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Understanding youth's post-peace agreement practices in Yumbe, north-western Uganda

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2. HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the legacies of past conflicts in present-day Yumbe, this chapter sketches the historical background of the people in a particular district as it emerges from the available literature and the oral histories and interviews I conducted. The background provides an essential overview that will be needed for the reader to interpret the subsequent chapters. The present chapter inevitably draws attention to histories of conflict and/or violence, as their subsequent influence form the core interest of this dissertation. Such a focus risks reiterating hegemonic narratives about the people in West Nile—and Yumbe in particular—as thoroughly enmeshed in violence (see Leopold 2005a; 2005b), while it may overlook other histories. It risks putting the experience of violence and conflict at the heart of our understanding of the people in Yumbe, following colonial and post-colonial fashions in writing about the the region (ibid.) However, like Leopold (2005a) I try to show how violence is not something inherent to the people of this region but rather was probably largely brought upon them by an extensive number of violent encounters. By drawing attention to personal histories where I can and by showing the complexity of the historical experience in the region, I hope to provide a more nuanced perspective than the popular one that has surfaced so far, the one that strongly and almost entirely attaches the people from Yumbe to the history of Idi Amin’s violent regime and the subsequent rebellions.

I begin this chapter not with the oral histories about the coming of the people of north-western Uganda to the region from what is currently the new ROSS,⁵⁸ but rather with the Aringa people’s first contacts with what are known as *radically different outsiders* (Leopold 2005a: 131), starting in the second half of the nineteenth century. One important reason is that we know violence was at the core of many of these interactions, and they have most likely significantly shaped and continue to shape Aringa society. The exact causal outcomes of these historical contacts may be difficult to determine, but this whole dissertation draws attention to some of the emerging legacies of these historical processes in young people’s everyday practices in present-day Yumbe.

While explaining more about the legacies of conflict and violence that so profoundly affected the research region, there are a few more important points to take

⁵⁸ For some explanation of these ‘Lugbara histories’, see Leopold 2005a: 133-140.

from this chapter for reading the following chapters. Militarization and violence are not the only important recurring elements of Aringa history; there are also people's mobility (displacement due to slave raiding, disease, and war; the abduction of people, the recruitment of young men into the army; labour migration) and their connection to petty trade and the 'survival economy'. While initially most of these characteristics of Aringa history have been explained predominantly by reference to a Nubi identity (explained later), this chapter examines this picture in some detail to show that these links were probably not as straightforward and linear as often proposed.

SLAVE-RAIDING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

This part of the chapter engages with the period of pre-colonial and early colonial dynamics in what is currently known as Yumbe District, a period that is important to consider for several reasons. First, this part of West Nile has been affected severely by slave-raiding, contrary to other, more southern parts of the area inhabited by the Lugbara. Second, some of the limited literature⁵⁹ on the region has suggested that contact with slave-raiders led the people from Yumbe District to work for them and become 'like them': Muslim and military. It has been suggested here and there in the literature⁶⁰ that the Aringa naturally absorbed the slave-raiders (Nubi-groups, see below) and allowed them to settle amongst them, while contributing to their forces. However, I argue that in such a suggestion the devastating violence most likely endured in the region at the hands of various slave-raiders seems to be ignored; furthermore, I argue that this type of history writing has later confused the relation between the Aringa people and Amin's regime in the eyes of researchers and other Ugandans alike. It is widely known that Idi Amin relied heavily on the so-called Nubi component in the army, but there seems to be rather too much conflation between the 'Aringa and Nubi' in present-day reflections on the identity and history of the former.

Nubi

In order to understand this statement, more background information is required. The slave-raiding that affected the region was carried out by various parties over time. First, raiding was conducted since 1820 by those parties related to the Viceroy of Egypt, in search for slaves and ivory in the south (present-day Sudan, the ROSS, and northern Uganda). Later, their posts were abandoned to traders that carried out similar patterns of slave- and ivory-raiding. Later again, freed slaves in these commercial slave armies were incorporated into Emin Pasha's forces when he became Governor of Equatoria in 1878.

⁵⁹ Very few sources on the slave-raiding armies and Emin Pasha's men refer directly to places in what is currently Yumbe District, as will become clear below.

⁶⁰ See for example Titeca (2007 unpublished) and Soghayroun (1981: 55); the latter refers to Kasozi (1965) as his source, a source that I have been unable access.

But, being pushed southwards by the Mahdist revolt in Sudan in the 1880s, Emin and his armies came to be stuck in the southern part of Equatoria, an area known as the Lado Enclave,⁶¹ of which the most southern part later became West Nile and part of Uganda, the region in which Yumbe District can be found today. Emin, stuck in the provinces with his soldiers and their large numbers of dependants, became associated with the practices of the previous slave-raiders, for his men roamed the countryside in search of ivory, food, women, and reinforcement of their troops (Soghayroun 1981; Hansen 1991; Leopold 2005a, 2006). In fact, they were stuck while expecting a return, with time, to their former position (Stigand 1968: ch. 14).

Nubi is the label used to refer to these men in the slave-armies that were common to the Sudanese slavery system⁶² and to their descendants (and these were the troops later inherited by Emin Pasha as his armed forces). While the term initially referred to men from so-called south Sudanese tribes, increasingly over time and with their descent southwards with Emin Pasha, people of local communities in present day Uganda had been incorporated (predominantly through force, as will be discussed below) into the troops (see for example Leopold 2005a: 124-125). The fact that once incorporated in this army they converted to Islam and learned to speak Arabic lent these troops the notion of a unified Nubi identity (see for example Kokole 1995). After it became clear there was no likelihood of a return to Sudan or Egypt for the troops of Emin Pasha via Sudan, and when more and more men loyal to him switched to the Mahdist camp (Stigand 1968: ch. 14), Emin finally decided to leave (in 1888) a part of his troops behind near Lake Albert and to no longer wait for the road to Khartoum to become free again (*ibid.*). The Nubi that remained behind were three years later visited by Captain Lugard, who aimed to use these stranded soldiers to pacify Buganda and become the core military force of the Ugandan Protectorate. Hansen (1991: 563) writes about this period:

[T]hese three years constituted the most decisive period in the formation of the Nubian community. They stuck firmly to their military ideals and organization, and the Islamic basis found expression in their way of life. The feeling 'we are Sudanese' and 'we are Muslims' nourished the superiority they felt towards the local people with whom the main contact was the capture of women and slaves. In their 'diaspora' they maintained the military code of conduct even though they lived dispersed in small groups each growing some of their own food in addition to cotton.

Militarism and Islam were thus from the inception of the colony associated with the Sudanese or 'Nubi-forces', as well as their ascribed identity as natural soldiers (for more information, see Hansen (1991)). When Idi Amin rose to power in 1971, the Nubi were still an important element in the army, next to the Acholi people who formed the largest group (*ibid.* 569).

⁶¹ For the history of this 'Lado Enclave', see Leopold 2009.

⁶² The 'Sudanese slaving traditions' were unique in that militarism and slavery were closely connected. Slaves (at least male ones) would be turned into armies; see Leopold 2006: 180.

The link between the Nubi and the Aringa

Kasozi (1965, cited in Soghayroun 1981: 55) states:

Part of the West Nile district (Aringa) has the most concentrated Muslim element with about 30–40 Quran schools. This is where the Sudanese troops rested under Emin Pasha before he was rescued by Stanley in May 1889. The Sudanese not only converted the people of this area to Islam but most of them decided to stay there.

It is this viewpoint in particular that I want to engage with in this section. Following this suggestion of intermingling by Kasozi, the Aringa have probably been attributed a 'strongly militarised identity' (see Titeca, dissertation, ch. 9, unpublished) and have been suggested to have become part and parcel of the Nubi-group. According to Titeca and many popular notions on West Nile, this history explains Aringa people's natural involvement in the colonial and post-colonial army and in particular their participation in Idi Amin's forces for which the whole region was later collectively punished (see below) because they had such a military exposure very early on and allied themselves to the Arabs/ Nubi. My reading of available secondary literature and the few oral histories I gathered raise some questions about this dominant reading and suggests further inquiry into the process of Islamization and militarization of the Aringa is still required.

My aim is not to dismiss the contribution of Aringa to the armed forces in the regime of Idi Amin; but like De Bruijn and Van Dijk (2007) I argue for the need for an understanding of local histories in order to question dominant narratives that have been written from a national or regional perspective—even if this understanding in this dissertation remains incomplete.⁶³ Attempting a nuanced understanding is particularly important in order not to see 'conflict' between 'tribes' in Uganda as self-evident (see for example Allen 1994). While often portrayed as the bad guys, a more specific regional history-writing is needed to discuss actual roles played, the diversity within the Aringa population, and the historical roots of these roles.⁶⁴

In the following section I show how Islam probably took hold in Aringa County later than suggested in narratives such as the above-mentioned about the pre-colonial slave-raiding period. I also show that the Aringa were in general not 'recruited' but rather abducted by so-called 'Arab forces'.

According to Leopold (2005a), John Middleton, an anthropologist conducting research amongst the Lugbara in the 1950s and 1960s, suggests that the Lugbara had not been affected by slave raiding. Yet Leopold cites informants⁶⁵ from Maracha in the northern part of West Nile who did narrate stories of slave armies coming at dawn to capture able-

⁶³ This query relates to but falls beyond the scope of the research question addressed in this dissertation. Here lies a strong challenge for further historical research.

⁶⁴ Contemporary forms of 'local history writing' witnessed by the author on Facebook and other websites, especially after 2013, show how complex it is to bring alternative stories to the fore, as people posting on the Internet rely on text earlier published about them and seem to select these texts based on political aims, while not trying to offer new interpretations of their history.

⁶⁵ These were Geria's (another author) informants quoted by Leopold 2005a: 126-127.

bodied men and children, killing young children and ‘all senile people’, and looting cattle while destroying the villages (Leopold 2005a: 126-127). A local elder in Yumbe⁶⁶ also leaves no doubt that slave raiding occurred in the Aringa region. As he stated: ‘this place was completely disturbed [by all the invading groups].’ His narrative began with Emin Pasha’s men and his slave armies raiding the area, while before Pasha there were possibly already others (see Soghayroun 1981), and such troubles continued when the former left the region.

The group that then came is referred to as the Jahadiya by Mzee Sadat Aringa. Soghayroun,⁶⁷ who writes about the Jahāddiyya, reports that their activities were initially disruptive and that they forcibly recruited youth in what is currently northern Uganda,⁶⁸ but later attracted followers who willingly sent their sons to join their troops (Soghayroun 1981: 51-52). Both group’s (remnants of Emin Pasha’s army, and the later Jahāddiyya) came from the north.⁶⁹ As suggested earlier, this search for slaves into the northern part of Uganda began when the Egyptian Viceroy was interested in ivory and slaves (the latter were needed both for Egypt’s armies and to protect the militarized trading centers the government established southwards) (ibid. 1). Around 1848 the Egyptian government withdrew its probably too costly presence in the south and left the trade to private enterprises. Influential merchants came to settle in the existing trading posts and maintained the flourishing trade in ivory and slaves (ibid.). Some acquired large troop numbers (read captured men that were turned into slave armies) of ‘as many as 2,000 men in their employ’, and permanent militarized trading settlements in the northern parts of present-day Uganda were supposedly established by 1862 (ibid. 2).

Initially, slaves were recruited primarily further to the north (present-day ROSS), but as of the 1860s it was common among the inhabitants of the trading centers and garrisons—‘Islamised northerners who despised these stateless tribes as barbarous and pagans’—to plunder to collect slaves in the current northern Ugandan region (ibid. 3). Grahame (1980: 9-10) suggests these were very brutal forces. Young men were selected for the Egyptian army, and women and children were sent via Darfur and Kordofan to be sold in Khartoum. According to Soghayroun (1981: 3), marriage between the men in the garrisons and local women also became common practice. With time, certain locals were also attracted to these centers for trade and slowly adopted Islam, while certain ‘tribes’⁷⁰ would join the slave armies (in their search for ivory and slaves) from the trading centers to raid their neighbours (for cattle), thus using the foreigners to fight their own local wars (ibid. 4).

⁶⁶ Mzee Sadat Aringa was the officially known Aringa elder, the most recognized authoritative voice on Aringa history when I spoke to him in 2011. Unfortunately he passed away in 2012.

⁶⁷ Soghayroun suggests they were active in ‘the second decade of the twentieth century’ and made a major contribution to the spread of Islam in what later became northern Uganda.

⁶⁸ Thus he speaks of a region that is much more extensive than the current West Nile region.

⁶⁹ Soghayroun explains the beginnings of this northern intrusion; how the Viceroy of Egypt began the conquest of Sudan in 1820 and had already reached what are currently parts of northern Uganda in the late 1830s (Soghayroun 1981: 1). However, Leopold (2006: 184) suggests, in line with the evolving analysis by Soghayroun, that real establishment in what is currently northern Uganda occurred most likely from the 1850s onward.

⁷⁰ I return to this point below.

Soghayroun (ibid. 4-5, 30-31) presents a narrative of Islam eventually spreading almost naturally in the region through these kinds of collaborations with certain tribes, which also led to intermarriage with local women. He cites sources that portray a slow process of Islamization taking place in the region, which by the time had not been exposed to Christian missionaries (ibid. 4-5). At the same time, it seems abduction still accounted for the disappearance of children and able-bodied men (see Geria, cited in Leopold 2005a: 126-127), and women were often taken as wives (Soghayroun 1981: 30-34).⁷¹

Soghayroun suggests that writers at the time whom he uses as sources about the garrisons saw the institute of slavery as improving the lives of domestic slaves that were looked after well and they emphasized the attraction of Islam's intellectual and material culture radiating from the garrisons⁷²; through marriage and trade expanding to the neighbouring tribes (ibid. 30-31). Johnson, however, seems to link the influence of Islam on the region much more to the military slavery institution, in which abduction and concubinage were the main tools of Islamization. According to him Islamization seems to have been at stake foremost for those who became part of the garrisons, while it was less so for the surrounding tribes (Johnson, 1989). What we see here are two contesting models on Islamization: one (Soghayroun 1981) speaks mostly of the attraction of Islamic faith in what are currently parts of the ROSS and northern Uganda, while Johnson (1989) suggests a model of coercion.

Being part of this terrain in which Muslim armies and traders tried to get hold, to what extent were the Aringa exposed to Islam? Contrary to the stance of the above-mentioned authors, there are reasons to suggest that the spread of Islam was a rather slow and diversified process and not so straightforward as hitherto reported. For example, no names of forts / trading centers on the map of Soghayroun (1981, map No 2, entitled 'The role of the stations in the spread of Islam in Northern Uganda') in the Lado Enclave point to 'Arab settlements' in what is currently Yumbe District during the time in which the region fell under Egyptian rule. Neither with regard to these early trading garrisons, nor with regard to Emin Pasha's later forts when he had to flee present-day Sudan with his soldiers on account of the Mahdist forces is there any reference to settlement in areas inhabited by the Lugbara (except in the citation of Kasozi used above, which is rather unspecific). Soghayroun himself also suggests that attempted settlement amongst the people was not successful, when he writes:

There remained with Faḍl al-Mūlā Bey, Bimbash Aḥmed Aghā and about 200 men, with their followers, at Wadelai, on the east bank of the Nile. This party crossed to the west bank and penetrated inland from Dufile;⁷³ but after roaming about for some months and finding no suitable place to settle, Faḍl al-Mūlā decided to return to Dufile. (1981: 29)

⁷¹ Later, many 'abducted boys' returned after being retrenched as soldiers (see Hansen 1991, and see the story of Aduu below). Of the abducted women, Mzee Sadat Aringa said, 'they never returned'.

⁷² Soghayroun refers here to cultivating extensive fruit and vegetable gardens, growing cotton and weaving it into cloth (1981: 30-31)

⁷³ This move suggests they could have moved towards north-eastern Lugbara, which later became Aringa County, but were unable to settle.

Direct reference to the region of Yumbe or Aringa county as indeed interacting with Emin Pasha and his men is limited in the literature. Leopold (2005a: 120, emphasis mine) cites Harris about such contact:

Emin did not confine himself to the river but went inland and made contact with Alur chiefs, Arera of Nyapea and Aredja of Angal, and in November 1880 a small station was built at Okoro, probably at Paidha. The lands of the Lendu were raided for cattle by Emin's soldiers but it is unlikely that the Lugbara suffered except for minor raids near Mount Wati by soldiers from Ganda station in Keliko. Though Emin made detailed notes on the language of the Alur people, his *only* comment on the Lugbara was that they were 'six or seven days march from Wadelai'.⁷⁴ It appears that his soldiers had a route from Wadelai via *Yumbe* to Keliko and Zandeland for bringing ivory to Wadelai and in this way made contact with the Lugbara. (footnote 20: RH mss Afr.s.1350).

If indeed the main contact was related to ivory trade, there is no need to suggest that this contact was pleasant, as ivory trade in general came together with forced portering and forcing the population to contribute ivory (see Leopold 2005a ch. 6). Middleton states about Emin's presence in the region that 'although he himself [Emin] never entered their country, he employed some Lugbara as servants and his troops raided them' (Leopold 2005a: 120, citing Middleton 1971b: 13). These servants could have been from Aringa County (considering the route via Yumbe mentioned above), and this would confirm the image portrayed by Titeca (2007) of the Aringa known in other parts of West Nile as 'brutalising the rest of the population with the Arabs' (ibid. ch.9). If this were the case, however, it is not clear proof for the whole of Aringa County being Islamized or 'Nubi-fied' at the time. Probably this involved a small group of people, Lugbara or Aringa—or perhaps the people from closer to Fort Dufile, people considered as Madi people at present (see below).

At the same time, there is more concrete reference to the settlement of 'some Sudanese' in Aringa County by Lanning, who writes of raiding forces amongst Emin Pasha's groups in the Sudan who were raiding cattle in areas neighbouring to Aringa (currently Koboko District) and came under attack by the local population when three of them were cut off from their companions. Eventually, they learned that 'some Sudanese were living further north in what is now Aringa' (Lanning 1954: 178) around the early 1880s, and they were able to join these men settled amongst the people there and even find members of their own dispersed raiding party (ibid.). This information thus points to early settlement and integration of 'some Sudanese', whose numbers are difficult to ascertain. Ironically, the son of the raiders later became abducted himself, together with his two sisters, by what were most likely remnants of Emin's forces in the region (ibid. 180). This shows that even if there may have been a small-scale 'Nubi/ Sudanese/ Arab' settlement in Yumbe, this did not spare the population from subsequent raiding and abduction.

⁷⁴ A well-known fort of Emin Pasha and his men at the river Nile.

Furthermore, there is a trace of resistance to the remnants of Emin's forces close to Yumbe in the work of McConnell (1925: 442), who refers to the Lugwari (later called Lugbara): 'It is reported that after considerable aggravation they attacked a body of 600 of Emin Pasha's men at the base of Mount Watti, of whom only three escaped.' These numbers are most likely exaggerated, and the period in which this ambush took place is not clearly stated. Elsewhere, McConnell refers to the extermination of 80 Nubis by the Lugwari (*ibid.* 464). Leopold (2006: 184-185) also cites various sources that support the idea that local deadly resistance to 'slavers' took place.

Arab/Nubi settlement was evident, however, in what is currently Moyo District, to the east of present-day Yumbe District (Fort Dufile), where Islam became widespread as a consequence and was later actively discouraged by the British by purposefully introducing Catholic missions there (Allen 2006: 431; Allen & Storm 2012: 23). According to these authors, Aringa County escaped such colonial attempts at conversion from Islam to Catholicism because the local leader that had by then established himself was a Muslim. Because of his loyalty to the British, his population was not heavily targeted by missionary intervention (*ibid.*).⁷⁵ How exactly then did Islam become so prominent in Yumbe, and what to make of the military identity that would have been brought by these Nubi forces and influence, especially the northern Lugabara (Aringa)?

Leopold himself, and my informants also, suggests that Islam came to the northern part of West Nile and Arua with the returning Nubi. These were men from the region who had been abducted, sometimes as children, and had become absorbed into Emin Pasha's troops or the remainder thereof. After maturing in the garrisons far from their homes, they had grown up to become soldiers that later played an influential role in carving our present-day Uganda. Captain Lugard is known to have mobilized many of these troops Emin Pasha had left behind, to fight under a British flag in the King's African Rifles (KAR). According to local history narrated by various elders with slight variations, one such 'Nubi' returned to his home region by accident and was likely responsible for the spread of Islam there.⁷⁶ He is referred to as Aduu or Fademullah Ali⁷⁷ in local accounts.

⁷⁵ [...] there were concerns among British officers that those people living close to the Nile had been affected by the presence of Muslim garrisons so, to restrict the spread of Islam to other areas, the territory was deliberately isolated. Catholic missionaries were also encouraged to concentrate activities in the area, with considerable effect. Missionaries were similarly encouraged in other parts of northern Uganda too, but the loyalty of the influential Muslim chief, Fadilmulla Ali, to the British during and immediately after the First World War, when the Protectorate administration in the region was stretched to near breaking point, had the paradoxical effect of promoting Islam among people immediately to the west of Moyo. As a result, Fadilmulla Ali's people became a distinctive group of Lugbara sometimes referred to as Aringa (i.e. as a separate ethnic group) and, as the population nearer the Nile converted to Catholicism, the distinctiveness of the riverine people from their neighbours was underlined.' (Allen & Storm 2012:23)

⁷⁶ This is in line with Leopold's recurring argumentation (see 2006) and reference to this process by Allen & Storm (2012: 23); however, I do not feel comfortable with this line of reasoning.

⁷⁷ There are some similarities in the personal history of abduction and later return to Aringa Country of this Fademullah Ali (Aduu) in local history and the story of Fademulla Murjan, whose career in the colonial administration is described by Lanning (1954). There seems to be conflation at work in present-day history telling between the roles that both played in establishing Aringa County as it was demarcated at the time. However, the difference in their administrative posts and the death of Aduu in the 1930s (according to my interlocutors) suggest that these were indeed two different persons. What is clear is that the returning Nubi were initially favoured for administrative posts under British rule (see Leopold 2005a: ch. 5; 2006: 189-190). And the fact that

Faḍl al-Mūlā 'Alī, according to Soghyaroun (1981: 45), was a pagan recruit⁷⁸ to the 'Sudanese', who returned to his home region converted; other sources also report that he became a Muslim after abduction, rather than before.

The narrative by one of the elders in Aduu's clan interviewed in 2012 stated that Aduu returned to his home area (Aringa County) just by accident, which was confirmed in other oral histories I gathered. The elder suggested Aduu was accompanying a European hunter⁷⁹ to the north of what is currently Yumbe District and was recognized by a displaced man from his home area. The man was surprised to recognize Aduu, and several oral histories narrate how at this encounter Aduu was told that the people had thought he was already dead and had held his funeral rites long before. The elder convinced Aduu to come and settle in his home area, and in various accounts he does so after officially resigning and first returning his gun to the hunter/employer he was working for. Upon his return he was soon introduced by the local chiefs to the Belgians or British in an administrative post further away, and they were very pleased with an intermediary who could speak Swahili learned during a long stay in the army beforehand.

Aduu became an influential intermediary, who is most recognized in oral histories for making the dispersed people of the region return after they had been displaced due to extensive slave-raiding and diseases. He was allegedly involved in demarcating the boundaries of what was to become Aringa County and has been popularly accused of expanding the original Aringa⁸⁰ territory in the process. Aringa people themselves have suggested to me that it was specifically on account of the large-scale displacement of the Aringa, who could now return home, that this large county was legitimized. According to others, Aduu's acting as an intermediary and becoming appointed by the British in the local administration had probably led him to become too influential and associated with colonial force.

The British initially relied not only on Aduu but also on other 'Nubians' as chiefs (see Leopold 2005a: ch. 5), who arrived following Aduu (according to local accounts) after being dismissed or retired from the colonial army. Included among these returnees were other people from the region that Aduu had been together with in the army, who either settled back home or in the vicinity of Aduu. As such, these 'Nubis' were perhaps closely associated with Aringa, although one influential 'Nubi' chief, for example, was based in Terego slightly further south (Leopold 2005a: ch. 5).

In general, these chiefs enforced colonial policies, which meant they were responsible for collecting taxes and—in the absence thereof (when people were unable to pay)—for forced recruitment into the King's African Rifles (Leopold 2005a: 85). Leopold (*ibid.* 85-86) cites King (1970: 22) concerning the relation between the early chiefs (Nubi) and the people: 'As the gap closed between the chief and the administration, that

both these figures (and quite a few more) returned around the same period to Aringa County is explained by Hansen (1991), who describes the process of their demobilization.

⁷⁸ Note the use of the term 'recruit' by the author, who doesn't refer to abduction.

⁷⁹ Hunters were very active in the region in the period before it really became part of the Ugandan Protectorate, a violent period in which the area was plundered for ivory—described well in Leopold 2005a ch. 6.

⁸⁰ Where the notion of a 'united Aringa people' came from is unclear, especially considering the acephalous society the Lugbara were suggested to be.

between the chief and his people was in danger of widening.’ Indeed, the Nubi chiefs were not simply popular and easily followed by the population, if one considers the so-called ‘Yakan or Allah-water uprising in present-day Yumbe and surroundings’ that came about in response to outside forces—including the Nubi agents, closely allied to the British.⁸¹

Nevertheless, despite perhaps being unpopular, Aduu was credited with the spread of Islam:

Missionaries were [...] encouraged in [...] northern Uganda too, but the loyalty of the influential Muslim chief, Fadilmulla Ali, to the British during and immediately after the First World War, when the Protectorate administration in the region was stretched to near breaking point, had the paradoxical effect of *promoting* Islam among people immediately to the west of Moyo. As a result, Fadilmulla Ali’s people became a distinctive group of Lugbara sometimes referred to as Aringa (i.e. as a separate ethnic group) and, as the population nearer the Nile converted to Catholicism, the distinctiveness of the riverine people from their neighbours was underlined. (Allen & Storm 2012: 23, emphasis mine)

According to Mzee Mosalih Dada, various versions of the story of how Islam eventually spread in Yumbe exist among the people.⁸² While many people associate Islam with Aduu’s return and the powerful position he obtained (soon to be appointed as county chief), he was, according to Dada, not personally engaged in the Islamization of the people, as he favoured retaining his own exceptional and powerful position.⁸³ While much is left to investigate with regard to the exact ways in which conversion took place, the local oral histories all indicate that it was soon after Aduu returned. Indeed, people in West Nile celebrated 100 years of Islam in the year 2014, while Mzee Dada twice mentioned the year of 1916 as the year in which Islam started to spread.⁸⁴ When there was a demand for conversion, it is suggested, Nubis were invited to what is currently Yumbe district to circumcize people, and they were also called in on account of their knowledge of burial ceremonies. In his narration, Dada suggested the Nubi that were called from Arua to perform these tasks were not appreciated by the local population; they were considered as cheating them.⁸⁵ Mzee Dada made one very interesting remark:

⁸¹ For a good and critical discussion of this ‘invented uprising’, see Leopold 2005a: ch. 5.

⁸² Interviewed in Yumbe town on 22 July 2012.

⁸³ According to the narrative, Aduu had become an administrator under the British and was not himself occupied with proselytization. And when Baba Bilal came from Bombo to settle in Aringa County and wanted to Islamize people, he was ‘brought and beaten by Aduu and urinated blood until he died’. Bilali Ondrunza apparently came later when Aduu was well established, and Ondrunza sought his permission to start Islamization ‘from his [Aduu’s] home’ and not from other parts of the region, which was earlier (in the case of Baba Bilal) probably understood as opposition to Aduu’s unique position.

⁸⁴ This is in line with Leopold’s reference to Doka Ali Kujo, who has stated about Aduu (or Fadimula Ali Aduu, as he calls him): ‘It was after when he became a county chief, the idea of Islam came to his mind in 1916’ (Leopold 2006: 189).

⁸⁵ This resonates with settlement patterns reported in the work of Leopold: ‘after having heard that Fadimula Ali was appointed a county chief of Aringa, the Nubis with whom they had lived together followed him immediately and settled first in Aringa before they moved to Arua town’ (2006: 189, citing Doka Ali Kujo). Hansen (1991: 567) suggests that especially after the First World War, there was widespread resettlement: ‘Soon after the end of the war a process of demobilization started, primarily in order to cut the army down to its pre-war size. The result

that people had already had certain habits that aligned well with Islam,⁸⁶ making it easy for them to adapt to it, which could suggest there had been earlier influences of Islam, in line with the reference by Lanning above (1954: 178) to ‘some Sudanese’ having indeed settled there before. Some people also referred to coerced forms of Islamization within a short time after Aduu had returned home. Others report that people first observed to see what this ‘becoming Muslim’ was all about. They were apparently not convinced in the beginning and also not forced to convert, at least initially. Islam also soon received some ‘competition’—though limited—from Catholicism’s arrival in the region. More research is to be done on the local history of conversion in Aringa County and neighbouring districts.

What emerges from the above is a picture of a fragmented instead of a straightforward process of the establishment of a Muslim and a military identity in Aringa. It seems likely this was a layered process that did not draw in the majority of the population until after the 1920s, rather than that the whole population was ‘Nubi-fied’ at the time of slave-raiding in the late nineteenth century. Today still, many people in Yumbe District know where there are ‘Nubi’ in Yumbe District. There were allegedly such people recognized in two sub-counties out of 13 when I conducted my fieldwork, and their numbers are not considered to be many.⁸⁷ Other informants suggested that the Nubi were not the same as the Aringa. Furthermore, Aduu, arguably the most influential ‘Nubi’, whose return marked the beginning of the spread of Islam to, was not considered a ‘Nubi’ in popular accounts but a lost son, an Aringa.⁸⁸

Despite Aduu also being held responsible for his own downfall in local accounts,⁸⁹ people in Yumbe today trace back their links to Aduu to explain their fearlessness and boldness. I have not heard them make reference to a military association. The idea that the Aringa perceive themselves as natural warriors (see also Chapter 5) is probably learned through army experiences and the selection processes of the army in the early colonial period. It was in the realm of army recruitment and army careers that the Lugbara and people from other regions were taught to apply this self-perception, strongly and initially linked to the Nubi-army identity. Could it be that sleeping sickness prevented the people in Aringa from having access to cattle—required to pay taxes in the early colonial

was that a number of Nubis or Nubians (as they were now frequently called by the colonial administration) became ex-soldiers and returned to their dependants who lived around the cantonments distributed in all four provinces.’ Uganda at the time consisted of four provinces, and this information shows that the Nubi spread all over the country, and only a small proportion could have settled temporarily in Yumbe when they were in search of places to settle (ibid.)

⁸⁶ ‘The Aringa found out that their culture matched with Islam. During Juma days (Fridays), Aringa used to cut nails, shave, wash sandals, clothes. When Islam came, it matched. People were saying, “I think we have to join, because it is a religion of cleanness.” The Aringa people refuse to eat an animal if it dies of its own; in Islam also, this also matches.’ (From notes taken during an interview with Mzee Dada, 22 July 2012).

⁸⁷ An official document drawn up by Yumbe District in 2011 points to Kei and Kuru as these two sub-counties where Nubians are settled, counting them as minority groups that together with other minority groups make up less than 8% of the current population. (Yumbe District Local Government profile 2011: 1)

⁸⁸ Perhaps ‘Aringa identity’ was also established or conjured for the Nubi friends of Aduu that came to settle in Aringa County with him. This would make the Nubi–Aringa link even more complicated.

⁸⁹ One accusation was that he ‘married’ too many women without paying bride wealth (read cattle); and related to this there were disputes—in which he was deeply involved—about cattle, cases concerning which the British were apparently not amused.

period (see Leopold 2005a: 85)—and therefore being disproportionately forcibly recruited into the army?⁹⁰ Did poverty play a large role their army enrolment? Kokole (1995: 48, 53) referred to the economic grievances of Muslims in Uganda, to which the Amin period later offered an answer. And Meagher (1990: 66) explained how a lack of access to education led to the exclusion from advancement of Muslims within the colonial system. This led to their widespread involvement in trade as an alternative means to social advancement (ibid.). Furthermore, the colonial perception that remained influential that one had to be Muslim to make a good soldier explains how the Aringa were easily absorbed into the army. According to Hansen (1977), recruiting practices for the army after independence continued to follow narrowly the criteria dominant in the army-recruiting practices established by the British. Four criteria were important for recruitment: 1) a certain height, 'which favoured the northern population groups and handicapped the Bantu group'; 2) certain 'tribes', which 'by virtue of their warlike traditions, constituted the best soldier material'; 3) educated people were considered not really suitable for the army; and 4) it was believed that Islam constituted a good background (Hansen 1977: 76). The last criterion explains why for Muslims from Aringa County (currently Yumbe District), joining the army was one of the few routes to social advancement, along with other forms of labour migration or trade.

It was in the process of aligning themselves to other traders in the region, who were mostly Nubi, that some Aringa came to see themselves as Nubi. Inter-marriage, especially in towns, also played a role in this process. Throughout the time of Idi Amin, 'becoming Muslim' and learning to speak the *lingua franca* of the Nubi was a strategy adopted by a large variety of people, and this was definitely not solely an 'Aringa practice'. Kokole (1995), for example, refers to people from all parts of Uganda, neighbouring countries, and other religions as 'becoming Nubi'. This, indeed, is in line with the widespread acceptance that the Nubi identity could be seen as an elective identity—or, as Kokole (1995: 53) quotes Twaddle: 'sociologically the Nubians form a fascinating category for scholars to study forming as they do ... a secondary and expansible social category capable of assimilating Ugandans previously classified under other tribal names.'

In conclusion, I have tried to emphasize in this section that it is probably too easy to explain the existence of a Muslim community on the border of northern Uganda by equating the people there with the Nubi as they were known before and during the early colonial period. I have tried to show that the people in what is currently Yumbe District have their own unique experience of interacting with the 'invading forces' and of Islamization, and that they have probably suffered deeply under intense slave-raiding, rather than smoothly absorbing the Nubi strangers in their midst. At the same time, precise information is lacking. All sources, however, point to the fact that a Muslim identity gained shape only after 1914. Simultaneously, the early Nubi influence nearby (in

⁹⁰ McConnell (1925: 440) describes how sleeping sickness is prevalent in the north-eastern part of the Nile. Aringa County belongs to the 'lower' parts of the province in which the tsetse fly thrived. Similarly, Mzee Sadat Aringa spoke of dispersal of the Aringa due to sickness in the time before Aduu returned home. Dak (1968: 77) states about a later period: 'In 1920's and 1930's, Aringa was seriously affected by sleeping sickness, and the people had to be moved by government to areas free from disease.'

present-day Moyo District) seemed to be effaced through colonial intervention facilitating conversion to Catholicism. Nevertheless, the Nubi identity, which is seen as an elective identity, possibly drew in quite a number of people with trading aspirations in urban centers, and I have suggested that poverty was one of the main reasons for joining the army.

In the following section, I proceed towards the period in which Idi Amin was in power in Uganda and what this meant for people in present-day Yumbe District.

AMIN

During my fieldwork, I could not easily access people's memories about the period in which Idi Amin was in power, a regime to which the Muslims of West Nile in particular have been strongly linked.⁹¹ It is too easy, however, to suggest that memories of this period's infamous regime are purposely not shared out of a need to hide people's involvement, and that these memories therefore do not easily come to the 'ethnographic surface'. More factors seem to play a role. Perhaps I was too wary, assuming a hesitation by people to talk about this 'loaded' history. There is reason, as the first case study below shows, to believe that the sensitivity was all mine, that one could for example take pride in one's participation in the army of the time. Perhaps due to my wariness I did not insist enough on learning more about people's experiences of this period. However, it is also a generational matter to a certain extent: many of my elderly interlocutors, people in their late forties and fifties, were still young during the days of Amin (see below under the sub-headings *Fear and secrecy* and *Innocence*), which meant that they themselves did not have extensive personal memories of this period. Furthermore, as I show in the next section of this chapter, which elaborates on the period after Amin was ousted, it seems that Aringa collective memory starts just then, at the period in which 'everyone' was suddenly persecuted for association with his regime. People were collectively targeted in revenge killings, and everyone had memories and/or family memories of this period. Nevertheless, not everyone was engaged in and supportive of Amin's regime when he was in power, or was aware of what exactly was happening in other parts of the country.

The three fragments of memories below open this section on the 1970s in Yumbe and larger Uganda to show the type of narratives I *was* able to access in interviews. Thereafter, I use secondary sources to provide an impression of the Amin regime as it was experienced elsewhere in Uganda,⁹² before moving to the aftermath of this period that so strongly marked the people's history and future.

⁹¹ Harrell-Bond suggests that, throughout her research, Amin's former military men largely concealed their identity when they fled to Sudan (1987: 2006), and Leopold (2005a) also acknowledges this particular part of history (people's narratives on being part of Amin's army) as largely inaccessible to him.

⁹² Of course, every region, town, village, and individual had their own, different intensity of experience with Amin's forces.

Pride

On the roadside in Yumbe town stands a small hut. An old man and his wife reside there in appalling poverty. Alcohol use seems to be one of their shared problems. The man is sick. He always greets me and we try to make conversation in Swahili. They seem to be outcasts, I understand, as they do not have land, their hut is falling apart, and—according to rumours—the man’s relatives do not look after them. People blame this on the man’s alcoholism. While our communication remains limited to his medical condition and his weakness, there is one point when I get a glimpse of his past. With pride and shining eyes, he refers to the ‘Simba battalion’, an army battalion he was part of. To me the latter resonated only with atrocities in the Mbarara barracks I had read of.⁹³ I am dazzled by the pride I see in his eyes when he speaks of his participation in this battalion, but our contact, despite my trying to engage a research assistant to support the conversation, never again touches upon this past. When I return to the field in 2012, the man is deceased. (Based on a compilation of field notes, 2011–2012)

This first case study suggests that this particular man was not inhibited about talking about his time in the army, nor wished to hide his pride concerning being part of a specific battalion; rather, language barriers, health problems, and alcoholism prevented a deepening of our conversation. In general, problems with health and with alcoholism prevented interaction with people from this generation (see also Chapter 4). But the pride that emerges in the account above is not completely absent in some of the offspring of Amin’s army-men. Furthermore, when probing a few interlocutors whose fathers had been part of the army, an image emerged of fathers that were rightfully loyal to the army commander (Amin at the time). When I probed a female friend on whether her father could have been part of an army that committed unlawful violence, she suggested that whatever he had done was part of his task in the army, and she suggested there was nothing wrong in what he did. In general, my youthful informants did not reflect on this part of their parents’ roles during the Amin regime, while an army career and the wealth some with higher rank had obtained during those days were considered ‘normal’ (see also Chapter 4).

Fear and secrecy

The second interview fragment comes from Annet, a woman in her late forties and her sister Nancy in her late twenties. The elder sister lived in Aringa County⁹⁴ in the 1970s while their father held a responsible position in Amin’s army. Before 1972 she had grown up in army barracks in other parts of the country, as her father had joined the army before Amin took power. The younger sister had not yet been born by that time; she was born after the period discussed below. Nancy acted as a translator in the conversation cited here. She did not recount her personal experiences, as she did not have any for those days.

⁹³ See Rice 2009: 220

⁹⁴ Before Yumbe became a District in 2001, it was called Aringa County and fell under Arua District.

JB: In those nine years, did you see your father?

A: Yes. He comes once a month and then goes back to war.⁹⁵

JB: And were you never worried about your father?

N: Huh?

JB: Were you never worried about him when he was at war?

A: We were very worried and fearful. When we would hear that 'they have killed some people', we would fear that our father is amongst them ... [inaudible] ... but when he would come home again, we would jubilate.

JB: And when he came home, would he tell stories about the war?

A: He didn't tell! He didn't tell He doesn't tell those stories. Except he has a radio call. He wakes up at 4 AM and talks, and communicates to those people [in the army]; but when the family members happen to see him, he is like hiding it. He doesn't want the children to hear, what they communicate. Because they [the children] are going to reveal to neighbours. As a soldier that was not needed.

I used to fear my father so much! The moment he came home like that Ah, ah ... you would feel you should not even pass around here. When he is here and when you pass around here, you feel like urinating on your body. So we [the children] feared him a lot. When even he calls you like this ... it is terrible. So we feared.

N: Annet was telling me: when he touches you, he takes you by the ear [demonstrates].

N+ A: Eeeh

N: And he raises you from the ears up He was not [an] easy man.

[A. confirms this by waving her hand up and down and looking pained]

[...]

JB: Do you know why your father joined the army when he was a young man?

A: I don't know

JB: You don't know?

N (translating for A.): She says she can't tell exactly, but what she thinks is because he was very poor. And children were there, nobody to pay them [...] so that he had to join the army so that he pays his children, probably. (Interview, 22 October 2011)

The discussion here provides insight into how an army commander behaved and did not allow his family (out of fear of the neighbours) to discover any form of army communication going on when he was at home on leave. And while not sharing information about the war and all that was going on under Amin's regime, his return home nevertheless instilled fear in the children through his behaviour.

Innocence

The third fragment I share here comes from an interview with Isaac, a man who was in his late teens in the 1970s. He was going to school in Gulu because he had a relative there who paid for his school fees. I asked him about his experiences there, because at the time, Amin's army was known to heavily persecute people in that region (Acholi and Lango

⁹⁵ The Mutukula war in 1972 (when opposition forces to Idi Amin made their first attempt to enter Uganda to dispose of Amin, they entered from Tanzania at Mutukula) made the father decide to bring his family back home to live in Yumbe instead of near his army barracks.

people) while the man came from the West Nile region that was known as Amin's support base.

JB: And during the 70s, you were in school in Gulu?

I: Jah

JB: How was the atmosphere in Gulu?

I: Ahh, it was terrible. It was terrible. Even me, I was scared like eeh ... these people ... the State Research [State Research Bureau staff], they had these cars, these my cars [personal cars], you find somebody put into the boot of the car.... People are piled there, sometimes [makes a movement with the hand as if compressing/pushing something down to fit in the boot] they are tied there. It was terrible. We saw them. I saw them with my own eyes. But those were things which were very, very inhuman. [looks away] Very, very inhuman. Me, I did not like it; but for us, they fear, they were fearing us in school. Jah. Knowing that, these are people from West Nile, they used to fear us, thinking that we are what? We are intelligence. If you want to befriend someone [...] the next day this person was running away from you. The life was also difficult for us, because we were like being isolated, because of what had been happening. We didn't know what their parents were telling them about us.

[...]

JB: And at what age were you then, approximately?

I: I was around, around 17 years, yes. But the way they liked me was ... I was a footballer and I was also a runner. [starts smiling] I was terrible [terribly good] in those short races. One hundred metres, two hundred metres, and I was also playing football [...] It earned for me, at least At least I was able to interact with the others. But still Others were looking at us as ... as informants.

JB: And how did it make you feel about the West Nile people. When you saw that they were doing such things?

I: Now what to do at that age of mine? And I was in school.

JB: Jah

I: I did not even reason very far. But to me, when I try to reason things which I saw, during that time, and when we were ousted and when we were in Sudan [as refugees], I started now to remember ... that these things our boys were doing actually were not the right one, were not *human*. They were very bad. I started realizing them

JB: Eeh

I: ... when we were now in Sudan. But if we were not behaving in that way, at least the government was going to stay (Interview, 24 October 2011).

This interlocutor narrates having witnessed terrible and frightening actions by the State Research Bureau as a teenager and the ways in which he was able to overcome isolation. He also claims that his full realization of how inhuman what was happening was came later, when the people from his region were forced to flee into exile when Amin was ousted and when that made this interlocutor reflect on events. Note that he speaks of *we* and of *our boys* and with some nostalgia perhaps when he says: 'but if *we were not behaving in that way*, at least the government was going to stay', suggesting that Amin would not have been ousted.

The last two memories shared suggest that much of what was happening in other parts of the country was not necessarily known to people within Yumbe. For example, Annet's father does not speak about 'the war' at home, and Isaac knew what was

happening in those days only because he stayed outside his home region.⁹⁶ The same argument has often been made about the wealth Amin's soldiers and commanders were able to accumulate during his regime: people in Yumbe often suggested that this wealth never really trickled down to Yumbe, except for a few corrugated iron-sheet roofs, but rather was 'consumed' in the south (see Gersony 1997: 73; Leopold 2005a: 65).⁹⁷ Further research into this field would be interesting, to see if indeed there was a relative disconnection between the south of Uganda and a remote (but considered 'Amin friendly') place like Aringa County.⁹⁸

The following section is based on secondary sources, to provide an impression of what Amin's regime looked like from other parts of the country.

VIOLENT RULE

Following a long army career (which started in the colonial army), Idi Amin,⁹⁹ an army commander under President Obote, came to power after a coup ousting Obote in 1971. While initially received with considerably enthusiasm, the regime soon became very violent. The army was increasingly used to purge its own members of the Lango and Acholi ethnic groups, which were supposedly loyal to the former president, Obote. Massacres in the barracks and disappearances of 'common men' soon became rampant. According to Kasozi, all people considered Amin's political opponents were at high risk, but violence also became more widespread and extended beyond targeting opposition members:

All the members of these paramilitary units used violence for their own selfish motives: the demarcation line between officially sponsored and private violence was very thin. Thousands of people in Uganda were tortured by government agents. (Kasozi 1994: 113)

'Disappearances' were the most visible manifestations of the absence of rule of law. People were arrested or abducted and killed outside established legal structures. The government became the major law breaker in the country and bad elements in society followed. (ibid. 115)

⁹⁶ Peterson & Taylor (2013) suggest that media use by Amin was pervasive. One interlocutor (young at the time Amin was in power) claimed his radio-speeches in Swahili were listened to in Yumbe at the time as well. However, this does not mean that people were aware of the depth of the violence perpetrated by Amin's men, because the media was instrumentalized by Amin and his government (ibid. 66-67).

⁹⁷ Gersony, amongst others, has confirmed this: 'But these benefits accrued to Amin's individual allies, not to the West Nile as a whole. Except for the installation of a communications satellite (which has long ceased to function) and a failed project to build an international airport [both near Arua Town, JB], Amin's home region benefited little from government programs during his regime' (Gersony 1997: 73).

⁹⁸ One link was probably through soldiers and commanders returning 'home' occasionally, like Annet's father.

⁹⁹ His West Nile origin has been used to explain his violent rule of Uganda, either by pointing to his Kakwa origins (his father was a Muslim Kakwa, his mother a Christian Lugbara) or by referring to his Nubi origins, an identity he could equally claim according to his growing up in army barracks with a military father, while having learned to speak Kinubi (see Leopold 2005a: 57-61).

A report by Amnesty International (1978) confirms the widespread abuse of power by the various notorious security forces, of which the State Research Bureau was considered one of the worst:

[...] this [the State Research Bureau] is the much feared State intelligence agency (reportedly about 3,000 strong). Its powers override other security agencies and it is directly under the control of the President. (ibid. 7)

Amnesty also reported the total collapse of an independent legal system and the commonness of disappearances, torture, and murder in the late 1970s. The accounts of torture that surface in many documents about the time are horrific; they include accounts of prisoners made to club each other to death and many other forms of severe torture (see for example AI 1978: 14-15).

Initially, the army under Amin still had a broad ethnic base, but increasingly (due to purges and fleeing soldiers) the army (and other repressive organs, see Kasozi 1994: 112-113) had come to be built largely on recruits and commanders from the West Nile and former Anyanya fighters from south Sudan.¹⁰⁰ Within its West Nile army base, there was soon a narrowing down of Amin's support base as, according to Kasozi, increasingly the Alur, Madi, and Lugbara people were also persecuted, leaving the Kakwa, those referred to as the Nubi, and the Anyanya behind in the army (ibid. 112).

By 1975 the Kakwa-Nubi-Anyanya core had closed ranks and was the foundation of Amin's power machine. They held most of the strategic positions, manned key installations, and easily grouped whenever there was trouble. The other alienated West Nile groups did not fight Amin because they rightly judged that it was not in their interest to overthrow him. If he were overthrown, they would be punished for their natural association with him. (ibid).

Amin capitalized on his Muslim identity to gain international support for his regime, and many people converted to Islam in this period 'partly for opportunistic reasons' (Kokole 1995). However, Muslim leaders also disappeared later during his regime (Kasozi 1994: 108). It is likely that the Aringa Muslims were those referred to as Nubi in the statement above and not as Lugbara, because of their Muslim religion, and survived many of the purges and personal vendettas in the army, although not necessarily at the end of his regime.

People from Yumbe who had already been in the army before Amin came to power now increasingly had access to better positions in the army. New recruits were also easily found in a region where brothers already in the army helped their kin to be recruited, based on patrimonial networks (field notes, JB). For youngsters from the region, it was one of the few avenues to social mobility.¹⁰¹ Being Muslim facilitated their access to

¹⁰⁰ Amin, while still army commander under Obote, had fought alongside the South Sudanese Separatist movement Anyanya. After the first Sudanese civil war ended (which lasted 1955–1972), Amin allegedly engaged its former fighters to increase his loyal base in the Ugandan Army (Kasozi 1994)

¹⁰¹ See Grahame 1980 (ch 1). Leopold (2005a: 65) states: 'One West Nile exile who attended a local secondary school in the late 1970s told me of army lorries turning up at the school empty, late at night, and returning to

the army and their relative loyalty to Idi Amin, who was not only ‘from their region’ but also a fellow Muslim. Towards the end of his reign, in 1978–1979, the army had become extremely violent towards civilians (Decker 2014: ch. 8). Rape, looting, and brutal killings of civilians, especially when the regime was increasingly under threat by invasion from Tanzania, characterized Amin’s last months in power.

After the fall of Jinja, Amin’s soldiers had been on the run, and people in eastern and northern Uganda suffered brutal violence from the retreating soldiers. In their wake they left a stream of blood from Jinja, Nakasongora, and Fort Portal. Thousands of people were shot and their property vandalized. All types of motor vehicles were snatched from unarmed civilians. (Kasozi 1994: 126)

Not long thereafter, revenge was collective. Muslims and West Nilers all over Uganda were persecuted (RLP 2004; Leopold 2005a; Decker 2014).¹⁰²

Decker relates how some of her interlocutors in Uganda (like mine, and those of Hansen & Twaddle (1988: 3) she quotes in the conclusion to her book) tend to argue that the second Obote regime, which came shortly after Amin was ousted, was worse than that of Amin. Amin’s men allegedly targeted individuals, whereas during Obote’s second regime, people were killed indiscriminately. However, some of the data used in Decker’s chapters suggest otherwise, namely that rape and bloodshed were also widespread and indiscriminate in the Amin regime’s final days (see Decker 2014: ch. 8). Be that as it may, it is important that this is an aspect of the way in which the Amin regime is remembered: relatively less terrible in its violence than the regime(s) that followed. This view is particularly strong among the people of Yumbe, who arguably were exposed to relatively little actual violence—that is, if they stayed within Yumbe—during the time of Amin,¹⁰³ while for them all hell broke loose after his ousting. The following section discusses this period from the perspective of Aringa County.¹⁰⁴

1979 AND THEREAFTER

In general, the contemporary narrative of history by the Aringa people starts in 1979, when Idi Amin was removed from power and after the soldiers they refer to as ‘our [Aringa] boys’ had to run home and passed through West Nile to flee to Sudan. It was not only the soldiers and those of higher rank that were at risk now that the political tide had

their bases full of recruits for the forces, sometimes almost entire classes of boys.’ Leopold describes this recruitment as one of the few options for young men from a region (West Nile) marked by a proletarian position: ‘Within the ethnically stratified economy created by a Ugandan version of British Indirect Rule [...] it had nothing to sell but its labour, and that was unskilled and poorly paid’ (ibid.).

¹⁰² Decker also refers to how the Libyan forces Gaddafi had sent to help Amin defend his regime against the Tanzanian invasion were brutally murdered amongst others (Decker 2014: 154, 164).

¹⁰³ While the spin-offs of physical violence, like the fear felt by Annet above in the relationship with her father, were present in Yumbe.

¹⁰⁴ This is not to suggest that the experience of people in other parts of West Nile was so very different from the one in Aringa County. The Refugee Law Project has written about this experience for the broader region (2004).

turned;¹⁰⁵ Leopold (2005a: 66) shows how all people in West Nile were regarded by other Ugandans as ‘Amin’s people’. And indeed, soon their lives were at stake. People in Yumbe retain many personal and more collective memories about the violence perpetrated against them during this period. These memories emerge throughout this section, which is based on primary as well as secondary sources.

Initially, the region was taken over by the Tanzanian army, the Tanzanian People’s Defence Force (TPDF).¹⁰⁶ When the Tanzanian forces left and Obote II took over,¹⁰⁷ Obote’s forces, perceived as an Acholi/Lango army (the UNLA), took power and set about inflicting massive retribution in the West Nile region in return for all the atrocities that had been committed against them under Idi Amin by people from the region (see for example Allen & Storm 2012: 24). In other words, the people of West Nile¹⁰⁸ were held collectively responsible for the atrocities committed by Amin and his army/security forces. The atrocities committed during this period of revenge by the UNLA then caused almost all people in West Nile to flee to Sudan (and Congo) (Harrell-Bond 1986; Allen 1991). As a result of atrocities, around 500,000 people in West Nile fled across the nearby borders of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, then Zaire)—around 80% of the population of the region (Gersony, cited by RLP 2004: 6). This period is remembered as a defining moment in Aringa (and the larger West Nile) history. Many atrocities were inflicted when the UNLA entered the West Nile region, and these actions play an important role in the memories of the elderly and the more politically engaged young people in Yumbe up to today. Public executions and displays of the mutilated bodies (of former Amin allies) in the rural area made a large impact on rural people, many of them simple peasants. The most horrific collective narratives of atrocities stem from this period. They refer to ‘newborn babies pounded in mortars’, plastic burned on people, and people buried alive with fire above them (field notes, JB). People in Yumbe often stated that whereas the Amin regime had been violent against the Langi/Acholi population, it was nothing compared with the extreme violence perpetrated against West Nilers in the aftermath of Amin’s reign—as is also suggested by Decker (see above).

Whereas the UNLA committed atrocities in the whole of West Nile and the whole population was forced to flee because of their association with ‘Amin’s (and his army’s)

¹⁰⁵ Although Harrell-Bond states: ‘Despite all the rumours that the liberation army intended to eliminate all the Madi, Alur, Lugbara and Kakwa because of the association of their home area (the West Nile) with Amin, most Ugandans attempted to remain within the country. The exodus from Uganda into the Sudan and Zaire in 1979 was highly selective, consisting mainly of people who had particular reasons for believing that their lives were in danger [...] they came in private cars, lorries, buses and some even escaped by helicopter’ (1986: 32). Later she suggests that these early ‘refugees’ were predominantly in the category ‘Kakwa’, ‘Nubi’, and she distinguishes the category ‘the military’, while there was overlap between these (ibid. 33-36). On pp. 37-38, she pays attention to the ‘Sudanese returnees’ amongst whom people who had served in Amin’s army took up confusing positions upon return.

¹⁰⁶ Many sources say the Tanzanian forces (TPDF) were friendly, but this is contested by my interlocutors and also in the work of Harrell-Bond (1986).

¹⁰⁷ Formerly ousted president Obote had returned to Uganda; and after an interim government won the elections, many parties spoke of rigged elections and formed rebel groups throughout the country to oppose the Obote II government.

¹⁰⁸ And Muslims in general; see Decker 2014: ch. 8.

home region', it took a long time for many people in what was then the north of Aringa County (now Yumbe District) on the far northern border of Uganda to flee. Many fled in phases, continually escaping and constructing temporary shelters in places that were still safe. It took time for the UNLA to get hold of this most northern part of the West Nile region, especially as self-defence groups¹⁰⁹ within Uganda and former army-men under Amin now exiled in Sudan were emerging in an organized manner, trying to defend their people left in Uganda. One of the aims of these self-defence groups was to protect people, who had had to flee all of a sudden, so that they could return to their fields and harvest their crops. Another activity these groups engaged in was laying ambushes in order to obtain weapons for their defence and a possible return to power. By October 1980 the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) had come into being and was able to organize 'surprise attacks' on the UNLA in West Nile (RLP 2004: 6).¹¹⁰ According to one of my interlocutors, they were able to re-take Arua and ended up in Bondo, just below the regional capital. But this man, formerly a member of Amin's army (but later jailed under Amin after becoming too vocal about arbitrary arrests), accused the rebels of being disorganized, interested only in loot,¹¹¹ and therefore easily defeated. Arguably, it was internal division that soon made it possible for the UNLA to push these rebels back into exile again (ibid. 7). The rebels pulled back in phases to give civilians time to flee, while during their retreat there was much fighting. In particular, on 24 June 1981 at Ombaci, not far from Arua town, the UNLA engaged in a massacre of the civilian population that had sought refuge in the school and church compound that was also an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) camp at the time.¹¹² The withdrawal of the UNRF seems to have taken place along ethnic lines. Former Aringa officers withdrew to Yumbe and later Sudan, while former Kakwa retreated via Koboko to Sudan and DRC (ibid. 7).¹¹³ According to the same source, tensions over leadership increased the tension between the various factions, while aims also differed: some were fighting for the restoration of Idi Amin, while others fought for liberation of the region and return of civilians (ibid.). Apparently there was even more to disagree on:

¹⁰⁹ In Yumbe, reference was found to four such groups, and I was informed about one in Terego sub-county (field notes, JB).

¹¹⁰ According to some of those active in the local defence groups, the UNRF relied strongly on those 'volunteers who had stayed behind' (the initial self-defence groups) to re-enter and stage attacks in Uganda. For example, some self-defence groups, in attacks on the UNLA, had already captured weapons. Nowadays, some of these old 'volunteers' that I encountered claim they were the real 'freedom fighters' and complain about neglect by the former UNRF leadership with regard to recognition and compensation claims/pay after resigning in 1986 from rebellion activities.

¹¹¹ See also RLP 2004: 9.

¹¹² Survivors have lately accused the UNRF of hiding behind the church compound, putting the civilians in the church at risk by now being positioned in-between the rebels and the UNLA (JRP 2014).

¹¹³ This leads us to wonder were Lugbara (non-Aringa) and, for example, Madi former Ugandan Army (UA) staff were in this narrative, for it was known some of them were part of these armed movements. (The UA refers to the Ugandan Army under Idi Amin; thereafter came the Uganda National Liberation Army as the new national army).

Tensions came to a head with the arrival of a cache of arms dropped at a Yumbe airstrip—which had been prepared for the event—by a plane reportedly from Libya. Some accounts state that when the arms arrived, most of the fighting forces thought that they were entitled to their share. But in practice, arms were given to selected officers on the basis of ethnicity, a number of Kakwa officers were allegedly rounded up, and internal fighting ensued. (RLP 2004: 7)

By February 1981, two rebel groups had distinguished themselves. The UNRF (Uganda National Rescue Front) was headed by Moses Ali, a Madi from Moyo, himself in exile (in Pakistan) where he was organizing resources for the rebellion, and Major Amin Onzi, the *de facto* leader on the ground, coordinating the attack in Uganda against the UNLA. For the second group, FUNA, perceived as a Kakwa group, it seems leadership was less clearly defined (*ibid.*).

Despite the temporary protection by local defence forces and the rebel groups that formed thereafter, the ‘common’ Aringa people almost all fled into exile over time, leaving everything behind in Uganda, or were robbed of everything they carried on the way once they entered Zaire or Sudan as refugees (Harrell-Bond 1986). In these countries, either they ended up in refugee camps, which at times had limited capacity to handle the large influx, or they became self-settled in the borderland (*ibid.*; interviews, JB).¹¹⁴ Both options had large implications for morbidity and mortality (Harrell-Bond 1986). For many parts of the West Nile population, by crossing the border they fell from one insecure situation into another. While the local people generally supported the rebellions that claimed they fought for the people of West Nile, they were at the same time a source of trouble. *‘As one woman said, “In exile, the Congolese looted and raped us. Amin’s soldiers too. They had nothing, so they looted. We were just refugees.”’* (RLP 2004: 8). And later, the UNLA even made incursions into Sudanese territory, chasing the Ugandan refugees there.¹¹⁵ The overall situation in exile was harsh and became increasingly difficult (Harrell-Bond 1986).

When we look at people’s experiences from 1979 to the time they returned from exile, starting from around 1986, these can encompass a complex series of events: people often report more than one episode of violence, engaging with various threatening actors and life conditions, and thus undergoing recurrent experiences of extreme hardship (see next chapter). The following diverse experiences were reported:

-Many people had been directly affected by UNLA (and TPDF) atrocities and lost family members. The group psychological impact of this period is very strong. Many stories about the cruellest atrocities are about this period. There are references to pregnant mothers’ stomachs being cut open,¹¹⁶ young babies pounded in mortars, and people

¹¹⁴ Woodward (1988), however, wrote about a few army officials under Amin who were well prepared for refuge and built houses in Sudan before Amin fell.

¹¹⁵ Harrell-Bond explains that the UNLA had made agreements with the Sudanese army to enter their territory (1986). (See also Crisp 1986: 171)

¹¹⁶ Seen as unprecedented cruelty by locals, but Decker’s sources (2014: ch 8 & Conclusion) tell of similar acts carried out by Amin’s soldiers.

tortured by the use of melting jerry-can plastic, as well as public executions (field notes, JB; RLP 2004: 5).¹¹⁷

-The exodus from Uganda itself was a shocking experience for many and remained so throughout the early 1980s. As Harrell-Bond reports about her observations in Sudanese refugee camps in 1982 (1986: 53):

The condition of the Ugandans who came to these reception centres from May through to August was appalling [...] I watched the hundreds of people—not only children but also adults—swollen with Kwashiorkor or other nutrition-related diseases crawl off the lorries. Hundreds were too far gone to be saved by food or medicine, as is confirmed by the death rates collected in the 1983 survey.

-People who returned to Uganda under the protection of the local defence groups, returning to harvest food crops, were sometimes killed (field notes, JB; Harrell-Bond 1986), indicating that the protection by local defence groups was not always sufficient.

-As mentioned before, this was also the period in which local youth and men mobilized themselves in the region, aiming to defend it from UNLA incursion. Some were former soldiers; others were youths that joined after witnessing atrocities or undergoing maltreatment by the UNLA. Today they call themselves 'volunteers' or 'freedom fighters' and take pride in their immediate action to defend the people.¹¹⁸ They were relatively successful in defending the people that returned home from exile secretly to harvest. But they were also brutal: they killed many government soldiers (UNLA) in ambushes to obtain weapons. One anecdote, for example, recounts how they travelled with the skull of one of these soldiers on a stick to Sudan, to show their people that they were successful in their battle against the UNLA (anonymous interview, JB).

-Some interlocutors indicated there were problems with the UNRF (field notes, JB), the rebel group formed in south Sudan by former Idi Amin soldiers to regain power and fight the UNLA in West Nile. Though mainly perceived as defenders of the people, a man in Kuru¹¹⁹ and another in Kei¹²⁰ explained how their fathers were killed by the UNRF because they had been active Uganda People's Congress (UPC) members and thus linked to and

¹¹⁷ Crisp, basing himself on a Minority Rights Group report (no. 66, 1984: 10), reports different types of atrocities in this period: 'According to refugees arriving in Sudan, anyone who could not escape from the advancing army [UNLA, JB] was killed, often in the most gruesome circumstances. It was alleged that old and disabled people had been stoned to death, that whole families had been burnt alive in their huts and that the dismembered bodies of men hacked to pieces were displayed on the branches of trees' (Crisp 1986: 165).

¹¹⁸ One former 'volunteer' claimed they were there before the UNRF came into being and suggested that they levelled the ground for the UNRF to come in. This is also a political claim, because lately the UNRF has been struggling to get paid 'compensation' for their laying down of weapons when Museveni came to power. In a political climate that rewards former rebels (see Chapter 4 this dissertation and Finnström 2010), claiming to be amongst these volunteers is also a political claim that suggests there is need for recognition (locally and nationally) and financial reward/compensation.

¹¹⁹ Name of a sub-county in what is currently Yumbe District.

¹²⁰ Idem.

willing to work under the Obote II government after Obote came to power again. Other local pro-government leaders survived but only after negotiating with the rebels concerning their good intentions. Others claim they were abducted to increase the UNRF rebel forces or were put under pressure to contribute to this rebellion.¹²¹

-Some people on the far border of Uganda with Sudan who never went into exile, or who settled just across the border as 'self-settled refugees', fell victims to the SPLA when the latter formed in the 1980s in the southern part of Sudan. The SPLA engaged in looting, abduction, and terrible torture and killing (field notes, JB).

Most of these hardships seemed to come to an end when Museveni came to power in 1986 and asked people (who had not yet returned under the 1985 Obote II Okello regime; see Crisp 1986) to return home from exile. The organization of this repatriation became chaotic, however, when the SPLA in southern Sudan became more and more active around the same period,^{122 123} forcing refugees to 'flee back home'¹²⁴ and leave behind the few things they had managed to acquire over the previous years in Sudan.¹²⁵ Their return to their destroyed homes in Uganda in the later stages combined with a massive influx of Sudanese refugees into northern Uganda, including into the West Nile region (Allen 1991). While some NGOs such as the Lutheran World Federation were particularly active during this period of people's return to Yumbe, apparently they were unable to relieve much of the suffering (ibid.). Many people report that hunger, sickness, and death prevailed and that they found their houses destroyed and overgrown by bush. Some life histories are full of tragedy following the return to Yumbe. During my fieldwork, a man in his sixties said about that time: '*Many of us were traumatized by then.*' While their family had experienced a particularly difficult time in exile (losing their mother when she gave birth to her ninth child early in the exile period, staying as a child-headed household with young infants in which he was now 'the father and his eldest sister was the mother'), it

¹²¹ RLP (2004: 9): 'Thus, while the insurgents initially enjoyed a relatively high degree of civilian support for their actions, this began to dissipate once they began to get caught increasingly in the crossfire. Furthermore, the lack of understanding as to the specific agendas and profiles of the two groups [FUNA and UNRF, JB] reflects the extent to which the groups failed to articulate their grievances, as well as the lack of a coherent leadership that otherwise may have galvanised unity. As a result, it was clear that the majority of people had little idea why the groups were fighting beyond a general notion of survival or regaining their former status within the army.'

¹²² According to Prunier (2004), this was strongly related to Museveni's support.

¹²³ Other reasons for a chaotic repatriation were that 'UNHCR policy demanded that the process happen much quicker than the refugees had planned, and began actively pushing for urgent repatriation' (RLP 2004: 11).

¹²⁴ Allen calls them 'refugees from refuge' (1991: 6) rather than returnees. Many Sudanese nationals also fled to Uganda in the same period (Allen 1991).

¹²⁵ Many people had wanted to wait in order to harvest their planted crops before return. This could have prevented much misery in the years after return, but Allen states that it was the SPLA's explicit aim to obtain the harvest of refugees in order for them not to have to prey on the local population. 'In 1986, the SPLA's strategy was to remove the Ugandans before they had harvested their crops, in order to secure a food supply without pillaging the local Sudanese population' (Allen 1991: 11). Some refugees were originally planning to stay in Sudan a little longer, particularly in cases when their hosts had offered them fertile land to cultivate; this was the case for some of the so-called self-settled refugees. Others were running lucrative small businesses and intended to stay, had it not been for the SPLA incursions (based on various interviews in Yumbe, JB).

seems the period of return was particularly painful to remember on account of the extreme hunger. For John, my interlocutor in this case, it was more difficult for him to speak about the return than about the period of exile.

Thus, returning from Sudan, many people faced significant hunger, and a lack of proper healthcare led to high mortality rates (see Hamid in the next chapter, and Tim Allen 1988 & 1991a). Others managed to stay behind in Sudan, engaging in lucrative business opportunities, but eventually fell victim to the SPLA. On the more political level, we need to understand what happened next in terms of collaborations between, and promises breached by, the former rebels, the UNRF, and the new government just before the coming to power of Museveni.

The UNRF, as a rebel group that emerged after Idi Amin was ousted and Obote came to power for a second time, had a relatively good understanding with the two Okellos who took power in 1985 after a military coup that removed Obote's second regime. After the coup, Tito Okello invited all insurgent groups into the government, and it is likely there had already been an understanding before that with the UNRF about the need to oust Obote.¹²⁶ Thus, the short-lived regime of the Okellos brought a lull in the fighting in the region, and attempts were made to end the cycle of revenge killings: '... there are reports that the elders in both Acholi and West Nile communities met and held ceremonies in order to reconcile the people from the two regions' (RLP 2004: 9).

But the alliance of the UNRF with the Okellos had put the relationship with the NRA, led by Museveni, at risk. Apparently, the UNRF and Museveni's NRA had made an agreement in Tripoli before the Okellos came to power.¹²⁷ The UNRF was resourceful to the NRA because they had an alliance with Libya that could provide the NRA with the much-needed weapons in their fight against Obote. The agreement was that the first of them to reach Kampala and overthrow Obote would appoint a new president, while the second would obtain the vice-presidency (LIU 2003: 34). Yet before either of these groups reached Kampala to overthrow the Obote II regime, there was a coup by the Okellos, which the UNRF then openly supported as suggested above. This move placed the UNRF in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, there were attempts by the elders to reconcile the West Nilers with the Acholi and Lango, in order to prevent another wave of violence and revenge (RLP 2004: 9). At the same time, this collaboration now breached the arrangement the UNRF had with Museveni.¹²⁸ A split occurred within the UNRF. There were those that joined the Okellos' regime, and there were contingents that continued fighting along with the NRA in the bush until Museveni was able to defeat the short-lived

¹²⁶ Crisp (1986: 177) refers to a secret meeting held in the Sudanese town of Nimule at the border. At this meeting, General Basilio Okello had solicited the support of the UNRF and Amin's former defence minister. 'A deal was struck, and several thousand members of Amin's old army returned from Sudan to Uganda, where they were deployed in support of the new government and against Museveni's troops.' On the other deal, between UNRF Moses Ali and Museveni (see Liu Institute for Global Issues 2003: 33-34).

¹²⁷ Confusion over this agreement persists up to today, but the formation of the UNRF II is popularly explained by a breach of the agreement (see Liu Institute for Global Issues 2003: 33-34; RLP 2004: 9)

¹²⁸ According to RLP (2004), Moses Ali, the former UNRF leader, disputed that the breach of such an arrangement between the NRA and UNRF was at the base of the formation of the later UNRF II, but many other people used this as explanation (RLP 2004: 12).

military regime led by Tito Okello. It is this period prior to Museveni's rise to power that thereafter caused confusion and distrust between the UNRF and the NRA. According to one interlocutor (described as from the former UNRF 'political wing') cited by the RLP:

But then the trouble came when Lutwa [Tito Okello] went to Sudan and wanted UNRF to join them to overthrow Obote. It did this, without consulting its former ally, the NRA. In this way, the UNRF breached the terms of the Memo of Understanding, thereby forcing the NRA to continue the struggle against Lutwa, because in its view, Lutwa was not different from Obote. Subsequently UNRF soldiers upon arriving in Kampala found themselves fighting their former allies at Katonga. (RLP 2004: 10)

In January 1986 the NRA took Kampala,

... heralding a new political dispensation and a consequent confusion as to the future status of previous rebel groups. The immediate impact was that thousands of soldiers from both FUNA and the UNRF, along with some civilians, withdrew into West Nile and eventually into exile. (ibid. 10)

Local people related that at this time (without all the wealth accumulated under Amin's regime, including motorized vehicles), the soldiers returned from Kampala to West Nile on foot and reached home often with bare and swollen feet (field notes, JB). Large-scale revenge was avoided, however, and Leopold (2005a: 52) reports that the elders in West Nile actively instructed their people to receive the NRA with friendliness and went to welcome NRA soldiers at Packwach, the first town one reached after crossing the Albert Nile from southern Uganda on one's way to West Nile.

Despite the peaceful entrance of the NRA into West Nile territory, soon thereafter some of the few UNRF who had remained in Kampala and sought alliance with Museveni's regime felt persecuted. They were arrested and disproportionately fired from the army in a World Bank-encouraged exercise to cut down on military spending (Gersony 1997; RLP 2014: 4). Many retreated into West Nile. But also within the West Nile region, former UNRF felt harassed:

... there was growing insecurity in West Nile, with individuals being imprisoned and killed. One ex-combatant told of the constant harassment of an ex-UNRF individual: '[He] was constantly harassed by security. His wife was tortured by security agents. They stuck a stick in her vagina. That was in Yumbe.' (RLP 2004: 12, citing Asedri Oyemi from the political wing of the UNRF II)

The former UNRF forces began to fear that the persecutions were a forerunner to a wave of revenge similar to the one experienced after the fall of Amin under the UNLA. This fear increased with disappearances and arrests, notably of Moses Ali, Rajab Rembe, Major Alidiga, and Major Noah Talib (see RLP 2004: 12) *'We suspected they were going to eliminate all leaders of UNRF, so then in 1988 UNRF II began'* (ibid., citing an ex-UNRF II combatant, Kampala). A group of former UNRF combatants, including Bamuze, the chief of staff of the former UNRF who had been shot in the leg in Arua, withdrew to Congo, and soon thereafter, supported by the government in Khartoum, these former soldiers and

rebels re-organized themselves and started attacking the NRA regime from Sudanese and Congolese territory and becoming deeply embedded in proxy warfare (for more details, see Prunier 2004). Within a short period, in the early 1990s, the rebel group WNBF became active in the area,¹²⁹ and later in the 1990s the UNRF II became active.¹³⁰

The access to borders and neighbouring regimes played a large role in the engendering and maintenance of these 'new' rebel groups. As Bogner & Neubert (2013: 61) describe it: 'In this period, especially in the 1990s, northern Uganda also became a secondary arena for the Sudanese civil war and the civil war in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire).' References to the deep entanglement between the Sudanese Khartoum government and these rebel groups are also found in Prunier (2004: 376):

In early February 1997 the UNRF II guerrilla group led by Ali Bamuze had attacked the village of Midigo (Aringa County) in West Nile. This move had been organized by the Sudanese secret service which was anxious because the main body of West Nile guerrillas (the WNBLF) was at the time crossing over from its bases in Zaire and surrendering in large numbers to the Ugandan army.¹³¹

It was no secret that the UNRF II was supported by the Sudanese government. According to Nassur Ezaga Ogara (cited in RLP 2004: 13), they were in Sudan in 1998 with a force of 3,000 (after a period of slow formation from 1988 onwards, when Bamuze fled to Zaire initially after having been advised to do so by the elders, who apparently sent some young men to protect him but not with the intention to initiate a rebellion) (ibid. 12-13). The UNRF II combatants were based in south Sudan, often next to Sudanese government army barracks. Some former combatants in interviews with me explained how they would receive food cooked in the Sudanese army barracks, and how money could sometimes be earned (paid by the Sudanese army) by fighting against the SPLA. They made no secret of their arms supplies and often claimed to have fought 'terrible battles' against the SPLA, from which some 'former child soldiers' were able to show bullet scars and testified about many friends killed in such battles. It seemed that my interlocutors did not feel inhibited about discussing these battles, while they were much more reluctant to give accounts of their engagements in battles and lootings within Uganda. Even though the grievances and the aims of the UNRF were related to the problem of feeling persecuted in Uganda (ibid. 13), the UNRF II combatants thus became engaged in a much larger conflict.¹³²

¹²⁹ The WNBF was headed by Juma Oris, a former minister and army commander, and was formed around 1994. The group, referred to as West Nile Bank Liberation Front (WNBLF) by Prunier, was seriously defeated in the south of Sudan in 1997 by the combined efforts of the UPDF, the SPLA, and rebels from Zaire and Rwanda (Prunier 2004: 376-377).

¹³⁰ According to Bogner & Neubert (2013: 62), who interviewed Major General Ali Bamuze, the UNRF was formally founded in 1989.

¹³¹ In a footnote after this fragment, Prunier states: '746 of them were tried in a mass trial two months later and released after a symbolic condemnation (*New Vision*, 23 April 1997). Most of them eventually joined the Ugandan army' (Prunier 2004: 376).

¹³² Prunier (2004) has published an insightful article about rebel movements and proxy warfare in this period in which the UNRF II became involved. At the same time another group was active: new abductions (of teachers

The WNBf was associated primarily with the Kakwa, while they also recruited on the Koboko-Yumbe border. An example comes from a place called Matuma on this border, where in 1996 more than 72 new voluntary youthful recruits to the WNBf were massacred by the UPDF after they discovered the mobilization taking place (interview, parish chief, 10 November 2011). The WNBf also abducted widely in Yumbe thereafter. (Leopold, who was doing research at the time in Arua, was unable to travel much outside of town because of such rebel activities, while at the same time noting the SPLA presence,¹³³ and he compared the style of the WNBf—looting, raping, and abducting youngsters—with that of the former slave raiding troops active in the region (Leopold 2005a: Introduction). A particular target became the Sudanese refugees and the humanitarian aid organizations in Yumbe. Payne (1998) explained this by reference to envy by the Kakwa (in the WNBf) of the facilities that refugee hosting brought to the Aringa region, and no longer to their own, when the UNHCR decided to move many refugees from Koboko to Aringa County. It was widely suggested that the WNBf in particular was able to bank on a widespread dissatisfaction among a generation of youth that had missed out on education during their period in exile and had had a difficult time surviving upon their return to West Nile. It was suggested that these young people had no education and ‘did not learn how to dig’, because in exile, food was handed out—at least for a long time—by the UNHCR. The promise of \$300 for signing up to the WNBf was suggested to be particularly important in their recruitment (Gersony 1997).

While the WNBf and the more Aringa-based UNRF II became well known in the region as notorious rebel groups, my data point to a more varied composition of armed actors / small rebel groups also active around this period. These small groups were explained to have caused enormous havoc in specific areas. The various rebel groups were sometimes said to be used to settle personal scores, and businessmen and women were particularly often targeted for their money. People in Aringa County again experienced a new period of fear and lootings of livestock and property under the WNBf, UNRF II, and smaller groups of rebels. Many people became displaced and fled to Arua or Yumbe town or were practising forms of ‘night commuting’: for extended periods having to sleep in the bush (in maize fields or mango trees) and ‘commuting’ to their fields at day-time.¹³⁴ The search for

and schoolchildren amongst others) took place in Yumbe and neighbouring district Koboko in 1998 by a group headed by Taban Amin (son of Idi Amin), to fight in the DRC against Kabilia, beginning in Kindu. Taban Amin had both mobilized former WNBf combatants and engaged in abducting new recruits (Interviews JB; Prunier 2004: 378). Abductees were taken to Sudan, where a plane was ready to transport them to the DRC where they became deeply engaged in the Congo war. In 2004 they were finally repatriated to Uganda and brought to Yumbe. The group I spoke of spoke of a number of 345 Ugandans who were finally repatriated to Uganda, while having lost 101 of their Ugandan colleagues in Congo (Group Interview Tuliki Parish 12 November 2011). During the abductions, rape, looting, and killing took place, according to the same interlocutors.

¹³³ Something also mentioned in RLP 2004: 11.

¹³⁴ One underexposed factor that was probably significant during these periods of local rebellions was that people within the community mistrusted each other. Hamid in the next chapter says about this: ‘You could not stay here. Everyone was looking for a place to sleep [hiding in the bush or in towns]. I could stay with you during the day, but I would not tell you where I would sleep [out of fear that some people in the community might be ‘rebels at night’].’

food and money by the rebels was often accompanied by beatings and rapes. Killings were not infrequent, but some people indicated their lives were spared because they were able to give the rebels money. Refusing to give money at times when it was expected to be available (e.g. at times of salary payment to teachers or when business people were returning from a market) resulted in atrocities, as did political membership or working for the government as a chief, and so on. Local chiefs were most often suspected of passing information about the rebels to the army and faced high risks.¹³⁵ In some specific belts of insurgency, the insecurity was at times extreme, and civilians suffered not only from invading rebel groups preying on the local population for survival, sex, and reinforcement while aiming to attack ‘informants to the government’, but also from the pursuing army, the UPDF.¹³⁶ For example, in Odravu, rebels had killed some local people as they advanced; then, while in the process of burying their dead, the community came under fire from a government gunship, which caused new deaths and suffering. Similarly, landmines were used in a specific area in Odravu-Kuru—and perhaps also in other locations—resulting in the death of many individuals, while others had to live on with the traumatic consequences (loss of limbs, sight, or family members). In other ‘bushy’ areas in the district where rebels ‘preferred to hide out’, whole populations fell under the suspicion of the government’s soldiers. They were accused of hiding rebels (although often falling victim to them) and were caught in the midst of ugly violence or were massively displaced. Sudanese refugees who were settled temporarily¹³⁷ in the area by the UNHCR were also affected by all this violence.¹³⁸

Eventually, the WNBF was defeated in 1997,¹³⁹ and the UNRF II negotiated peace with the Ugandan government. Depending on whom one talks to, different reasons for the peace are given. One important dynamic that contributed to the UNRF II’s need to return to Uganda was the fact that they lost the support of the Sudanese government; yet others lay the causes of peace with the roles women and elders played in convincing their

¹³⁵ In 2011–2012, one former chief was collecting all data on these government servants who were killed or tortured/harassed in those years for serving the government, with the aim of making the government aware and asking for recognition and remedy. A selective recognition of such people took place at a medal-awarding ceremony in Yumbe in May 2011 that was highly political and contested by others, some of whom were not informed. The former chief I mentioned was completely unaware of this meeting and had not been invited.

¹³⁶ For example, in an FGD (8 July 2010) with women in one of the sub-counties: The first woman: ‘...another problem was, when this UNRF II, when they [the UPDF] realized that maybe a member of this family has gone into the bush ... what they used to do was come and invade the family. The UPDF, they come and invade the home where they caused a lot of atrocities, killing the members of such a family, and because of that they [women] used to prevent their kids to go to the bush, in order to prevent UPDF from destroying their families.’ The second woman continued: ‘... sometimes what used to happen is when this UPDFs, they realize that maybe your husband is in the bush, they come and beat you up as a woman.’ (I understood the last expression to mean that such women were raped).

¹³⁷ The region proved very unsafe for refugees, and Oxfam’s Bidibidi camp was attacked (Payne 1998).

¹³⁸ We do not know much about how much the WNBF and UNRF II caused insecurity and fought local people in south Sudan, where they were based when supported by the Khartoum government of Omar al Bashir to fight a proxy war. See Prunier (2004). Here lies an important subject for more research.

¹³⁹ Prunier reports large losses when the WNBF together with rebels from other groups were ambushed by the SPLA; more than 2,000 of them died, and 1,000 were taken as prisoners of war (2004: 377).

husbands and sons, respectively—when they would occasionally visit their homes at night-time—to give up the struggle. Another important moment noted as influencing the embarking on the road to peace was when the community within Yumbe heard threatening talk in a meeting called by the UPDF's 15th battalion, which was stationed in Yumbe, about the massacre that would ensue on Aringa territory if the rebels did not come out of hiding. These threatening words were pronounced while the first gunship ever seen in the region was attacking the UNRF II further south of Yumbe town and also making civilian victims. The otherwise tough male leaders in Yumbe all started to shed tears at this meeting, including the civilians present; this was a turning point in motivating high-ranking UPDF staff from the region to intervene by forming the Aringa-Obongi Peace Initiative Comitee (AROPIC), which aimed to negotiate peace.¹⁴⁰

CONCLUSION: A COMPLEX HISTORY OF CONFLICT

I have chosen in this chapter to write a history of violence and conflict—and not a history of everyday life or of economic life in the region, for example. The extensiveness of violence and conflict legitimizes this choice in connection with my research question. One cannot write the history of West Nile without asking how these histories of violence, militarism, and rebellion have affected people in the region up to the present. But the answers to these questions are not straightforward or simple, as I will show. The remainder of the dissertation is concerned with the answers that emerged in everyday practices and perceptions people had about themselves and their histories and how they engaged with these.

Trying to comprehend who was affected by conflict and in what way, leads us to an intricate puzzle that definitely complicates the more established readings about the late 1990s in Aringa County, readings that portray the two rebel movements of the WNBF and the UNRF II as relatively clear-cut groups of actors. These readings omit the Ugandan national army (UPDF) as an important participant in the violence,¹⁴¹ the roaming thugs that seem to have operated on their own, and also those dynamics that are locally considered as incursions, such as the large-scale abductions by Taban Amin, and the cross-border conflict dynamics with SPLA involvement that impacted the region. Nobody as of yet seems to have written a comprehensive history of the Aringa in the past century. While this would be a very important contribution to make, this dissertation is far from complete in its historical reconstruction but aims to open the debate for a more complex understanding of the people and their histories, in order to also come closer to an understanding of present-day social dynamics in Yumbe.

¹⁴⁰ According to a key interlocutor, a local chief who had been present at the meeting in 1998: 'It was the first of its kind where more than 50 civilians in Aringa County—this time Yumbe District—went into tears.' The shedding of tears it started when an Aringa working for the UPDF spoke in the meeting and then burst into tears (Interview, 18 November 2011).

¹⁴¹ Though RLP (2004) and Bogner & Rosenthal (2014) point to the fact that the role of UPDF in committing atrocities needs further research.