Conflict legacies

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

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5. 'STRONGER THAN MAHOGANY': 'ARINGA IDENTITY' AND SOCIAL IMAGINATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MALE YOUTHS

The Aringa are warmongers […]. We have war at heart.
(Spontaneous comment by Muhamad, 29 years old, soon after explaining a land conflict that had become violent two years before)

The reason Kony never entered here is because he fears the Aringa people.
(General response to the question of why the LRA had never attempted to enter the region)

INTRODUCTION

In a 2005 book about the history of West Nile, Mark Leopold describes how a group of Lugbara elders in Arua in the late 1990s aimed to contribute to peace in the West Nile region, something touched upon in the introduction to this dissertation already. In order to disconnect the people in the region from the disproportionate and—according to them—unjust associations with violence, they literally engaged in rewriting history. They argued that West Nile itself had become a victim of violence (post-Amin) because of the incorrect interpretations of its history. Leopold describes the efforts of these elders as a project of social reconstruction, aimed at national inclusion (under the NRM government) and peace in the region. This important attempt by the elders, which has borne certain fruit such as improved relations with the central regime in Uganda, did not, however, necessarily resonate with all layers of society. Not everyone in West Nile has appropriated this peace-seeking attitude that had its core, it would seem from Leopold's book, among elders and teachers in Arua town (Leopold 2005a).

During my fieldwork, I observed that in Yumbe District on the fringes of West Nile, in general, educated people such as district staff, local NGO staff, and religious leaders also subscribed to the notion that history had been misread and that the Aringa, as a subgroup of the Lugbara, had been particularly misunderstood as violent. Such people often claimed that the Aringa were in fact peace lovers, and they had the then recent (2002) successful peace agreement to fall back on in their claims.[224] The peace

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[224] In official writings and communications, the district and local people take pride in the peace agreement. Others, however, have argued that the peace agreement should be seen as an achievement of *negative peace*, since it rewarded the perpetrators of violence with reintegration packages but left issues of justice vis-à-vis the victims of violence untouched (Bogner & Neubert 2013).

agreement came about, among other reasons, through the intense involvement of local women and elders in convincing their family members to return from rebellion (RLP 2004). Thus, claims about their inherent capacity to reach peace, coupled with the successfulness of the peace negotiations, generated a solid basis for their assertion that the Aringa are in fact peaceful people. In popular proposals written to apply for funding in Yumbe District, NGOs and CBOs referred to a past in which the region had been particularly victimized (instead of having been violent) and emphasized the fact that it was now completely peaceful. Indeed, there was an active attempt to shake off the legacies of the past and move towards a more development-oriented future.

Despite these public and political initiatives, in this chapter I argue that, at the same time, at least three powerful counter-forces can be discerned working against this political project—of (re)constructing a peaceful Aringa identity—being led by the elders, educated elites, and local community organizations. First, former rebel combatants—on account of the negotiated peace process—have been able to maintain influential status in the community after their reintegration since 2002. Their continuing political influence means that a militarized political identity has, to a certain extent, remained intact (see previous chapters and Bogner & Neubert 2013; Bogner & Rosenthal 2014), despite a strong development-oriented discourse in the district government, and this identity contrasts with the image of the district as peaceful and now disconnected from conflict.

Second, and related to this, it is not easy for the Aringa, the people of Yumbe District, to change their reputation as it has been built up among the neighbouring peoples. During the UNRF I and UNRF II rebel activities, in particular, many people from neighbouring districts were significantly affected by violence, and they associated this violence with the Aringa people since they were predominant in the make-up of the UNRF I and II (see Rwehuru 2008: 178-180). Personal memories of interactions with rebels from these groups, as well as with the WNBF rebel group, continue to cause people to express bitterness towards those from Yumbe District today.[225] Thus, it remains difficult for the people of Yumbe District to shake off their association with violence among their neighbours. As a ticket controller from Arua told me on the bus from Kampala to Arua in 2010, on the occasion of my first visit to Yumbe District: 'Yumbe is a hostile place. People there are hostile. Especially because of their religion. People in Yumbe are like our Iraqis.' In general, perceptions in Arua of Aringa youth also lean in this direction, where they are primarily known for their work as 'OPEC boys'.[226] Lecoutere and Titeca quote the Arua mayor (2007: 7), who said: 'These [Aringa] boys can be tough; they are former soldiers and rebels. They are dangerous and could go back to the bush if not treated carefully.'

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[225] Based on field notes I made after repeatedly speaking to people in Arua about their experiences with rebels in or around Yumbe in the 1990s. At the same time, individual family, collegial, or friendship relationships between people from Yumbe District and the neighbouring districts are also often good.

[226] Titeca (2006: 1, English version) describes the OPEC boys as 'a group of men who smuggle fuel, paraffin and vehicle oil from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Arua town in Uganda, where they sell it. They call themselves the "OPEC boys", after the coalition of oil-producing countries. They are about 300–400 men strong, and employ a whole range of other actors, from transporters to children acting as watchmen. They are the most prominent and visible actor of the second economy in Arua.' At the time of Titeca's research, it was suggested that two thirds of the OPEC boys were Aringa (ibid. 4).

Lecoutere and Titeca go on to suggest that this is a widely shared opinion in Arua.[227] From the perspective of non-Aringa people from outside of Yumbe District then, the historically developed image of the Aringa as inherently violent is rather dominant.

Third—and this counter-force forms the focus of this chapter—during my research with youth in Yumbe District, it became clear that some of them saw themselves as inherently warlike, or at least as vigilant and prepared to fight and die if need be. This self-perception[228] of being people of inherent fearlessness and potential violence is what I examine in this chapter. How can we understand such statements as 'the Aringa are warmongers ... we have war at heart' (the opening quotation in this chapter), and what do such constructions of self mean for the chances of the 'new' peace to really take root in Yumbe? What does it tell us about conflict legacies?

In this chapter, I examine the section of the youthful male population in Yumbe that employs violent stereotypes about the Aringa to describe and characterize themselves. These stereotypes are in stark contrast with the agenda of the elders in the late 1990s whom Leopold writes about. But I also point out the ways in which male youths in Yumbe variously relate to these historical and cultural-political forms of identification: some draw upon such discourses of violent identifications as 'Aringa', and others do not—or in a much lesser way—and have alternative discourses and images of self to tap into within the context of Yumbe District. In order to embed this discussion, I first look into a wider notion of 'Aringa-ness' shared by most of my interlocutors in Yumbe, which forms the shared foundations of self-perception among young men in this research, before I enter into the analysis of the more violent self-identifications, their use in discourse and potential and actual practices, and the diversity therein.

'TYPICALLY ARINGA'

Apangu: So even if you go to any part of Uganda, you can be able to find an Aringa, the language he speaks, you can be able to know: that one is an Aringa. Here in Moyo, there are very many; Adjumani, there are many; Gulu, there are very many. Kampala, you know about it, eh? Even Mbarara, they are there; Jinja, plenty […] even if you go to Lugazi[229] […] you may think that that is a place of Aringa people […]
JB: Up to today? [I ask, assuming that the speaker is talking of a past migration pattern.]
Rasul: Yah, many!
JB: And what kind of jobs do the people have? Is it specific work that they have? Like trading or anything […]
Abori: For?

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[227] The authors show that this is an image the OPEC boys embraced and also created for themselves, which closely links to the theme of this chapter.

[228] I use the term 'self-perception', or 'identification', because I believe it explains better what is at stake than the essentializing notion of 'identity'. Some of the young men in this chapter recurrently referred to the ways in which they saw themselves as a people. This does not mean that this was the only view they held; and even though these images kept recurring in different situations and narratives, we know that identities should be seen as shifting and that narrations about oneself are context bound (see for example Willemse et al. 2009).

[229] Lugazi is known for its sugarcane plantations. For reference to Lugbara (including Aringa) labour migration to these plantations in the south, see Dak (1968).

JB: Aringa people?

Abori: What I know is, they are *die-hards*, they are always strong-hearted. *Any* kind of work they are willing to do.

Group: Mmm. [Confirming]

Rasul: They do any kind of job.

Abori: That is why business owners like them; they can lift heavy loads. If you go to Kampala, there are very many [Aringa] loaders because of their *physique*, eh? *Their body*. So they don't fear; as long as there is something out of the work they do, they just do it.

(From an FGD on Aringa history, 25 May 2011, emphasis mine)

In the above FGD fragment, a portrait of the Aringa is sketched out by reference to their working 'everywhere', having migrated out of Yumbe and being recognized by their engagement in mostly unskilled, heavy physical work. Through their expressions, we see that young men take pride in the strength, the bodies, and the notion of fearlessness that they associate with 'being Aringa'. In this fragment, young men employ descriptions of themselves as Aringa that are shaped by colonial and post-colonial experiences of labour migration and low education levels that led them to work in unskilled jobs (see Meagher, 1990; Leopold 2005a).

An important feature of Lugbara history has been the out-migration of young men. During the colonial period the British sought to exploit the strength and fearlessness that they recognized in the people whom they believed were remnants of the Nubi armies that settled in West Nile after their flight from Sudan. They therefore approached the region as a labour reserve, a region that was not to be developed but rather exploited for its manpower. Since then, the Lugbara (among them the Aringa), Alur, Kwakwa, and Madi, were, like the Acholi, widely recruited into the army and other armed positions (such as security guards) and also into the tough work on sugarcane plantations further south.[230] Through their encounter with the British and the stories that preceded this encounter, West Nilers have had to engage with the image of being recognized as inherently fearless and strong, as natural warriors and violent people. In the words of Leopold: 'I have shown elements of what later crystallized into a discourse of West Nile and its inhabitants as wild, violent and lawless' (2005a: 129). As Leopold shows, these stereotypes were created and reiterated frequently in the second half of the twentieth century to explain Idi Amin's violent rule. These labels, while being indiscriminately projected upon West Nilers in general during the liberation war, were predominantly applied to the Kakwa and Muslim Lugbara (mostly Aringa).[231] The latter two groups formed Amin's favourite powerbase in the army, along with Sudanese recruits described as ex-Anyanya fighters, and former Zairean freedom fighters (Ravenhill 1974: 241). After Amin was overthrown, these former Kakwa and Muslim Lugbara soldiers and officers engaged in various rebellions (see historical chapter).

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[230] 'Within the ethnically stratified economy created by the Ugandan version of British Indirect Rule, the West Nile district occupied a proletarian position—it had nothing to sell but its labour, and that was unskilled and poorly paid' (Leopold 2005a: 65).

[231] See Titeca dissertation (unpublished), Chapter 9.

The expressions of young people in Yumbe today, as shared above, can thus be explained by reference to historical stereotypes, embodied pre-, colonial, and post-colonial identities, and can also be related to the formation of a *military ethnocracy* in northern Uganda (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 8). This has meant that people from the various northern regions were recruited in large numbers into the army, leading them to start to see the profession of arms as their natural vocation (ibid.).[232] Finnström (2008), however, writing about the Acholi people at the turn of the century, heavily criticizes this idea that the Acholi have developed a military identity. He shows how a few of his young interlocutors as well as elderly people employed historical statistics to correct this dominant reductionist image of the Acholi as violent and militaristic, an image that has proven vital in fuelling the war in the Lango-Acholi region after Museveni came to power (see Finnström 2008: ch. 2).[233]

It is crucial for this chapter to understand that the effects of such a military history and stereotypes are being embodied by a group of young men in Yumbe in the present, and thus they continue to have an influence on young people's discourse and actions. More so than Leopold and Finnström, I therefore draw attention to more complex and diversified ways in which young people relate to such pre-, colonial, and post-colonial legacies, instead of arguing that history has been misinterpreted and that all Aringa people in present-day Uganda disassociate themselves from these images of them as a people.

Beyond these embodied histories, I came to understand my young interlocutors' tendency to point to their physical strength as one of the few resources they could fall back on as young uneducated men. Their physique was often referred to by young men themselves as a source of pride. This can be easily understood, for these bodies—and beyond their physical bodies, the notion of fearlessness with which they could make ultimate use of their bodies—allowed them access to the limited opportunities accessible to them to make potential progress in life, engaging in heavy physical work or finding work for security companies (the few economic niches that were open to them). In other

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[232] While such recruitment was already common since colonial times (see Grahame 1980), during Amin's presidency one of the few opportunities given to young men from the region was recruitment into the army. See Leopold (2005a: 65) on the recruitment of whole school classes of boys at the same time.

[233] In fact, on the topic of youth, Finnström states: 'during my fieldwork I encountered some young men, frustrated by the collective blame put on the Acholi, who painstakingly collected data and statistics to challenges the image of the Acholi as violent and militaristic' (2008: 82). I have two main remarks concerning this point, which he also makes for his elderly interlocutors. The first is that these statements by the young men in his research are very political, aimed at explaining the injustices done to the Acholi people, who are seen as being held collectively responsible for the atrocities committed during the bush war. The second is that, as in the work of Leopold (2005a), one gets the impression that these contestations of such an Acholi image are mostly promoted by a small group of interlocutors, possibly the well-educated and elite segments of society. Finnström does not show how widely these ideas are shared by the wider community of youths in his research but rather seems to refer to a few important interlocutors. With this last point, I do not claim that this view is not much more widely shared among the Acholi, but that young people (also in Finnström's research context) could have held different positions regarding the contestation of the Acholi as 'natural' warriors, in fact some might have embraced the idea. In this chapter, I aim to look more extensively at who identifies with particular discourses (of militarism, peacefulness, or less reductionist images) and why, paying more attention to diversity among my young interlocutors.

words, they see their bodies as the only means with which to accrue value in the contemporary society they find themselves in (see also Cole 2011: 81; Honwana 2012: ch. 5). By emphasizing their strength and fearlessness, they thus make use of specific references to specific forms of masculinity. Quite contrary to the aims of the elders in Arua and Yumbe, as well as to those of district staff and people working for CBOs/NGOs, these young men embraced this more ruthless and potentially violent identity consciously (as a resource) and sometimes less than consciously (when pointing to the embodied, internalized 'naturalness' of these ideas for them).

In the fragment from the FGD above and as recorded in other data, many young men often put forward an image of themselves as strong, hard, resilient, and fearless. The following is a fragment from my field notes, which shows how such imagery returned in relation to mobility, a topic central to Chapter 7. Here it serves to show how the notion of oneself as a young Aringa man, in terms of strength and endurance, plays a role in daily praxis and self- and community understanding.

> Atama tells me that they (his family at home) recently received a phone call from his younger brother Ronald (23 years old, incomplete secondary school) in Juba. Initially, it seemed that in March 2012, after struggling for survival in Kampala for some months, he joined a popular bus company on its route to Juba as a ticket controller or loader. However, we were never really sure: it might have been a one-day job to reach Juba without paying for a ticket. Finally, after many months, there was now a bit more information: 'Ronald called two days ago. He told my mum that he is fine, that he is like *jingele*, very strong!' Atama laughs out loud about his brother's self-description. His young aunt joins in the laughter. I cannot laugh with them, as I do not know what is so funny. Atama notices: 'You know *jingele*?' I admit I don't. 'It's a local name for a tree, a type of tree that is stronger than mahogany!'[234] 'So what does it mean?' I ask. 'It means that he is very strong, very tough, that he will manage the conditions in Juba.' Atama laughs again. After a while I ask: 'And what is Ronald doing now in Juba?' It appears that Atama knew that his brother was selling clothes before, clothes he had brought from Kampala. But he does not know if that is still the work he is doing, and he imagines his stock to be long gone. He admits he is not sure about how his brother is surviving. (Excerpt from field notes, 8 August 2012)

In this case, Atama spoke of how his brother Ronaldtook pride in his strength and endurance to deal with hardships and misfortunes faced in the process of his migration. In many cases like these, people did not simply display fearlessness and preparedness to face hardship, but also suggested a normalization of engaging with hardship. Similar cases re-emerge in Chapter 7, where such qualities are seen as particularly core to the Aringa people vis-à-vis neighbouring populations and are used to explain migration by the Aringa into difficult regions. Young men refer to deeply embedded and embodied notions of self that resonate within the wider community—Atama and his aunt fully recognized what Ronald was referring to. These self-perceptions also did not remain simply self-images, for they were often used to refer to prospective migration paths that were subsequently undertaken or to explain a person's past choices.

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[234] East African mahogany (*Khaya anthotheca*) is a locally growing tree known for the hardness and durability of its wood.

THE INFLUENCE OF TERRAINS AND HISTORIES ON THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION

The appeal that interlocutors made to their strength and fearlessness was particularly appropriate as a resource with regard to their specific surroundings—that is, the terrains they grew up in and that shaped them as they moved through life (Vigh 2006). As Vigh expresses it:

> The way we, as social categories, inscribe ourselves in the world is dialectically related to our social horizons and thus to our conceptualization and demarcation of our physical and social terrains and our possibilities of action within them. Historical memory and the perceived congruent movement through time of individual and group is part of what shapes the agent's sense of what is normal and possible. (ibid. 175)

As suggested above, one can imagine deep and rich histories lying behind the expressions of the young men in the opening fragment in this chapter, referring to the Aringa as warmongers and dangerous, in which they refer to influential 'social horizons' in their lives. Points of reference for them are the more recent histories of rebellion and the absence of alternative models for young people's social horizons in the still marginalized district, where most young men have low levels of education. Toughness and endurance, one could argue, are important qualities for people in their environment and with their history—for example, long ago when there was slave-raiding and hunting, as well as the widespread notion that any stranger met outside the compound was an enemy and therefore one had to either kill or be killed, and where conflict was normal (Middleton 1965)—and these qualities remain important today when young people are inclined to travel to places like the ROSS and engage in unskilled physical urban labour (see Chapter 7).

It is therefore difficult to see these characteristics as detached from the specific terrains and history that interplayed with people's agency to lead to such typical imagination. In other words, we are dealing here with a form of habitus: deeply embedded dispositions vis-à-vis the world, which strongly influence young people's social imagination in Yumbe today due to a certain consistency in their environment (poverty and low education) and history (continuation of violent environments and their people's own armed engagements). Beyond important qualities, these notions are also reinforced by the symbolic violence of history writing (Leopold 2005a; Finnström 2008) and the 'cultural' constructions of masculinity. But there also seems to be learning at play from more recent history, a history replete with military/rebel stories. As a 45-year-old man from Yumbe related:

> For me, I witnessed it. […] one can be able to know that this is typical Aringa, or 'Aringas are like that' through their actions. For instance, when UNRF I was formed, I witnessed it […] there could be one gun, eh? And in the gun there could be only three bullets […] but all these other Aringa people can follow the man with that one gun, they could go! Others could get logs, bows, eh? Without any surrendering. You go and meet the opponent without fear. And if one person has been shot, they cannot fear that this person has been shot; the next could be you, or the next could be me. Then they go away […] they could not think about that […]. What they

want is [that] they should meet the opponents and beat them. With any way. And in the process they could ATTACK [louder voice] and have more guns. So that happened in the October war […] that one of 1981. (Male interlocutor, 45 years, who was 15 in 1981)

What I found intriguing about the above statement was that it was not expressed with a lot of bravura, but rather came across as a matter-of-fact narration. This fragment does not reveal exactly how a boy of 15 came to learn about these events. Was it through what he was able to witness himself?[235] What he had heard from others at the time? Or does this story most of all reflect a powerful cultural memory that took shape in the more recent past and is still widely shared and interpreted anew? We can assume that a combination of communication patterns have influenced his memories of the event. For example, funerals in Yumbe go together with storytelling in front of large male crowds; public political meetings are often opened with interpretations of local histories shared by elderly members of society and are often widely attended by young men; and, originally, family meetings with clan elders and maternal uncles were also reported to be important moments of knowledge transfer. In this chapter, I continue to show how young people in Yumbe today have internalized and potentially act upon such powerful self-images of the Aringa, which can be understood as historically shaped self-interpretations.

YOUTH, VIOLENCE AND YOUTH'S DIFFERENT SOCIAL POSITIONS IN YUMBE

Above, I have shown that there are strong and prevailing stereotypes and discourses about Aringa toughness and fearlessness, and that young men employ, embody, and draw pride from them in their engagement with their everyday environments in Yumbe and beyond, in particular in their mobile trajectories. This is especially relevant with regard to the following: after suggesting in the first parts of this chapter that we are dealing with a common self-perception among my interlocutors of being fearless, strong die-hards, and sometimes even warmongers, to what extent can we expect youth in Yumbe to respond to opportunities for armed rebellion if they were to occur today? In other words, how do these self-perceptions relate to practices? This is an important concern that this chapter takes up. If this strong self-perception and warrior-like ethos are quite dominant among the Aringa in the context of the persistent marginality experienced in the region (Titeca 2006), what does this mean for the prospects of peace and stability in Yumbe and its close surroundings?

There are several reasons for exploring this question, especially since during my research in Yumbe and Arua around the election period in 2011, people often referred to rebel groups forming and/or reinforcing themselves to fight the election outcome.[236] The

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[235] More interlocutors, now in their mid-forties, explained things that they saw/witnessed as teenagers during the period of the Liberation War and October War as crucial events that shaped their perceptions and choices thereafter.

[236] These assumptions went as far as warning me not to travel alone to certain parts of Yumbe, about which they claimed to have information (through their extensive former army networks) that conditions were unsafe and that abducting a foreigner could be an ideal way for such groups to instantly draw international attention.

general notion in the wider region as well as within Yumbe used to be that if new rebel groups started to form, or existing rebel groups were in need of recruits, they would definitely recruit in Yumbe, 'because we are warmongers' or 'because the people of Aringa, we don't fear war—that is why they come looking here'. Such expressions were commonly used by my interlocutors, often very bluntly, displaying a deeply held self-understanding among the Aringa rather than simply being examples of boasting. Even in 2013, references to the formation of new armed groups occurred during my fieldwork. The older existing rebel groups—the LRA and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)—were still active in the neighbouring regions; and especially concerning Aringa youths in Arua, it was sometimes suggested that they had crossed the Congo border to join the ADF.[237] Locally within Yumbe, certain adult former fighters referred to the potential to form a new rebellion, especially after the 2011 failed election promises of development projects and ministerial posts (see Introduction to this dissertation). Furthermore, young former combatants also occasionally threatened to form a third UNRF (UNRF III) or voiced the urge to take up arms due to post–peace agreement grievances (see Both & Reis 2014). Those among them who wished to join the national Ugandan army in order to pursue a military career (as an alternative perspective that fitted well with their self-perceived military identification) were often ineligible due to their relatively low level of education, despite the fact that they had prior armed experience (through participation in UNRF II). That this experience was not valued frustrated them.

For the period around 2005 (and thus before my research), Titeca has shown that it was also common then to encounter youths, predominantly young Aringa men (many of them former ex-combatants, according to Titeca), threatening to 'take up armed rebellion' in Arua. He classified these youths, following Gersony (1997: 77), as 'unanchored, uneducated, disaffected former soldiers and youth' (Titeca 2006: 151). They were dispossessed due to historical marginalization in the West Nile region, a lack of higher education (something that was particularly the case for Muslim Aringa and Kakwa), and the strong influence of exile and continuing displacement affecting the Aringa (illustrated by their dependence on the UNHCR and other NGOs, their loss of agricultural skills, and the overall erosion of social and cultural values) (ibid.). The most important point to take from Titeca's work in relation to this chapter is the fact that the threat of rebellion is not new for Aringa youth, that it has been associated with their marginality and their low level of education (see also Chapter 2), and that it has re-emerged again and again over the past decades. In the case of the OPEC boys that Titeca focussed his study on, Lecoutere and Titeca (2007) describe how this threat could be explained as generating 'political capital' for marginalized youth in close interdependent relationships with government actors.

In my case, I describe the situation approximately six to eight years after Titeca, explaining the positioning of young people from the rural hinterland (although mobile) vis-à-vis rebellion as a resource with which to escape hardships in the present and potentially access a better life. The political leverage of their threats seems less relevant here (than in Lecoutere and Titeca's work), as they do not engage deeply with politicians

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[237] See also Lecoutere & Titeca (2007: 7), which shows that this is an ongoing perception.

or other local authorities in their everyday activities—and thus cannot be considered 'strategic political players' in that sense (see Lecoutere & Titeca 2007: 2). But what is interesting is the shared perceptions of self and the continuing marginality that apparently still play an important role in Yumbe today, just as these factors did among Aringa youths in Arua eight years ago, despite a peace agreement that had eight years longer to effect some change in this field.

So how would young men in Yumbe today respond to the opportunity of rebellion if it presented itself?[238] Or, perhaps more prudently phrased, how in general did male youth in Yumbe relate to mobilization to violence vis-à-vis the dominant social imagination surrounding them and internalized by them? In this part of the chapter, I try to unravel answers to this question by drawing attention to diversity among young men's social positions, based on several factors. While many young men drew upon the idea of 'having war at heart', others did not. This is extremely important because youth are too often seen or described as an undifferentiated or 'oversized analytical' category (Philipps 2014), and youth in post-conflict regions are too easily associated with a threat of (or a return to) armed violence (Sommers 2015). In writing about African youth, we often fail to be specific in our analysis of young people's different positions and practices. There is much to be gained by looking at heterogeneity among small town and rural youths, especially when trying to discern the potential for violence and mobilization as well as the potential for social reconstruction (Schwartz 2010). Here I aim to come to an understanding of the variations in young men's interpretations and applications of a shared discourse on, and embodiment of, their toughness, fearlessness, and warriorhood.

The bush

Remember Aluma in Chapter 4 who claimed that, as a teenager, at some point he saw no other option than to join the UNRF II rebels: 'At some point you start wandering', Aluma suggested, 'and at some point you start thinking "let me meet my death on the way".'[239] Aluma pointed to the absence of care by his father as being a particular trigger, bringing him to a point where as a last resort he could imagine joining the rebel group. The same point of view was echoed by young men in an FGD and at several other informal meetings and informal interviews with young men in 2011, 2012, and 2013, when they expressed how difficult it was to provide for their young families and that they sometimes thought of 'going to the bush' (joining a rebel movement) as a last resort, as we see below. While this suggests the notion of fighting, occasionally young people's expressions hinted that 'the bush' also referred to the opportunity to engage in looting and thus potentially to improve their material situation. These two ideas of the bush—violence and looting—

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[238] This question differs from the one asked by Lecoutere and Titeca, who studied the enforcement of political contract between rebels and local authorities and the likelihood of the OPEC boys taking up arms again in the event that they were forced out of the fuel business in Arua. In this chapter, I deal with a more generalized framework (without one specific political trigger) regarding the likelihood of and conditions for young men engaging in rebellion.

[239] Based on field notes 12 August 2012, see also chapter 4.

belong together, as rebels in the past took the opportunity to loot, and the presence of rebels in the region also allowed small groups of thieves (unconnected to rebel groups) to engage in looting, intimidating people as if they were rebels.[240]

Some of these young men who expressed this idea of going to the bush had fought previously in the UNRF II, but others had not. Their motivations for thinking of the bush as a last resort, as we will see later in this chapter, was explained by the experience of suffering and failure: experiencing a sense of neglect in their own families, like Aluma, when they were unmarried boys, or more often their inability to feed and provide for their young wives and children as young men and were faced with their young families' 'cries of hunger' (for a further understanding of such deep poverty affecting families, see Akello 2012).[241] One could argue that this imagination of potential futures was inspired by Aringa experiences from the past, which influenced the social imaginary (Vigh 2006: 175), as well as by a lack of access to 'alternative masculinities' (Dolan 2003) in the context of marginality and deprivation. In other words, in the more recent past, men's despair over their inability to protect their families during periods of rebellion in Yumbe also drove quite a number of them to the bush. Going to the bush as a last resort to avoid humiliation as a family head can therefore be seen as having historical precedents in Yumbe, precedents which influence the social imagination. While today it is not the direct armed attack on families that forces men to despair and go to the bush, the impossibility of providing for their families and fulfilling the roles expected of them as men in Yumbe tends to lead to similar patterns of plotting to escape.[242]

From the case material, it therefore becomes clear that when facing despair, the resources of hardiness, fearlessness, and the preparedness to die—which, according to my interlocutors, was so typically Aringa—could be employed to embark on more violent trajectories.[243] In this sense, the youth literally gave ear to the proverb that was occasionally employed by young men during the course of this research: 'a man should be prepared to die in the seventh forest' (*Agobi la dra jere azi ga*). Some of the young people who referred to going to the bush used this proverb directly,[244] while others referred to it more indirectly. In other words, the proverb was used and explained differently by different actors, as we shall see, and this leads me in the remainder of this chapter to an exploration of a variety of social positions vis-à-vis violence and leaving for the bush. I aim

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[240] See Chapter 6.

[241] When I occasionally asked what would happen to their children if they went to the bush, they replied: 'Your children, you now leave them to God. They are God's children.' Others referred to brothers who were old enough to look after their wives and children if they left.

[242] See also Chapter 7 on 'escaping'.

[243] In line with Dolan (2003), I therefore do not suggest that masculinity and violence are naturally related, but rather that in the absence of 'alternative masculinities' (i.e. alternative pathways to be recognized as a responsible and providing married man and father, and to avoid humiliation, frustration, and failure in this regard), violence can become a last resort. In Yumbe, we see that the young men could fall back on an 'alternative model of masculinity' related to a warrior-like image that is highly valued.

[244] While the word *jere* was translated for me as 'forest' by my interlocutors, the Lugbara–English dictionary by Paul Ongua Iga (1999) does not mention *jere*, but rather translates *jereku* as 'bush'. Nevertheless, there are significant differences (not in terms of grammatical structure but rather vocabulary) between the Aringa dialect and the Lugbara spoken in Arua (Dalfovo 1997).

to deconstruct how young people differed in their relationship to the highly regarded values of fearlessness and violence: first, with regard to the different uses of the aforementioned proverb I was confronted with in conversation with my interlocutors; and second, by looking in more depth at the people behind statements made in a discussion with youths that emerged at the end of a FGD about who would go to the bush and who would not if there were a new round of rebel recruitment, and for what reasons. These two approaches offer insight into the ways in which local youths were able to position themselves differently vis-à-vis potential engagement in and/or recourse to armed violence.

<p style="text-align:center;">*A man should be prepared to die in the seventh forest*</p>

The first time I encountered the saying 'a man dies in the seventh forest' was when Charles and I were discussing how many people had recently been telling me that to an Aringa man, his sense of masculinity lies in the act of carrying a weapon. An educated woman from Yumbe said that I should therefore not be surprised to see children in Yumbe already 'playing war' at a young age with self-made guns. I doubted, however, that this would be specific to the Aringa, and I probed Charles when he came by the next day. I said: 'You know, also in the Netherlands, children play war or fight, after seeing it on television', and I went on to suggest that Yumbe's video halls with their preference for fighting and war movies, as well as the predominance of violence in newspaper images (at the time focusing on the war in Libya) and on popular posters (see Kagoro 2013), might be equally responsible for such type of play. Charles fully agreed with my challenge to the particularity of young Aringa children playing with guns. Then, after a while, I asked: 'So, is there any truth in the idea that carrying a weapon is important for an Aringa man, as has been frequently suggested to me?' To my surprise, Charles immediately confirmed the idea. I continued to probe:

> JB: I have never seen you carry a weapon [...].
> Charles: No, but we are being raised with the idea that as a man you have to be prepared for anything. The Aringa have a saying: *Agobi la dra jere azi ga*. A man must be prepared for anything [...]
> JB: *Agobi la dra jere azi ga*? A man dies...? What does it mean, literally?
> Charles: 'A man dies in the seventh forest'; meaning, in the war, if you have a target to meet—the enemies—you should not fear to penetrate the forest if worst comes to worst. Meaning, as a man you have to be well equipped for whatever comes your way.
> JB: What does 'well equipped' mean? [Expecting there to be reference to a certain number of arrows one was traditionally expected to carry]
> Charles: It means well prepared, once you are attacked, without even knowing you were [going to be] attacked, you equip yourself with something around you.
> JB: So how did you come to learn about this saying?

Charles: My father has not told me that.[245] Maybe I have been picking it up from somewhere […]

JB: And how would you know what it means?

Charles: It is easy to know that as a man you must *not fear*, and you must *always be ready* [emphasis his]. [According] to me, anything can happen any time. With time, if people keep their guns out like that for long, at some time people might come out and start some rebel activities [again].

[Charles then explained how he personally came to understand that the potential for war was not over in Yumbe—for example, during occasions on which Aringa people had used guns to rob a mobile phone shop in 2009 and a bus in 2007.]

JB: Can I go back to something you said earlier on? When you said 'A man must always be prepared', this makes me think of something that has kept me occupied for some time now. Remember when my mother was visiting and your mother gave us a lot of things; honey, *simsim* paste, groundnuts […]. Do you remember?

Charles: Yes.

JB: You accompanied us all the way home because it had got dark already. And when I asked you if the bag was not too heavy, you immediately, without pause, replied very seriously: 'If it was war now, I would carry Coco [Charles' daughter of 9 months at the time] much further than this.' Where does such a statement come from? Does it mean you expect that anytime some conflict could come to Yumbe again?

Charles: Not really. But of course, as I was a baby, my mum used to carry me around like that. She experienced such a life. Always hiding and hiding. Even though I myself do not remember anything of that period, even if such a thing happens, I will carry Coco. I cannot leave her behind, right?

The above conversation shows my first encounter with this saying *Agobi la dra jere azi ga* and the specific explanation given by one of my key interlocutors. Charles interpreted the meaning of the saying primarily with emphasis on what he had seen and observed (arms still being used in Yumbe every now and then; knowing there are people who have hidden and not turned in their arms from 2002 until now) and what he had heard and knew about his own past (being carried from one hiding place to another by his mother during a very violent war period in West Nile, even though he had no memories of that period himself). Charles' Aringa name, Amadile, literally means 'they have come to kill us', as he was born in the midst of war in 1983. He was his mother's firstborn, and she used to stay in hiding with him and his cousin during the war in Yumbe and only fled to south Sudan relatively late, when there was really no other choice. When it came to his interpretation of the saying, he repeatedly emphasized the notion of an 'ever-preparedness' for armed conflict.

Charles' responses can be read as referring to a form of permanent vigilance, learned predominantly through his experiences as a baby and his mother's repeated narration of this episode to him over the course of his life—an experience he carried with him in his name on a daily basis and which was reinforced by his coming to understand that the district was still not completely safe from potential rebels. Yet the threat was not

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[245] Charles's father was a secondary schoolteacher with a Master's degree (one of the first two people to get a Master's degree in Yumbe District). I emphasize this to show that Charles probably had a different education at home compared with most of my other interlocutors, whose fathers were less well educated.

immediate, and the behaviour and understanding shown by Charles did not match the 'hyper-vigilance' portrayed by Vigh (2011) for Guinea Bissau and Northern Ireland. People in Yumbe, while 'being prepared', were not continuously trying to read their environments for volatility; the expectation of violence was less immediate. Rather, when listening to Charles, it seemed that preparedness or vigilance had become a more latent, embodied, and discursive state of being[246] rather than an upfront attitude. A negative potentiality was referred to as a possibility, based on experience, but it did not penetrate every layer of daily life. The threat did not come so much from present rapidly moving social terrains (Vigh 2006, 2009, 2011) but rather from the solid knowledge of a lengthy past in which violence and war were frequent and recurrent. Charles, however, did not place emphasis on dying or on the preparedness to die contained in the proverb, nor did he refer to his own potential use of violence—as other youths in Yumbe tended to do, as we shall see later. In fact, he talked about carrying his little daughter out of war if it were to break out, like his mother had done with him, rather than about taking up arms and fighting.

I was later quite surprised that another interlocutor, Hussein, also well educated like Charles and with a good job and study prospects abroad, mentioned the same proverb when we used his office car to visit his sick mother in a remote village.[247] He did, however, interpret the saying rather differently from Charles: although he used it to refer to expectations of manhood in general, he referred to his father in particular, who died when Hussein was still young. He described his father as a very good traditional hunter who was well respected for his skills: his father was known to always come back from hunting with two animals (kobe, antelope, etc.) instead of one. For Hussein, the saying was about the hunters of the past, who entered real forests with the aim of returning from them with bush meat for the family. Facing the forests in those days was not without danger, he explained, as there were many more wild animals in the past compared with today. He referred to a period in which the hunting of wild animals was common practice to prove one's manhood. For Hussein, the saying thus meant that a man had to be courageous and fearless and provide well for his family (originally, by being a successful hunter).

To explain Hussein's different explanation of the saying in comparison with Charles, I look to his different personal experiences with war and conflict. Hussein himself had not experienced the two rebel groups in the 1990s directly, as he had spent that time hustling to get money for his education (in which he had succeeded) in Arua town. Hussein had experienced exile in south Sudan and its hardships as a small child, but he had not been confronted by recruiting rebel forces around him or the need for vigilance at an older age. At the end of this same day on which we went to the village to visit his sick mother, the theme of the proverb returned unexpectedly in our conversation. After leaving his mother and his old uncles, we discussed the situation in the village (regarding

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[246] With this term 'discursive state of being', I refer to the idea that reference to vigilance often occurred in speech (and was latently embodied, as I also mention) but did not necessarily turn into action.

[247] Hussein gave the proverb slightly differently, saying: *Agobi le madra jere aziri*, which did not change the meaning.

crops, drought, tree planting, etc.) and an aunt with a hernia living in a remote village, and I came to realize—and consequently asked Hussein about—the amount of responsibility that he carried within his extended family as a young educated and employed man. In response, he returned to the saying that he had mentioned earlier in the day, that 'a man should be prepared to die in the seventh forest', as if it explained exactly the burden he had to carry based on his position. He applied the proverb to his own situation of being able to provide and carry responsibility for such a large part of his family in the absence of his father. Death, vigilance, and fearlessness did not form part of his explanation of the proverb as it fitted into his perspectives on life.

Later again during my research, I was chatting on Facebook with Ika, a young Lugbara man (thus not an Aringa) from more to the south in West Nile. After translating the word *jere* (forest) for him, since he was not familiar with it, I asked for his interpretation of the proverb:

> JB: How else should we understand the meaning of 'forest' [in the proverb]? I guess it means a dangerous place?
> Ika: My personal interpretation [of the proverb] is that when the going gets tough, the tough should get going. Hehehe […] It also means confronting a situation that's rather scary or whose outcome you're not sure of. E.g., a young boy pulling the guts to tell a girl that he loves her ☺ […] funny ☺
> [Facebook chat, 12 June 2014]

It struck me how both Hussein's and Ika's interpretations of the proverb were very different from those that were so central to my research with youth in Yumbe (and to which Charles' interpretation came closer). Ika was studying in Europe at the time when I contacted him on Facebook. He had not had very personal experiences with conflict in his youth and had been living with his family and as a student in larger towns (Arua and Kampala) for the majority of his life. The example that the proverb provoked in him was thus disconnected from the more extreme explanations that the proverb lends itself to; rather than war, he referred to love relations. Hussein, as mentioned, had also not experienced or personally encountered the latest rebel group actions, and he had many future aspirations that kept him from dwelling on the option of going to the bush, unlike the youths whom I describe below did. Based on his social position, Charles also was unlikely to live up to the proverb in the way in which those who referred more literally to going to the bush did, but his early childhood and the often repeated stories told by his mother were marked by an embodied disposition of preparedness for anything (flight, hiding, the experience of violence) that might come.

Proverbs, of course, by their very nature have the ability to accommodate personalized interpretations of their meanings. Or, in the words of Dalfovo (1997: xxvi):

> a proverb is characterized by its being general and allusive; it represents past experiences synthesized in a few words, in view of enlightening similar situations in the future […] the result of this is that a proverb has an ample shade of meanings and more than one application. Besides this variety of meanings and applications, the context in which a proverb is uttered adds a specific significance that increases the difficulty of being exhaustive in explaining its meaning.

This is exactly why it is useful to see young men's primary explanation of this saying as revealing much about their social positions, their knowledge of their (family's) history, and their own experiences and memories as youths. We can also argue that this particular proverb has survived societal changes and changing conditions of life without losing its applicability, due to people's ability to explain proverbs with reference to current experiences (Mbiti in Dalfovo 1997: xix) that go in various directions. As already seen earlier in this chapter, while not explicitly using this proverb, other youths in Yumbe applied the notion implied in it when they mentioned being prepared to literally go to the bush in the face of the hardships they were confronted with at home. They expressed a preparedness to fight and engage in armed combat, rather than remain at home where they despaired in their feelings of uselessness.[248] They appealed to a strong notion of (hyper-)masculinity when emphasizing their ability to go to the bush without fear. At the same time, as we shall see, they were also attuned to this option because it was difficult for them to maintain their status as a man in Yumbe, since they were failing in their role as providers at home (see chapters 6 and 7). And although this group of young men referred to the ultimate masculinity performance—being prepared to face any kind of problem or hardship and not being afraid to die in the bush—they were also driven to the forest by their failure to perform the masculine roles expected of them at home.[249]

One could question whether these youths, in the absence of alternative social imaginaries in their dire conditions, were simply falling back on a military/rebel history and habitus. They showed themselves to be prepared and even expressed a preference for engaging with the forest or bush—insecure terrains that they are not afraid of—where they were prepared to either perish or return with rewards.

THE REGIME OF THE PAST

Charles, my research assistant and key interlocutor, while sometimes taking quite substantial business risks, which he explained in terms of his 'tough' and daring Aringa identity, once also explained to me that, contrary to what the interlocutors referred to above, he was not prepared 'to die young'. This expression came about when I interviewed him in 2013 about his younger brother in Juba, and after a while asked him if he had ever planned to go there himself. Charles, while a Master's student at the time,

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[248] While there were examples in my research that referred to endurance and strength as related to women, in general women were connected to the home. The outside world in which men operate was also present in other proverbs. See, for example, *Agupi ni dra oli a, oku ni dra jo a* (this uses a different spelling, where *agobi* [man] is spelled as *agupi*), which means: 'A man dies in the open, a woman indoors.' The explanation is that a woman escapes from danger into the house, while a man faces it at the risk of his life, defending the home from outside (Dalfolvo 1997: 2). Another saying is the following: *Agulpi ni dra malo dru* (note the different word for mahogany compared with the one introduced in this chapter earlier), which means: 'A man dies under the mahogany tree.' The explanation here is that in cases of danger, women and children flee while a man stands his ground. The hardness of the mahogany emphasizes the stamina and courage that a husband needs to have in order to defend his family (ibid.).

[249] A behaviour that has perhaps found its contemporary alternative in 'running to Juba', as we shall see in Chapter 7.

was also involved in small business activities and was always 'on the lookout for new opportunities'; Juba would normally qualify as such an opportunity. Charles admitted that he had 'all along been wanting to go there [Juba]', but could not because of the large degree of insecurity that people faced there. 'I am not prepared to die young,' he explained.

Without explaining why he would say that or what he meant exactly, I felt like I knew, after knowing him for more than three years. Charles was referring to the idea that one might lose one's life in Juba, because so many foreigners were killed in acts of robbery or provocation (see Chapter 7). As the oldest son of his parents (29 at the time), he was well educated and still pursuing his Master's degree,[250] hoping to enter the civil service soon, and in addition he had a small business that supported his two younger brothers. However, as a close business aide to his mother, and as a young father and husband, Charles was also well aware of the fact that he could not be absent from his family. He had too many responsibilities, too many people relying on him. Due to his slightly better-off position, Charles, like certain other young men, knew that his death would be devastating for his family—not just for his own young wife and child, but also for his brothers whom he supported tirelessly (for example, by paying for their education or enabling their small businesses) and his parents. In their ability to take on multiple responsibilities, young men like Charles were more deeply embedded in family structures and had a higher numbers of dependants, and thus they could not afford to make such a potentially dangerous move as taking their chances in the ROSS or joining an armed group when it promised remuneration. They had much more to lose than the young men who failed to live up to their families' expectations and/or were frustrated by their lack of prospects.

Does this disparity described above make the latter group more liable to violence, however?[251] To convey the diversity among youth in this respect, important fragments from an FGD discussion that went in this direction are quoted extensively below. Here we see different positions emerging in the discussion. In this first fragment, orientation towards the bush is central.

> JB: So, some people always say that if new rebels come to Uganda, they will start in Yumbe, because there are so many people here that are not happy with the peace agreement. So people suggest rebel movements will start recruiting people from here. Do you also hear such kinds of remarks? I think this is the idea people from outside have of Yumbe [...].
> C: According to B's uncle's earlier statement, if such a thing can happen, he can easily join [the rebels].
> JB: How old is the uncle?
> C: In his forties.
> JB: So he is still young, and he is not tired of fighting?[252]

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[250] His two younger brothers showed much less interest in education and had abandoned their studies.

[251] See also Dolan (2003), who asks this question in the context of protracted war and young men's inability to provide for and protect their families.

[252] Earlier it was mentioned how this uncle had previously been forced to join the rebels. The rebels had been looking for the interlocutor's father, a local leader (LC1) who had left the village because of the rebel threat against people whom they saw as attached to the government. So, in the absence of the father, they decided to

C: Yeah.

JB: And if such a thing happens, would many young people consider joining in Yumbe?

[Small discussion enfolds in the Aringa language]

C: […] Yes, it is confirmed by different group members [that they would go].

JB: [Having noted that Khadaffi was one of those who confirmed directly, I probe] Why, Khadaffi? Is it because of your name?

K: It is because of my suffering.

C: D. has said that he would not just be walking, but running [to the rebels]!

JB: Eh? And Gule, you also? I saw you nodding.

G: Yah.

[C laughs]

JB: But, ehm, Gule, you have a wife and children. Would you really consider that?

G: I would willingly accept [to join the rebels] because I am suffering […] [Continues talking but is cut off by another speaker]

R: I can also go because my follower [younger brother], my immediate follower, has reached my size so he can look after the children.

JB: But, ehm […] what would you expect from such a group […]. How could you be motivated to join?

G: There is no hope being like this outside here, no money to continue these businesses. There is no way of continuing with studies. For us, if we joined, it would be good for us to meet our death on the way […] in the bush.

JB: Sure?

G: Because it is useless to remain outside […].

JB: Really?

G: Of course, being in the bush […] sometimes, if you land on some money […] you can also, ha ha, get […]

JB: Now, where is the money in the bush?

G: Eeh? You just go and attack!

O: […] And you get something.

JB: But if that means you need to, ehm […] torture that person to get the money?

G: You scare the person to run away and leave everything, because that particular time the man cannot think of organizing his things in the shop, he just runs. So you use the shop for you, you just pick whatever you want, sell things you are able to carry; you go and sell them off. And use the money for survival, rather than remaining idle, nothing to do, you suffer. There are those things you would like to attain but it is impossible for you to attain them, so it's just like that. So it is useless remaining here […].

R: It [joining a rebel group] is better than being a thief!

JB: Mmh.

[…]

The fact that they talked about going to the bush in this way can be seen as an act of bravado and despair at the same time. While of course we cannot know what the youths in question would do if they encountered a real situation of rebel recruitment, we can

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take his brother, the interlocutor's uncle, to the bush instead. After returning from the bush, this uncle, by that time in his early thirties, did not receive any of the resettlement money that the Ugandan government paid to former UNRF II combatants. Earlier it was reported that this uncle was now very poor, unable to send his children to school, and felt so desperate about this that he sometimes spoke of going back to the bush as a last resort.

argue that the recurring reference to this option as a social horizon—both uttered through stereotypes about the region by outsiders and reiterated by local young men themselves—at least reproduces such an idea. Even if, in the end, these youths do not go into the bush, their discourse is reinforcing and powerful vis-à-vis other youths whose social imaginary and perception of Aringa masculinity is shaped by such expressions.

While the discussion started off a bit jokingly and full of bravura (D. said he would not just be walking, but running to the rebels), some young men pointed to concerns that we will see returning in the following chapter on khat use. They pointed to their failure to provide for their families and the uselessness of living such a life as they do. Here we see patterns of what others refer to as 'thwarted masculinities' (Dolan 2003: 9), an experience of humiliation and frustration with regard to their failure to achieve hegemonic models of masculininty. The potential and actual recourse to violence, it is suggested, is linked to such emotions. The young men also invoked patterns of care within the family structure that would help attend to their children in their absence, such as when R. above stated that his younger brother would be old enough to look after his children. Such patterns were also common in the past, when certain youths in a clan were convinced to join the rebels, leaving their families in the care of those who stayed behind.

We also see that the interlocutors' social imaginary is influenced by several understandings of the bush. As mentioned earlier, it is a place where one goes to join the rebels, a place where one can die, or where one can improve oneself or one's circumstances, and, not unimportantly, it is a place where a different survival ethic counts (since, according to the interlocutors, stealing as a rebel is a more legitimate act than stealing from your neighbour). This latter point may sound ambiguous, but it refers to different kinds of ethics: those that play a role in everyday relations with neighbours and peers (see Chapter 6); and the looser ethics that are linked to times of conflict, when looting for survival carried out by armed groups is apparently legitimized by its potential recruits and the very conditions of conflict.

The above discussion continued and became more intriguing when other participants in the FGD expressed their contrary stance. For these latter participants, they did not aim to go to the bush and fight, and their explanations are insightful.

> O: But for me, I am not [joining the rebels].
> C: B. also said he will not join on such [an] occasion.
> JB: And what is for you the reason not to join?
> O: Because I have my followers [younger siblings] […] and as of now I am a businessman. Doing my business. I am paying for my fellow brothers' school. And I want to stay with my family well. And it is going to be hard for me to go there [to the bush]; meanwhile, [if] I leave my brothers here, there's going to be nobody who is going to pay their school fees and so on. And my family will […] will also suffer.
> C: In your absence.
> O: In my absence. Which means they are going to be in the regime of the past. [Meaning his family would experience the hardship of rebellion. Earlier on in the FGD, O. had explained how his father, as a businessman, had been sought out by the rebels and had fled to Kampala, leaving the family behind.] And I don't want that. Yes!
> JB: And A.? What would you do?
> A: I would just join!

JB: And for you B.?

B: I cannot go. I have my family. We have only got little because of war […] so […] [Here he speaks about education and looking after his children's future, but is interrupted by another speaker]

K: […] For those who refuse to go, we will come and torture them also! For them to join us.

[Laughter, and it is difficult to hear what is being said]

JB: So now […]

B: [Continues to explain his position] I look for my own means to look after my family. If impossible, I have land, I will go to the field, I start digging. For survival.

K: But me, I have no land here […].

JB: You have no land? Is that a problem?

K: The piece of land I have cannot be used for cultivation. Just for settlement. But to go to dig it is not there [it is not large enough].

In this fragment, we see that some young men in the same group of peers claimed that they would not go to the bush, because their families have been greatly affected by the past conflicts and they wished for a better situation for their own families. Access to land came up as an extra explanation for whether or not young men would have alternatives to fall back on, though the option of cultivating land was seen only as a last resort by these youths living and hustling in Yumbe town. In the fragment, we see how farming ('digging') is associated with subsistence farming for bare survival (normally perceived as the domain of women) and not as a preferred or lucrative livelihood activity ('If impossible [...] I start digging'). Furthermore, we see reference to aggression between the haves and have-nots, the joiners and non-joiners, when K. says: 'For those who refuse to go, we will come and torture them also.' Should this be read as a prediction of the forms of violence (committed among peers) to be expected in the event that a new rebellion were to break out? More of such hints recurred.

JB: But now I want to ask two things to the ones who say they would be able to join. […] First of all, are you not afraid? Is there no fear of what you could face in the bush? For fighting?

G: I don't fear AT ALL [loud]. The aim is to meet them and fight them terribly. [No one laughs this time.]

JB: [Probing] […] But many of the government soldiers are from Aringa […] from West Nile […] meaning you might have to kill one of your brothers […] sons of this soil […] if you fight them.

[Some discussion in Aringa follows about how this happened in the past during the guerrilla wars in Kei sub-county, where a rebel shot his own brother who was in the army.]

K: For me, I *shoot* any person […] regardless of who the person is. Even if it is my brother […] [Because] why has he failed to look after the family […]? Knowing very well that he [the fictional brother] is getting something from the government [his salary as a soldier]. We are suffering at home and there is not any step he [the fictional brother] has taken to stop the suffering at home […].

[…]

G: Staying closer to the children or to the family members, they also keep crying for food and you personally are also affected by hunger [...] this is very hard. So that staying […] in this place is very hard. But if there is any kind of thing that can make us generate some income and make them able to get something for the family, the better. We are just trying to go […] go […] back to the bush because […] going back to the bush is […] indirectly trying to run away from our family's problems.

K: Yeah.

G: If they want to die, then let them die in our absence […]. Because if we are there […]

JB: Sorry, say that again?

G: That for them, they run away, so that if they [their children] die of hunger, let them die in your absence. Otherwise, you are there, you see them suffering, you see them dying […].

[…]

JB: I am looking at my friend who *was* able to establish a business [look towards O]. What is the trick? How have you been able to open that business?

O: For me, actually, I went to school, at least to Senior 4. After that, I went to Arua; I was riding a *boda-boda* bicycle. I did that for about one year. And then […] my aim was that […] I wanted to be a driver […] a long time ago. Then after that I went to Kampala to look for survival, so that I [could] get money for my survival. After […] the *boda-boda* cycling I went to Kampala to work as a watchman. I worked for one year; then […] I used my money for the watchman to access my [driving] permit. After finishing, then I came back to Arua; after Arua I went to Sudan; from Sudan I came to Arua. And after that I got my job,[253] and I start keeping the money, up to where I started my business […] up to now. This is how […].

JB: So you really started from below […]

O: Yah.

C: [Commenting] [He is] somebody who doesn't spend much on other things […]. In fact, saving his little money.

O: Yah, to start my business.

C: He has had that target in mind.

JB: Yah.

O: I was thinking that my family was so poor, like my father, my mum; they can't help me a lot. Because they are digging […]. You see, digging you can dig so that you eat food and so on. But for your health, for your wealth […] it cannot be so good because they don't have money. So that forced me to do that thing [struggle for his own business]. So that I could make my family better. So that is why I say that I should not go to the bush. I am […] I want to strengthen my family so that they do well. I don't want my family to be [like] the one of my father.

JB: So you want to improve?

O: I want to improve, yeah.

In this fragment, we see that O. was better off than many of the other interlocutors. He was 'ahead' of them because he had studied up to Senior 4 and because he had a strong goal in terms of how he wanted his family to improve and to break with the past (not to 'live in the regime of the past'). This distinguished him from the other young men, who were mostly locked up in their feelings of despair, unable to see a way out for their young families. For these latter young men, one of the most predominant resources they felt they had to fall back on was a self-perception of being fearless, tough, and violent. In their discourse on going to the bush, they could fall back on their bodies and some sort of legitimized (because it was typically Aringa) warrior identity. Talking like this is simultaneously an expression of their anger and their despair.

It is painfully clear from the interviews with adult and elderly people, when we talked about the past conflicts in Yumbe, that businessmen and women often became explicit targets for looting and torture by small roaming groups of rebels. There is,

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[253] I am unsure what job O. is referring to.

therefore, perhaps some irony in the variety of positions displayed here. While O. and some other youths were trying to improve the conditions of their families by engaging in small businesses, K. threatened: 'For those who refuse to go […] we will come and torture them also! For them to join us.' Here we see reference to the notion of envy (see Chapter 6) that exists between peers and is apparently not new as a force in conflict.

Yet envy is not the only emotion that lives within this group of peers. It became clear during my research that people like O. tended to have good relationships with the youths who claimed that they would go to the bush. They were of the same age group and realized that they had had the opportunity to get more education than their peers. Like Charles (a Christian and well-educated young man with his own little business), O. (a Muslim and also a relatively successful businessman) entertained good relationships with the often khat-chewing and disaffected young men hanging out most of the day on a spot very close to his building. They spent breaks from work together when there were no customers, often playing draughts, and there was in general a good rapport between them. Young men like O. and Charles, as well as young men working in the district and local youth representatives (at sub-county level), were engaged in writing 'proposals' to help their less fortunate peers emerge from their difficult situations. Nevertheless, such proposals often remained unsuccessful, did not qualify completely (for example, because they were based in a town instead of in a rural/agricultural area), or they were simply totally neglected (such as those that were written to Salim Saleh when he camped close to Arua around the elections of February 2011; see the introductory chapter).

It is positive that young men, while quite diverse and particularly divided in terms of their level of education, business prospects, and general perspectives on life, were aware of each other's situation and also aimed to help one another. Envy, however, did emerge as an important factor in these relationships and was predicted by some youths as an emotion that might cause upheaval in the event of future rebellions. In a more day-to-day form, it also occasionally found its expression in witchcraft accusations that were particularly targeted at more prosperous people, including prosperous entrepreneurial youths[254]—and thus seemed to be potentially counter-productive for progress within the district.

DISCUSSION

> Embodying a certain type of masculinity is the result of the interplay of societal imperatives and personal concerns that lead to taking up a particular lifestyle; both are 'strategies of survival under compulsory systems'. (Pype 2007: 266, referring to Ferguson 1999: 99)

In this chapter, I set out to explore the self-perception of young Aringa men in relation to prevailing ethnic stereotypes, masculinity, and violence in Yumbe. In the history of Yumbe, these identities are interconnected, and I have argued that the self-imagination of

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[254] One explicit case like this, targeting a very successful young man in Kei sub-county and his friend, was occupying public debate during my fieldwork in July–August 2012.

a warrior-like identity is still powerful and rather dominant among a specific section of youth. The more general image that I present, as well as the more specific images, have their roots in pre-, colonial, and post-colonial legacies (such as those described in Chapter 2 on the lack of development, with army enrollment being one of very few opportunities, together with trade and labour migration, to try to escape a very marginal position). These images continue to influence young marginal youths' social imaginaries concerning their future possibilities in the absence of alternative options in Yumbe. Much of their social and discursive positioning vis-à-vis these prevalent stereotypes comes from the prevailing conditions of poverty and their resulting difficulty in fulfilling the masculine role of provider for their young families.

I also drew attention in this chapter to nuances and factors that explain the variety in young men's social positions and imaginaries. For example, personal and family histories with violence,[255] access to education, and the ability to create a regular income are important factors generating more distance from the literal and powerful interpretations of the Aringa as inherently warrior-like. At the same time, it became possible to understand why those who were deprived of these resources (education, income) could tap into such discourses of violent identities in order to position themselves and envision exits from their difficult positions as young fathers unable to look after their families.[256]

Both Dolan (2003: 6) and Finnström (2008: ch. 2) have argued that the dominant stereotypes about people from the north of Uganda are very negative, ethnocentric, and racist. In the case of the Acholi, both authors argue that these stereotypes have been used extensively to legitimize 'the war in the north' (which refers to the government's war against the LRA and its predecessors, as well as the war that was waged against the civilians in this area). Many of my interlocutors, however, from their marginal position, sought to employ a discourse on the Aringa as strong, fearless, and violent, thereby building on a stereotype, like that of the Acholi, that goes back to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial discourses. For marginal young men in Yumbe, such a stereotype offers an alternative masculinity, which they embrace in order to generate at least some pride and identity in the face of defeat in other fields of masculinity. Nevertheless, their adaptation of this powerful and dominant self-imagery may have significant negative consequences for the way in which the Aringa are perceived in the broader Ugandan context, as the image reinforces the dominant stereotypes of 'northerners' and of 'the Aringa' as violent.[257]

Like the authors writing about the Acholi region—who painfully sketch the relationship between masculinity, violence, and the state (Dolan 2003) and between Acholi identity and the state—looking at the broader framework of society in which young men in Yumbe grow up, one can interpret their position as being strongly influenced by a

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[255] I have suggested that the way in which youth have (or have not) experienced the various conflicts (as a baby or teenager) seems to influence their interpretation of the saying 'a man dies in the seventh forest'. But memories also influenced, for example, O.'s point of view: he did not want to end up in the same contradictions with his family as he had experienced with his parents.

[256] Alternative exit options, such as 'running to Juba', are discussed in Chapter 7.

[257] This happens also, for example, where Aringa youth are known as 'aggressive brokers' in taxi (i.e. minibus) parks in various larger towns in Uganda.

disconnection (Finnström 2008: 116-117, referring to Ferguson 1999) that young men experience from 'wider developments, even future developments' in Uganda (ibid.). Occasionally, my interlocutors did present their plight in more politically conscious terms—by referring to their marginalization as a causative factor explaining their attitudes and social positions—than at other times. But the historically grown and sedimented social imaginaries in the context of Yumbe mean that the dominant social horizons that many young men cling to as inevitably (and fittingly) Aringa are, in fact, questioned less often than one would expect. Rather, these images of self are embraced instead of being seen as potentially negative in terms of how they reflect back on them in the wider Ugandan context. From a context of deprivation and hardship, my interlocutors approached the notion of a powerful 'Aringa masculine identity' as a resource—and, in many cases, the only one they had.