be a source of power and stated that violence can be seen as an attempt of those who lack power to find a substitute for it. Like Arendt, Foucault (1980) argued that "power needs to be

considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (p. 119). He suggested that power not only functions as a negative constraint but, in a manner similar to that of Arendt, can also be an enabling force. Foucault (1983) stated that "there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom which is mutually exclusive because freedom must exist for power to be exerted" (p. 221).

According to Newman (2004), Foucault's most important contribution to the theorization of power is the notion of *productive power* that refers to the ability of discourse to **produce** **"**subjects" with different social identities and characteristics. Foucault (1983) stated that power is to be understood in terms of relationships:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (p. 212)

Because power operates through language, it operates at individual level and, according to Foucault (1983), power is **everywhere: "it** is everywhere...because it comes from everywhere... power is a mode of action upon the action of others" (pp. 208-226). Further, Foucault (1983) stated that everyone is constantly exercising power all the time, whether they realize it or not. In many cases, therefore, the ideas we express and the language we use are exercises in power.

More recent scholarly literature derives the definition of power from emotional connection (Smith-Lovin, 2008), perceptions of choice (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993), and valuations of the actors involved (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999), recognizing that the relations of power

are not strictly relational, as implied in initial conceptions, and that perceptions and emotions such as fear, and psychological processes in general, become important when talking about power and control. Just as psychology, psychiatry and criminology look at individual fear (Walsh, 2009), the social sciences look at collective terror and the social conditions that produce fear (Daddis, 2004; Garretón, 1992), including functions that fear may serve within society such as societal regulations and control (Victor, 2006). Such control may come, for example, from doubting one's perceptions of reality (Green 1994). In this case, the routinization of fear is in fact what fuels its power because, as Green (1994) argued, "such routinization allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a façade of normalcy, while that terror, at the same time, permeates and shreds the social fabric" (p. 231). Similarly, Fisher (2012b) argued that fear is power: "how that fear-power-knowledge gets distributed (via education and/or propaganda) in a society is important to analyze at the collective and individual levels. Without a good analysis, our interventions (fear management) will be less than good and we'll suffer further for it" (p. 17).

Ruling regimes use the power of fear to maintain social control because, as Migdal (2001) suggested, the state is a 'field of power' marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by "(1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts" (pp. 15-16). Further, Svendsen (2008) argued that when fear is used as a tool for social control in conflict settings, it is not only the fear of terrorists that exist in a particular location that frightens the local communities, but also the public information about how dangerous these terrorists are. This information is then used by the ruling regime to justify various political or social measures.

Similarly, in the context of the conflict in northern Uganda, researchers observed that fear was used as a strategy for social control; for example, Vinci (2005) argued that the LRA constructed a climate of fear and insecurity and therefore enabled power over the civilian population by committing random acts of violence and maximizing unpredictability.

Other scholars were in agreement that the phenomenon of fear is often associated with unpredictability, dangerousness, and uncontrollability (Armfield, 2006). In northern Uganda, such unpredictability was decoded by the population as omnipotence or power (Vinci, 2005) and this added to the element of terror. For example, during the war, the rebels would often cut off bicycle riders' legs because bicycles, a major means of transportation in the region, also brought communication. Mutilating bicycle riders was also a way of spreading fear. However, the attacks took place at random or, as how a participant in the war put it, "one day they will say they are going to kill everyone who is riding a bicycle, but then you will ride a bicycle and they will pass you by, but then a week later they will decide to kill you. You can't tell" (Vinci, 2005, p. 373).

Power in northern Uganda was also constructed by using children in battle. Child soldiers are a tactical innovation used by guerilla groups that seek alternate forms of power in order to overthrow the established political regimes (McAdam, 1983). This tactical innovation is very difficult to counter because, when children enter the battlefield, some combatants may face a moral dilemma and therefore be immobilized. For example, during the war in northern Uganda, research showed that members of the Ugandan government forces were psychologically disturbed by having to fight against children. For these soldiers the dilemma was about killing children as well as seeing their own leaders contribute to the massacres (Neu, 2004).

Despite the popular image of child soldiers being mostly African, according to Human Rights Watch (2006), the practice is geographically dispersed in over 30 countries around the world. The most commonly cited figure for the number of children involved in conflicts is 300,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2006), but that estimate may not necessarily be the most accurate figure as data on recruitment rates are difficult to validate (AlertNet 2006). In northern Uganda, the LRA was heavily dependent upon child soldier use. Vinci (2005) argued that Kony abducted and used thousands of children in combat because they could "inflict fear on their adversaries due to their own fearlessness in combat and complete disregard for human life" (p. 371) and that helped the LRA construct an image of omnipotence. According to McAdam (1983), a method of power-building through the use of child soldiers in battle is through negative inducements:

> Such negative inducements involve the creation of a situation that disrupts the normal functioning of society and is antithetical to the interests of the group's opponents. In essence, insurgents seek to disrupt their opponent's realization of interests to such an extent that the cessation of the offending tactic becomes a sufficient inducement to grant concessions. (pp. 735-736)

In other words, insurgents utilize extreme tactics to demonstrate how far they are willing to go. Further, Stohl (2002) argued that empowering children with guns during a conflict has the potential to change not only power relations but also the culture:

> After a conflict small arms may become instruments for other forms of violence such as crime and banditry. In some areas, these surplus weapons may create a culture of violence that traps whole societies in an endless cycle of war. When children have no

experience with or exposure to non-violent conflict resolution, small arms become the

tools for conflict resolution. (p. 21)

Such was the case in northern Uganda where, after the war, there were reports of traumatized

returnees who were extremely violent and killed siblings because they "would not be quiet"

(Vinci, 2005, p. 371). At the same time, many other abductees either returned years after the end

of the war or did not return at all for fear of being blamed for committing atrocities by their

families and communities; these abductees were easier to control by the LRA because they were

less likely to escape.

Even though I do not agree entirely with Arendt (1972) who argued that power does not

provide a basis for violence and that power is always the property of the group, never of

individuals, for my thesis I used her insights to make a distinction between different kinds of

power, as well as Dahl's (1957) theory to define the concept of power. For the purpose of my

research, I distinguished four types of power, as follows: 1) *coercive power*, which I define as

the power of a strong A to impose their will against the weak B, is associated with violence and

it is based on military power (the LRA had coercive power over the communities in northern

Uganda, during the war); 2) *bargaining power* determines which side gets the bigger piece of a

pie when A and B are similar enough in strength and when control over the conflict outcome is

impossible (as was the case of the LRA and the government forces in Uganda who, after two

decades of fighting, unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate peace in 2006 because the LRA never

signed the peace agreement); 3) *concerted power* is the capacity of a mobilized group to act

together in the pursuit of common goals (the LRA had concerted power, at the beginning of the

movement, in the '80s, when, as the literature review will further show, the rebels used religious

rituals rather than violence to promote their cause); 4) *political power* refers to the type of power that is institutionalized and can be exercised by individuals who are 'in power' (concerted power and political power can be exercised without use of force).

Fear and communication in armed conflict

Communication is an essential feature of conflict because it aids in the framing of perceptions (Putnam, 2006). Perception is the most central variable in both the creation and the management of conflict interaction (Donohue & Kolt, 1992), and, in fact, "perceptions are the bedrock upon which conflicts are built" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001, p. 43). Fear, perceived or otherwise, manifested or communicated since the war, is important because it influences the outcome of any conflict (Rachman, 1990).

For the purpose of this research I looked at how fear was manifested during and after the war in northern Uganda, not only through messages sent by guerilla fighters to communities about engaging in acts of violence and destruction, but also through messages encoded in activities of violence and decoded by the target audience in a variety of ways, depending on how they understood symbols and constructed their own sense of reality. As Blattman (2007) stated, creating a new social structure was key to Joseph Kony's power in Uganda:

> Indoctrination into the LRA was a complex process of spiritual training, misinformation, and the strategic use of fear and violence. Spiritual practices appear central to motivating recruits and can be seen as an attempt to create new social bonds based on a shared cosmology (as well as fear). Kony created a cult of mystery and spiritual power which few abductees or civilians disbelieve even now. (p. 18)

Religious language, texts and symbolism are often used in conflict for various reasons, including mobilizing the population towards war (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). In Uganda, drawing from traditional African beliefs that interpret social problems through spiritual media, Kony claimed to be possessed by spirits and used biblical revelations and rituals to manipulate and gain the support of the LRA rebels. For example, Kony would place his hands on those who were killed in order that they might be purified by the power invested in him personally and the LRA rebels ended up believing in his spiritual power and feared him. Other rituals included not eating for three days before battle and spreading shea butter in the sign of the cross on the fighters' bodies to create an aura of mysticism that increased fear. Research has shown that such religious rituals are powerful means of communications allowing for multiple interpretations and offering alternative ways of communicating difficult emotions such as anger and fear (Abu-Nimer, 2003). While the Acholi population showed no active resistance or fear when Kony's movement first started up (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999), at the beginning of the 90's, the LRA took a new direction after failed peace negotiations with the government. Kony accused the Acholi people of abandoning him and started a campaign killings and abductions using religious beliefs to terrorize the whole population. For example, he killed people because they raised pigs or performed manual labour on Fridays which suggests an introduction of imagined Islamic taboos into Kony's vision (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). Depending on the nature of interaction between individuals and interpretation of outside events, religious symbols had different meanings during the conflict in northern Uganda leading to a creation of a climate of fear, and the use of religious symbols and practices to instill fear was confirmed by all the participants I interviewed in Uganda.

According to Matusitz (2013), when individuals are emotionally distressed by a terrifying event, they feel a compulsion to share their emotional experiences with others. Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, and Rimé (2000) argued that individuals who find themselves in a very negative emotional situation tend to engage more intensely in interpersonal news diffusion. The spread of negative emotions from the individual to the collective may eventually lead to a negative collective emotional orientation. During my entire stay in Uganda I noticed a collective repressed fear that affected the communities. This was not surprising because repressed emotions are typical manifestations of posttraumatic stress disorder (Dayan & Olliac, 2010). Bar-Tal, Halperin, & De Rivera (2007) argued that just as individuals may be characterized by a dominant emotion, societies, too, may develop a collective emotional orientation. The resulting context of the collective fear orientation may be a set of beliefs that cultivate insecurity, fear, anger, and hate (Matusitz, 2013). Such was the case of northern Uganda, where messages were conveyed not so much through the media, but through the word of mouth, as rumours, shaping expectations for the future solely on the basis of the past and contributing to the social construction of fear. During conflict, rumours are a way of dealing with unknown threat (Finnström, 2008) and post conflict rumours reflect insecurities that linger from past violence (Fujii, 2010).

Another way of communicating in northern Uganda is through ceremonies of reconciliation, such as *mato oput*, rituals of forgiveness of war-related crimes that are still practiced to this day. Regarding non-verbal communication in conflict, Green (1994) indicated that silence is not only a survival strategy but also a mechanism of control enforced through fear.

For my study, I suggest that multiple audiences were involved with terrorism as a communication process during the war in northern Uganda. Such audiences include not only the

communities affected by the war, but also 1) those who witnessed the atrocities, 2) Ugandan officials who were forced to respond to the attacks, 3) the Sudanese who provided military support to the LRA, and 4) humanitarian organizations and the international media who covered the war. All these various audiences communicated with one another, engaging in encoding and decoding the LRA's messages of destruction depending on the meaning that they attributed to fear and violence and on how they constructed their own sense of reality because the LRA rarely communicated directly with the outside world (Vinci, 2005). The real goal of the communicated message was persuasion: to persuade the audience that chaos and fear will be in their life unless Uganda is turned into a theocratic state based on the Ten Commandments. Consequently, this thesis explores fear in communication as persuasion, acting as an agent of control externally, and as a disabler internally.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

My research question: how was fear applied as a form of communication and managed by those who experienced the conflict both during and after the war in northern Uganda led me to discover symbolic interaction theory as a suitable framework.

Qualitative research methods, such as phenomenology and the phenomenological aspects of ethnography and grounded theory, are often associated with symbolic interactionism (Osborne, 1994) as the emphasis of each of these methods is discovery, description, and meaning rather than prediction and measurement. Moreover, all these methods take the insider perspective, in other words, the participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question communicate that experience to the researcher. Both symbolic interactionism and phenomenology express the idea that person and environment cannot be considered in isolation. However, when doing phenomenological research, the focus is largely on the conscious experience of the subject, whereas the broader scope of symbolic interactionism enabled me to look at both verbal and nonverbal behaviour in order to identify relationships among symbolic meanings and contexts. As well, phenomenologists apply bracketing, setting aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh look at the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007) and I purposely used my experiences of fear in the field when I analyzed the data because I thought that it would enrich the research. The violence I was exposed to helped me better understand the actors and the context within which the symbols of violence and fear had occurred. Here, context has a big role in determining and analyzing the symbolic worth of nonverbal communication as Tuman (2010) describes.

Ethnographic research, on the other hand, studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting (Creswell, 2007). My research considered the phenomenon of fear both in the present, post conflict, and in the past, during the war; therefore, ethnography would not have been as useful a method to use for my research.

Grounded theory, often associated with symbolic interactionism (Osborne, 1994), would not have been as useful either because the purpose of my research was not to develop a theory, grounded in data from the field, but to document perceptions and attitudes associated with the role of fear used as a communication strategy.

In short, I chose symbolic interactionism because it is an approach that allows the researcher to understand: 1) how misinterpreted action and meaning can persist and escalate into conflict (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), 2) how, in conflict settings, the definition of reality is negotiated to capture and maintain power by those who control symbols, perspectives and definitions (Charon 2010; Musolf, 1992), and 3) how fear and violent conflict are highly correlated (Matusitz, 2013).

Symbolic interactionism is traced back to the work of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), however, the perspective was named and popularized by his student, Herbert Blumer (1969) who defined symbolic interactionism as an approach to social psychology whose first principle is that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them" (p. 2). Symbolic interactionism is concerned with how individuals define their environment, act toward it, and use it through social interaction, choosing one course of action

over another (Charon, 2010; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). When an individual simply reacts to another's action without interpreting that action, this is non-symbolic interaction.

Contrastingly, symbolic interactionism requires an interpretative process to take place (Mead, 1934). In other words, symbolic interactionism rests on the premise that people act and communicate through shared verbal and nonverbal symbols and the interpretation of events relies on the meaning that these symbols have to individuals, derived from social interaction.

I found symbolic interactionism a highly useful approach for my thesis because the purpose of the study was to explore the meaning that fear had for the participants, as perceived and modified through social interaction, during and after the war in northern Uganda, as well as the course of action that the participants took, based on the phenomenon of fear. Emotion and symbolic interactionism are correlated because, as Franks (2003) indicated, symbolic interaction is largely about "moving one's self and others to behave in certain ways through the efficacy of discourse" (p. 788). It is the emotion behind the words and not the words themselves that compel others to do our bidding or, as Franks (2003) argued, "words devoid of affective gestures move no one, not even the speaker, to actual deeds" (p 788). Charon (2010) argued that emotions are not just a causal response to a stimulus, emotions are learned through interactions with others.

In the context of violent conflict, such as the one in northern Uganda, the fear that the communities experienced not only defined their identities, determining what role they played in society during the war (Vinci, 2005), but also, after the end of the war, it led to further violence because "a frightened society is more willing to fight when it has to face threatening conditions" (Matusitz 2013, p. 143). Therefore, symbolic interactionism provided a helpful framework to

explore the definition of the meaning of fear in conflict on an internal level, as well as on an external level of social interaction.

Data collection

I drew my data from six face-to-face in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place in May – June 2012, in Gulu, northern Uganda. I used purposive sampling to ensure that I selected participants from those who experienced the war first-hand and the phenomenon of fear and who could speak English so I didn't rely on an interpreter. Two months before I left for Uganda I contacted international media organizations I am affiliated with - the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and the World Press Institute. Through them, I found a Ugandan journalist who sent me contact details of reporters who had covered the war and who were still living in Gulu at the time I was there. Then I used a snowballing technique to interview others. Snowball sampling involves asking a small number of participants to recommend others who believe can enrich the study (Neumann, 2006). When I arrived in Gulu, I went to a local university and met with one of the professors who agreed to do the interview and who also referred me to other potential research participants. I found a former child soldier through the owner of the hotel I stayed at and he recommended other former abductees.

All the participants were living in Gulu at the time. Choosing participants from a single region provided a common cultural frame for their experiences, thereby making the process of finding common themes easier and more practical. However, I chose them with the intention of representing diversity in terms of religious or spiritual orientation (because symbolic religious objects and beliefs played a crucial role in creating fear during the war), age (some of them were born before the war and others during the war so they never experienced peace), and the different

roles that they played during and after the conflict. For safety reasons, I conducted all the interviews during the day, in the hotel reception area where I stayed in Gulu or at a coffee place nearby.

The interview questions focussed on the participants' past experiences associated with communication-related aspects and experiences of the phenomenon of fear during and after the war in northern Uganda. The meetings lasted from two to eight hours each and with some of the participants I did multiple interviews, noting a trust that emerged from the initial interview. Thus, I had access to deeper, more emotional responses. All the interviews were taped and transcribed.

Participant profiles

Three participants were former abductees who spent from several months to several years in captivity in northern Uganda. All of them were tortured by the LRA and forced to fight when they were teenagers. Tom became the LRA first commander's escort and was given authority over other abductees and Sammy was severely traumatized after witnessing a large number of atrocities, including the killing of his own family. George, another child soldier who was abducted at a very early age, developed an infection while he was in the bush and almost lost his legs. After he escaped, the doctors managed to save his legs but he had to learn how to walk again. Two other participants, Ben and Magala, were living in Gulu during the war and were forced by the government forces to leave their homes and go into camps for several years. Victor is a reporter who covered the war and is currently one of the founding members of a media organisation that brings together journalists based in northern Uganda.

Ethics

All the participants were of adult age at the time of the interviews and each agreed to sign an informed consent form. The meetings started with a reminder that the interviews were voluntary and that they could be terminated at any time. To protect identities, I gave each participant a pseudonym. The approach raised ethical challenges related to anonymity because individuals in the stories were likely to be identifiable by those who knew them. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, I reported sensitive remarks and issues in a more indirect way, without giving precise contextual clues, such as dates and locations, where the abductions took place or identifying information, such as the names of the LRA commanders who tortured the participants and the names of the organizations that helped the former abductees return and reintegrate into their communities. Telling stories of fear, abduction, rape, torture, and killings evoked strong feelings and emotions in all the participants, but they seemed to manage reasonably well during the meetings so I didn't have to stop the interviews.

CHAPTER 4

Research Findings

Following the interviews, I transcribed the data and grouped the participants' statements into three major themes: 1) a description of fear or what the participants understood by "fear"; 2) their experiences of fear during and after the conflict; and 3) the contexts in which the participants experienced and managed fear. I used several techniques to identify themes and subthemes. First, I linked the three major themes to symbolic interactionism approach in which experience and context have a big role in determining and analyzing the symbolic worth of verbal and nonverbal communication (Tuman, 2010). Then, I reviewed the written texts for subthemes. I looked for repetitions and local terms that sounded unfamiliar or were used in unfamiliar ways, such as the descriptions of fear in connection to religious rituals and the ceremonies of reconciliation. I also looked for analogies and for linguistic connectors such as "as a result" and "rather than" because analogies, repetitions, and connectors are part of a speaker's ability to grasp meaning (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). My goal was to establish how the participants constructed the meaning of "fear". I listened to the recordings again and noted all the pauses and the changes in voice tone. In other words, all the transitions that may have been markers of themes and subthemes because, as in written texts, new paragraphs indicate shifts in topics, in speech pauses and changes in voice tone may indicate transitions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This process of listening again and marking the transitions helped with the data analysis as well, as the next chapter will show.

Description of fear

Metaphors and Analogies. I asked the participants how they created the meaning of fear during and following the war. I observed that most of them used metaphoric language to conceptualize the abstract notion of fear. This confirmed recent research, such as Crawford (2009) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who suggested that complex emotions, like fear, are difficult to describe without linking them to a physical experience.

The participants used metaphoric language and analogies in order to provide a clear description of the abstract notion of fear confirming the position of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who argued that individuals' ability to conceptualize emotions on their own terms is inadequate, leading us to represent them in terms of more concrete, physical dimensions of experience such as brightness and spatial position. For example, when describing an LRA attack, Sammy, a former abductee, said:

> I knew that the rebels had abducted people from the villages around Gulu but I was at the
>
> seminary and I wasn't expecting an attack, it was a church institution, a confined place.
>
> That night, for the first time in my life, real fear crept up on me. My eyes were dazzled.

Some participants created the meaning of fear by associating it with the act of dehumanizing: "I truly understood what fear was when I saw the rebels cutting peoples' mouths; they were trying to dehumanize us," Ben, a villager in northern Uganda, said; "they tied us with ropes, in bundles of five boys together, so that when we were moving we walked together like slaves," Tom, a former abductee who later became a LRA commander, said; "after the commander finished eating, everything that was left was pushed over to me. They gave me the remains, I was their dog," he added. Other participants used sensory analogies (Crawford, 2009) when they described

the meaning of fear: "I can smell blood everywhere I go," Tom said; "they told us not to worry, that we were safe with them even though they were rebels, but I was frozen with fear," George, another former child soldier, said; Victor used picture stimuli to explain what fear meant to him: "it's when you see corpses dumped by the side of the road every day."

Meta-language. All the participants said that rumours and silence played a big role in how they understood fear and that all the conflict parties, the LRA fighters and the government forces, used rumours to intimidate or enhance fear. Whether true or not, the rumours during the war created the idea that the Acholi were being subjected to a slow genocide and they always sent people running. The participants explained that rumours spread very fast during the conflict because of the lack of other communications means in the region, such as newspapers and radio. During the war, only the LRA commanders had radios and satellite phones. George, a former child soldier, told me how the fighters broadcasted rumours on the radio in order to frighten him and other abductees:

> One evening, when I was in the bush, the commander came to us with a radio and told me: "people are talking about you at home, they say you've been killed". And it was true, I could hear my name on the radio, they said that I'd been killed because I was too young and because I couldn't walk. I was barefoot and had stepped on thorns, I had an infection and my feet were swollen, I couldn't walk, I crawled.

The situation didn't change after the war ended: "there are still rumours that create fear. Some people say that Kony will come back and commit atrocities again. Others are afraid that the government will grab their land, there are lots of land conflicts today," Magala, a Gulu University professor, said.

Often during the war, silence was used as a survival strategy, as Magala explained: "during the day, the rebels were mixed up with regular people in villages. At night they turned into rebels and abducted and sometimes killed people. You didn't know who was who, people were afraid to take sides." However, Magala added, silence out of fear created more fear: "People didn't articulate their rights because they felt afraid and intimidated and that led to more fear and misfortune."

Experience of fear

Identity. The experience of fear during the conflict influenced the participants' self and identity in relations to others. For example, Sammy told me that, when he was in the bush, he was affected so much by the sight of corpses and of people being tortured every day that "at one point you become like the rebels and you just forget your previous life." He developed fears and beliefs about his own security even when he didn't feel any danger or perceived threat. Sammy said,

> My commander said had been abducted too. He seemed friendly. He said that I should do as I was told and nothing bad would happen to you. He said, 'forget your family, look at us as your parents and your friends. Together here we are one big family.'

The use of military symbols also influenced and, in most cases, changed how the Acholi in northern Uganda defined their self and identity and how they interpreted events and circumstances. For example, Tom told me that, when he returned from the bush to his community towards the end of the war, people were afraid of him because he was wearing boots and a uniform. "The uniform screamed 'rebel'", Tom said. Women went through similar changes in identity during the war. All the participants told me how young girls were abducted and given

as "wives" to those high in the LRA hierarchy, as a reward for the fighters' loyalty. However, the participants said, the men returning from the bush after the war were viewed more negatively by their communities than the women who fought along the rebels.

Religious symbols and rituals. The participants recalled how the LRA used religious rituals to spread fear, manipulate, and gain support. Sammy said,

The day after the abduction the commander said that we had to be initiated. He had shea nut oil in a small plastic bottle. He prayed, made the sign of the cross and then dipped his thumb in that bottle then he made the cross sign on my colleague`s forehead, chest, and on his back. I underwent the same process. Afterwards he closed his eyes and prayed. Then the commander said that the ritual made us already members of the LRA. He said that the oil had put some mark on us that if we tried to escape we would lose our way and return to them. This was some kind of superstition meant to confuse and control uneducated boys and instill fear in them. Many believed it.

Other participants shared similar stories. While in captivity, Tom was told that the Holy Spirit directed all the LRA fighters' actions and that if they threw out stones at enemies, the stones would turn into bombs. However, some of the participants were convinced that religion saved their lives. For example, Tom tried to escape on a Friday and he was caught and tortured but not killed because, he explained, "Friday is a holy day for the rebels. They don't 'work' Fridays." His second attempt at escaping was more successful because, he said, instead of dismissing fear, he turned it into energy and used it to come up with a better escape plan; in other words, he learnt from previous experience how to translate fear into preparation and action and thus save his life. Religion played a big part in the Acholis' life not only during the war, but also

after the war. Once Tom was back, he had to go through a religious ceremony in order to be

forgiven by the members of his community. He sought spiritual help from Jok, the tribe's spirit,

during a ceremony in which chickens were slaughtered and their blood used for performing the

ritual.

Context of fear

  Abductions. When I asked the participants about the context in which they created the

meaning of fear, most of them mentioned the abductions that they either went through or heard

about. Sammy remembered that, the night he was abducted, he was in the dormitory, studying

for his exams, and at first he wasn't scared when he heard gunshots:

> Then the rebels smashed the windows using the butts of their guns. I remember there was
>
> glass everywhere. They said in the local language, 'open the door, open the door!' We
>
> were scared and didn't open the door. People were running from one room to another. I
>
> hid myself under the bed. Eventually they kicked the wooden door open. One of them
>
> came and looked under the bed and pulled me by my leg. I tried to resist but he pointed
>
> the gun at me and said 'get out or I shoot you.' I got up and they tied everybody up with
>
> ropes.

George didn't know what fear was until the night he was abducted even though his father had

been killed by the rebels a few years before. He said,

> I was only 14 when it happened. That night, they abducted 41 young boys. We moved
>
> into the bush, not on the road, the whole night and the following day until around 8
>
> o'clock in the evening. I didn't have shoes on because the rebels had taken me right off
>
> the bed. They told us not to worry, that we were safe with them even though they were

rebels. I didn't believe them, I knew they had killed people. I feared them but I couldn't

do anything. Had I tried to run, they would have killed me. So I stayed with them.

Victor worked as a journalist during the war, he wasn't abducted by the rebels but he witnessed

abductions and took risks in order to get the story: "I was afraid of both the LRA and the

government forces. Everybody knew that the government was to blame for some of the

massacres. They feared international exposure so they restricted foreign journalists. A lot of the

reporting was done by local journalists those days." Maintaining objectivity was another

challenge to local journalists, Victor explained, because they were in fact part of the story, they

all had relatives and friends who had been killed in the conflict and, in most cases, they knew

exactly whom to blame and that added to the trauma they were going through.

Reconciliation. After the war ended, all the participants attended or witnessed

ceremonies of reconciliation called *mato oput*. These rituals of forgiveness of war-related crimes

are the Ugandan traditional way of making peace and, the participants said, death for death

would not help. They said that the ceremonies helped them cope with fear, reconcile with the

past, and continue to live in close proximity to those who had killed their family and friends.

Magala said:

> The ceremonies are attended by both the perpetrator and the victim or the victim's
>
> family. During the ceremony a sheep or a goat is slaughtered. If there is a baby in the
>
> family, that baby is given the name of the person who was killed. After the ritual, people
>
> don't feel afraid anymore. And they don't fight, there are laws against it.

Two participants, former LRA combatants, said that they were forced to attend such rituals, that

they were afraid to say no to the victims' families, but that they didn't believe they were truly

forgiven by the community for the atrocities they had committed in the bush. Other participants

said that the stigmatisation of LRA returnees stems from fear of their violent experiences and

that if former rebel soldiers attend reconciliation ceremonies and say that they were forced into

violence and killings, the communities will not be afraid that violence will occur in peace time

any more.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

I interpreted the data using Mead's (1934) notion of the 'generalized other' that refers to the means by which values, attitudes, and standards of behaviour of a group are adopted by individuals (Cockerham, 2003). The concept of 'generalized other' grounded in symbolic interaction theory is particularly relevant when analyzing research data gathered on the African continent because the concept of *Ubuntu* runs deeply throughout African thought and action (Mersham, Skinner, & Ronsburg, 2011). The term *Ubuntu* is derived from the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means "I am because we are" (Nwosu, 2009, p. 162) and this philosophy was indeed reflected in the research findings. For example, when the study participants discussed *mato oput*, the ceremonies of reconciliation that took place after the war, and how such rituals helped them cope with fear and reconcile with the past, they said that violent crimes that were committed by one individual affected the whole clan; the participants said that unless the crime is forgiven, it could bring curse on the living and consequently spirits will haunt the community forever. Therefore, in the African culture, a person is defined in relation to the community and the self cannot be conceived without conceiving of others.

In line with the concept of 'generalized other', in symbolic interaction theory role-taking is imagining the world from the perspective of another individual. Mead (1934) suggested that individuals not only experience themselves from the standpoints of other individuals within the group to which they belong, but also from the generalized standpoint of the community as a whole. One of the participants, a former child soldier, told me how frightened he was when he was abducted but how, in a short period of time, he became "great friends" with his LRA

commander, quietly followed orders to beat and kill other boys, and even "shared a bed and the same mosquito net" with the commander when, in fact, all he wanted was to escape. Therefore, the participant played a role and experienced himself from the standpoint of the individuals within the group he belonged to, the LRA, and learned how to create power out of fear. Moreover, this tacit support is another form of power that he created for himself in order to survive. At the same time, he was afraid to return to his community for fear of being stigmatized for the atrocities he had committed in the bush. In other words, he imagined the world from the perspective of the group as a whole, the Acholi communities in northern Uganda. Indeed, when he eventually escaped and went back to Gulu, the former guerilla fighter was lucky to stay alive because, he explained, people were suspicious of him and falsely accused him that he had in fact returned only to abduct more people. Therefore, in this case, the self was a product of social interaction, developed and refined through an ongoing process of participation not only within the group to which the individual belonged, the LRA, but also in the Acholi society, in general.

According to Charon (2010), role-taking is an essential part of social interaction; however, he stated, "even if we do take the role of the other and accurately capture the perspective of that other, we still cannot leave our own perspective aside, and our understanding of the other will be coloured, in part, by our own perspective" (pp. 105-106). This is, in fact, exactly what I myself experienced when I conducted the field work in northern Uganda.

I interviewed victims of the war and asked them about their experiences of the phenomenon of fear and how they dealt with it, and at the same time terror reigned and shaped the very nature of my interactions in Uganda. While listening to stories of abduction, torture, and mass violence and trying to engage people who experienced the unimaginable, I felt emotionally

distressed not only because of the stories themselves, but also because I had been held at

gunpoint 48 hours after arrival in Uganda. Seeing boys and girls marching armed to the teeth on

the streets of Gulu every day and witnessing violence at night at the place I stayed, didn't help

relieve the stress. I believe that symbols such as military uniform and guns added to the

rhetorical dimension of terror I felt in a post conflict zone such as northern Uganda. Imagining

the world from the study participants' point of view came very easy to me because I feared for

my life while I was there.

In symbolic interaction theory, interaction is seen to occur not only externally, but also

within the self, as an internal dialogue, and this was evident during my stay in Gulu. Having

internalized the fear I felt in Kampala, my definition of the situation I found myself in Gulu

continued to be one of dread. In other words, just like Blumer's (1969) first premise of symbolic

interactionism that states that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that

these things have for them" (p. 2), I continued to react based on my internalized, past

experiences with fear that did not always evaluate the situation as new and different.

A similar internal dialogue was evident in my research findings as well. The participants

used metaphorical language when they tried to describe the phenomenon of fear in conflict, and

this implies that there is a certain relationship between fear and self and that language shapes

social identity. This is not surprising because, as Crawford (2009) argued, metaphors are

"frequent when the topic is emotional, and their frequency increases with emotional intensity"

(p. 130). While in metaphoric language 'good' is usually 'bright", one of the participants said

that "my eyes were dazzled" when he explained how he understood and experienced fear; I

believe that this association may stem from humans' dependence on vision which makes us more

vulnerable and fearful in the darkness. Other participants mentioned sensory experiences and

used picture stimuli when they described fear and tried to represent affective states, as well as

vertical space with respect to the body, 'good' being towards the head and 'bad' towards the feet.

What I thought was most interesting was that some of the participants used low tones for

negative descriptions such as abductions and killings and a high pitch for positive events such as

reconciliation ceremonies. I noted that the former guerilla fighters used low tones when they

described negative events because they associated fear with shame. As the literature reviewed

showed, what matters the most in Africa is the shame that a particular behaviour brings to the

family or the community, rather than the guilt of the behaviour as reflected on the individual

(Nwosu, 2009). Oftentimes, when the participants discussed the experience of shame, they

recognized that, in time, their interpretation of shame associated with fear changed from an

internalized emotion, when they believed that shame stemmed from the self, to an externalized

emotion, when they realized that all the abductees and the communities affected by the war

suffered from a collective shame, especially because Kony was born in Gulu and directed his

campaign of killings against his own people. During both formal and informal interviews, I

noticed that this collective shame, mixed with feelings of fear, was still present and it affected

everybody in the communities in northern Uganda because, as Munt (2008) indicated, shame is

contagious and it spreads fast: "shame is an emotion that travels quickly, it has an infective,

contagious property that means it can circulate and be exchanged with intensity" (p. 3). I believe

however that this feeling of collective shame gave the affected communities concerted power

which, as the literature review showed, is the capacity of a mobilized group to act together in the

pursuit of common goals. Therefore, in this case, power did not have negative effects, but

productive consequences or, as Foucault (1983) called it, the participants turned their feelings of shame and fear into "productive power".

All the participants said that rumours and silence played a significant role in their understanding of fear. Rumours spread fast, not only because there were no official means of communication in the region such as newspapers and radio, but also because rumours were a way of managing fear for the affected communities, as well as a way of social control for the LRA. This confirms Finnstrom's (2008) view that rumours are a way of dealing with unknown threat and that regimes need the power of fear in order to maintain social control (Migdal, 2001). The participants also said that they used silence to conquer fear and as a survival strategy; therefore, silence was a way of control of what was going on or an enabler of power in social interaction. In other words, the participants interpreted their circumstances and chose one line of action (non-communication) over another (communication).

The research findings also showed that the experience of fear influenced the participants' self and identity in relations to others, meaning that their identity emerged, developed and changed during social interaction. For example, one of the former child soldiers said that while he had strong negative and fearful feelings towards the rebels after he was abducted, in time "you become one of them" and "you just forget your previous life". Therefore, his identity changed because the group to which he belonged, the LRA, assigned him a different identity. Conflict arises if an individual has an identity that the group doesn't accept or if he refuses the role identity assigned by the group. In the example above, had the participant refused to do what the rebels asked, he would have surely paid with his life. The abductees had no choice but to change their identity and confirm to the group because, as one LRA commander put it, "we are

one big family now." This is in line with the Foucault's (1983) concept of "productive power",as

noted in the literature review. Just like Foucault's example of the modern prisoner "whose

marginalized identity is constructed through the disciplinary and normalizing techniques of

power" (p. 210), the LRA's power did not always manifest through physical punishment and

confinement, but through an attempt to change identities. Moreover, I believe that by saying that

"we are one big family now", the LRA commander expressed himself not just to communicate,

but to dominate, and this was another attempt to gain "productive power".

  The LRA commanders constructed new identities for themselves, too. For example,

Joseph Kony, the LRA's leader, claimed to be possessed by multiple spirits. The participants told

me that, according to the rumours that spread during the war, Kony used to place his hands on

those who had been killed in order that they might be purified by the powers invested in him.

The LRA rebels and abductees ended up believing in Kony's spiritual powers and that enhanced

fear during the conflict even though no one, except maybe for just a few people close to Kony,

had actually seen him perform such "miracles". In fact, Kony was rarely seen in public during

the three decades when he was the LRA leader. Therefore, Kony successfully exercised his

power like a modern sovereign, with his subjects, those to be observed and disciplined, being the

most visible, unlike pre-modern states, where the exercise of power was such that the sovereign

was more visible than his subjects. The mechanism through which Kony exercised his power

falls under Foucault's (1983) doctrine of "domination." Foucault (1983) cites Bentham's

Panopticon as an example of the use of power to dominate and control the conduct of others in a

constant manner, and with a reasonable degree of effectiveness.[1] Besides rituals, the participants

said that all sorts of religious objects were also used to create a climate of fear in Uganda, such

as rubber bracelets that were believed to be endowed with Kony's magic and that were never

removed for fear of spiritual repercussions. The research findings indicate that religious symbols

and rituals shaped attitudes by instilling fear during the conflict and were used by the LRA as a

powerful source of legitimation and justification in order to gain the followers' support.

Therefore, in this case and, like in Bentham's Panopticon, the exercise of power was done not

through the use of force, but through influencing and eventually changing the subjects'

behaviour even though it is important to note that those affected by the war managed their fears

and found comfort and strength in the same religious rituals. The findings confirm the literature

review that showed that religious language, texts and symbolism are often used in conflict for

various reasons, including mobilizing the population towards war (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009),

and that religious rituals offer alternative ways of communicating difficult emotions such as

anger and fear (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

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[1] Panopticon was an institutional building designed in the 18th century by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and whose guards were never seen by the prisoners. The goal of this institution was not merely to control the individual without the use of force, but also aimed at transforming him. Basically, the Panopticon was the precursor of the hidden surveillance camera of today; because the individual does not know when he is being watched, the goal is to make him behave as if he is constantly under observation. Kony was just like the Panopticon's "sovereign", never seen, yet controlling his "subjects" through attempts to change their identities, as described above, and through religious "miracles" that he was rumoured to be able to perform.

CHAPTER 6

Directions for Future Research

Studying fear and power is a complex process that involves historical attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews that help us better understand intense emotions. This research could be further expanded by reflecting on similarities and differences between cultures regarding the role of fear in violent conflict and during peace negotiations because, as some theorists like Guerro and La Valley (2006) and Matusitz (2013) argued, people from different cultures express and experience emotions differently. Noting the huge impact that emotion has in conflict interaction, Randall and Hammer (2006) stated that conflict style differences across cultures represent an unexplored area of future crisis negotiations and that our understanding of how we interact in an attempt to manage emotion-based communicative dynamics is still in its infancy. Roscigno (2011) indicated that cultural values matter not only when studying emotions in conflict, but also when clarifying the nature of power in conflict situations. According to Roscigno (2011), most sociological research so far has focussed on observable power relations ranging from peaceful protests to violent repression and policy-related issues, and not on cultural issues. I believe that this path of inquiry is important because, as Matusitz (2013) pointed out, cultural and religious differences between civilizations across the world have become one of the primary sources of violent conflict today. This research could also be expanded by looking at how different interpretations of emotions, objects, and symbols give way to conflict and what symbolic interaction might discern for repairing communication in times of conflict.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The primary research question was: how was fear applied as a form of communication and managed by those who experienced the conflict both during and after the war in northern Uganda? My research showed that fear was manifested through messages sent by guerilla fighters to communities about engaging in acts of violence and destruction and through spiritual practices meant to motivate the abductees to accept the beliefs advocated by the LRA more easily and to create new social bonds inside the guerilla group. Fear was also manifested during the war through rumours that had the role to create power by spreading panic. The participants managed their fears through listening to some of these rumours and listening was important because, as they explained, the fears they had chosen to listen to during the war would govern whether they lived or died. The participants also managed their fears through silence that was used as a survival strategy and through the creation of new identities in order to either cope with fear or, in the case of the LRA rebels, to enhance fear and power.

Even though the war has ended, there is still conflict and fear in northern Uganda. Almost two million people were forced into camps by the government forces during the war and, when they returned in 2006, some found their land occupied by strangers. Most of the people I spoke with during formal and informal meetings in Gulu said that they mostly feared land-grabbing because they had very few, if any, possessions left after the war. There was no land ownership documentation and even to this day there are still land disputes that sometimes turn violent and threaten the fragile peace in the region. Given the lack of official documentation, the authorities in the region exercise disciplinary control by establishing "truth", meaning, who has the right to

own the land, based on eye witnesses' testimonies. Therefore, as Foucault (1983) showed, truth

is implicated in power; power does not repress or conceal the truth, on the contrary, in the

example above, power operated through the truth.

Another big fear that the participants identified after the conflict cessation was Kony's

potential return. Currently he is said to be hiding somewhere in the Central African Republic;

however, most people I interviewed said that the rumour was that Kony was right there, in Gulu.

Even though there are several radio stations that broadcast in local languages in northern

Uganda, rumours still play a big role in communication. Religion is equally important. In fact, I

found it interesting that many former LRA combatants have become priests after the war.

The Acholis find comfort, peace of mind, and strength in religious practices and rituals

such as *mato oput*, a traditional ceremony of reconciliation that is very popular but has its own

limitations, including the fact that the perpetrator's father has to pay compensation to the

victim's family before the ceremony can take place and in most cases people can't afford it. A

second limitation to the use of *mato oput* is the massive scale of atrocities committed in northern

Uganda; *mato oput* is traditionally used in individual cases and reconciliation is not possible in

the case of mass killings. Even when these rituals take place, how effective are they? I asked this

question again and again when I was in Uganda because every family there has at least one

brother, parent or friend who had been killed by the rebels and, as someone coming from a

different culture, it seemed to me that it was almost impossible to be able to forgive and forget

overnight, especially when, in many cases, the killer lived in close proximity if not next door to

the victim's family. Some participants said that *mato oput* is not a culmination of the peace

process, but rather a first step in the journey, and that they are ready to do anything to overcome the fears that are still haunting them and find the strength to forget the past and live in peace.

When I decided to do my research in Uganda, my initial plan was to write on conflict communication. Once I arrived there, I went through fearful experiences that made me change the focus of my thesis. What emerged was a study of fear. Writing about my own emotions and how the world of fear that I experienced collided with the participants' own world of fear, seemed more difficult to process than I expected. I thought that such an experience might enrich the research because it made me more open to how people in Uganda experienced danger which it did, however what I didn't anticipate was the impact that fear had on me.

During my stay in Uganda, my different interpretations of situations, my interactions with others and my own reconstruction of the fear itself allowed my terror to fester and grow. After I returned to Canada I continued to feel fearful and even now, almost one year later, I still have nightmares every other night. However, I have chosen to use my sociological imagination to find out how fear is weighing in, in my everyday life and not to allow it to steer me away from the things that I want in life. I have come to realize how important it is to stay positive because, like President Roosevelt said in his 1933 inaugural speech, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself".

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