

## Gender Perspectives in the LORD's Resistance Army in Relation to the Old Testament

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### ABSTRACT

*The essay is a comparative analysis of gender perspectives within the Lord's Resistance Army and the OT. Based on the claim by the LRA that all their actions are supported by the Bible, in this essay I seek to establish if there is a relationship between the roles of girls and women within the LRA and in the OT. From a comparative analysis, I established that there seems to be a linkage between what the OT texts present as roles of girls and women and the Lord's Resistance Army. An evaluation of such a connection between the beliefs and practices of two entities – LRA and the OT – shows that such a relationship may be a result of patriarchal influence. Consequently, I call for a gendered approach when dealing with the texts or any cultural beliefs which open up for Kony's or any similar understanding with regard to the roles of girls and women to avoid untold suffering and discrimination such as the one the former female LRA fighters were exposed to.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key words:** gender criticism, Lord's Resistance Army, war, law, Jael, Deborah, Hagar, Tamar

### A INTRODUCTION

According to the constitution of Uganda, any female who is below 18 years of age is considered to be a girl. After 18 years, that female then becomes a woman. However in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA),<sup>2</sup> a girl is a female who has not yet started menstruation, while a woman is a female who has undergone her menstruation for at least three consecutive months and thus is considered ready for marital obligations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The LRA, an armed group which was fighting in northern Uganda and has now moved to the Congo and the Central Africa Republic, was known for its use of OT motifs.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Arnold, Okot. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Senior quarters, Gulu, February 7 2008.

During my field work in northern Uganda, I discovered that very few women were able to articulate the ideological framework of the LRA.<sup>4</sup> This was partly due to the fact that the LRA has a patriarchal system which puts only male fighters as commanders and in other positions of leadership. When asked about such a kind of arrangement, Kennedy,<sup>5</sup> a former LRA commander argued that women could not be put in high ranking positions because that is exactly how God designed it in the Bible.<sup>6</sup> With such a belief, the questions that come to the surface – and which I find important to articulate in this essay – deal with the roles and positions of girls and women in the LRA and the OT. These are: if God designed it that female fighters cannot be in leadership positions, then, what are the roles for girls and women in the LRA and in the OT? Does the way in which the LRA treats girls and women give associations to the way some OT texts treat girls and women?

And, how are such roles related to the roles of girls and women in the OT? To answer these two questions, my discussion in the essay will be comparative in the sense that I will concentrate on the roles of girls and women in the LRA, showing how these are related to some OT texts.

Structurally, this essay starts with an overview, followed by a section on the roles of girls and women both in the LRA and in the OT. This is followed by an evaluation of such a linkage and lastly a conclusion is reached that there are texts within the OT which may open up for the very close link between the roles of girls and women in the Lord's Resistance Army and those in the OT.

## B A GENERAL OVERVIEW

According to statistics, 40% of child soldiers worldwide are female, and in the LRA 30% were female child soldiers; hence there is a need to create awareness about the role of girls and women as fighters in armed groups, thereby highlighting the female voice.<sup>7</sup> The lack of awareness of female contributions

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<sup>4</sup> This essay is based on field research in northern Uganda, specifically in Gulu district, which is the area that has been particularly affected by the LRA actions for more than two decades.

<sup>5</sup> For the protection of my informants, all names used here are fictitious.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, Ojok. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi-Inn, Gulu, February 9 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Angela Veale, *From Child Soldier to Ex-Fighter: Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia* (ISSMS; Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies; 2003), 7; Bård Mæland, "Constrained but Not Choiceless: On Moral Agency Among Child Soldiers," in *Culture, Religion, and the Re-integration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (ed. Bård Mæland; BTA 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 3; UNICEF, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2006), 44; Susan McKay and Dyan E. Mazurana, *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives*

in war and war-like situations – such as the one in northern Uganda – reflects the fact that girls in most cases perform non-combatant roles and as a result they are simply perceived as bystanders or victims.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the case of the LRA, estimates show that many of the abducted girls in the LRA – soon after their initiation into the LRA – became wives to commanders, who received them as rewards for well performed work.<sup>9</sup> For that matter, pointing out the women's experiences in this essay is a deliberate effort to highlight the experiences of girls and women while they were still members of the LRA. In this effort I am influenced by African feminists who argue that breaking the silence – by letting the women speak about their experiences – is essential for their healing.<sup>10</sup> It is my hope that by letting women tell the stories of their experiences from the bush as LRA members, they have started the long journey towards their healing and possibly re-integration.

According to my interviewees, women and girls were not part of the LRA in the beginning. This is possibly because it was against Acholi cultural beliefs and practices for women to participate in war.<sup>11</sup> This is clearly explained by *rwot* Acana II:

It is absolutely outrageous and absurd that he [Joseph Kony the leader of the LRA] chose to do that [abduct women and children] . . . Kony has taken young women and girls and he has not taken very old women. All this in Acholi is against our culture. Women are much respected, these are our mothers, we respect them very much here in Acholi and even if you go for war, when you come across a woman, you rather rescue them.<sup>12</sup>

Tinkasimiire affirms this further when she explains that in most African cultures women are not to engage in active war and in case they were caught in

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*During and After War* (Montréal: Rights and Democracy, 2004), 29; Margaret Angucia, *Broken Citizenship: Formerly Abducted Children and their Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda* (Amsterdam: Rosenberg Publishers, 2010), 64.

<sup>8</sup> Meredith Turshen and Clotidile Twagira-Mariya, *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1998), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Els de Temmerman, *Above Girls: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2001), 69; Astri Halsan, "Lost Childhood: A Quantitative Analysis on the Use of Child Soldiers in Armed Conflicts 1994-98," (M.A. diss., Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2000), 342.

<sup>10</sup> Musa W. Dube, *The HIV and AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 109-110.

<sup>11</sup> Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 208.

<sup>12</sup> *Rwot* Onen, Acana II. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi cultural offices, Gulu February 9 2008.

battle: they had to be spared together with the children.<sup>13</sup> Despite such cultural beliefs, the LRA were later forced by circumstances to recruit females into the group to help them perform various duties and shall be seen in the next section.

### C ROLES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN THE LRA AND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the LRA, female officers were assigned specific roles which were believed to be in accordance with "God's design." Like Dona who was in charge of the sickbay with a specific duty of ensuring its smooth running, many girls and women were relegated to lower positions such as caring for the sick, being prayer intercessors – for instance praying to Mary for protection when their husbands had gone off to war, leading praise and worship, home care and in other cases, they were sent to fight together with the men. Arnold, a former LRA commander in charge of girls and women while in the bush, explains that the reason why women are mainly left in lower offices is because they are considered to be weak:

He [Kony] said women they are not strong but they are cleverer than men [concerning] the way to stay as husband and wife. [. . .]. But naturally, they have been made very weak.<sup>14</sup>

Arnold's – and in this case the LRA's – reasoning is not out of context. In most African contexts, women are viewed as good wives and having the power and ability to take care of their families, being able to control men who are their husbands, but are not strong enough to fight.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the OT portrays women as a weaker sex and inferior to men. Right from the second creation account of Gen 2:18-24, women are presented as inferior to men. The woman was created out of man's rib only after God realised that he is lonely.

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." <sup>19</sup> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep

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<sup>13</sup> Theresa Tinkasiimire, "Women and War in Northern Uganda: A Theological Reflection on the Dignity of a Woman in the Reintegration Process," in *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (ed. Bård Mæland; BTA 10; New York: Peter Lang; 2010), 166-167.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold, Okot. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Senior Quarters, Gulu, February 7 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Madipoane J. Masenya, *How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa* (BTA 4; New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 137.

sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.<sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.<sup>23</sup> Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

In these verses, women are presented as being only an afterthought – created out of the man's rib, and as a result of the fact that the man is lonely. As Schüssler Fiorenza observes, ". . . whichever way the Bible is used, it legitimises societal and ecclesiastical patriarchy pushing women in their 'divinely ordained place.'"<sup>16</sup>

Ironically in the LRA, even though it was argued that women are weak, most females who were recruited were also trained as soldiers who were sent to the front line as fighters whenever Kony deemed it necessary. This act of using girls and women as fighters in the LRA has echoes from the OT narratives of Judg 4 where the commander Deborah accompanies Barak to lead Israel to a victorious battle against the Canaanites (Judg 4:6-7). In the same chapter (Judg 4:21), the Canaanite general Sisera is killed by a Kenite woman called Jael.

<sup>21</sup> But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground – he was lying fast asleep from weariness and he died.

Therefore, here we see that it is by the command of the woman judge, Deborah and by the hand of the Kenite woman, Jael that the Israelites succeeded at the battle. Thus, the position of women as fighters during war situations in the OT is articulated.

In addition to the above, at a time when there was a lot of pressure due to military engagement between the LRA and the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), the men would rarely find time to cook food and perform other household duties. After realising that the commanders and other fighters were going without food for several days, Kony decided that female combatants be recruited to do home chores, while the men were at the battle front.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the girls – especially the younger girls – who had been abducted were turned into maid servants and baby sitters in the homes of the commanders but when the girls reached puberty, they were then given out – most of the time forcefully – as wives to the commanders and others were

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<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Dona, Ajok. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Transarock, Gulu February 10 2008.

given to the young boys who were also LRA members. As already mentioned, in the LRA, a girl is considered to be due for marriage after experiencing their menstruation for three consecutive months.<sup>18</sup> Sheikh Khalil, the leader of Muslims in northern Uganda affirms this when he explains:

Initially these girls are taken generally as children. They looked after them, they take care of them so well but once a girl reaches the age of puberty, that's when the nature takes over and that's how they now give them to their fellow youth boys who are in the army and at times it will end up even the very officers themselves fall in love with these girls and turn them into wives when they have already reached the age of puberty anyway.<sup>19</sup>

The view that the girls were kept in commanders' homes till puberty is testified to by the female ex-child soldiers. Damalie, a female ex-child soldier, explains:

When I was abducted I was taken in the commander's home to care for the children. Then eventually I was put at the headquarters and I was married off. I was forcefully given out in marriage, hereafter I conceived and gave birth to a child.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to that, other girls testified to the fact that they stayed in commanders' homes. For example, Irene, who was abducted at the age of six, says, "I was baby-sitting, and carrying luggage. I was young by then. Life was tough."<sup>21</sup> Rose who was fourteen years at the time of interview also narrates: "My role was to fetch water, care for the baby for the commander and to cook and carry luggage in case we had to move. I was young."<sup>22</sup> In the same line, Lydia explains: "What I can remember is that I was helping to keep the young children of the commander."<sup>23</sup>

The practice of using young girls as help in the house is not unique within the LRA, but it was also common in most societies in Uganda. This was considered as a form of informal training for the young girls especially those

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<sup>18</sup> John, Okwi. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi-Inn, Gulu, February 9 2008., The same is confirmed by Sheikh Musa, Khalil. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. ARLPI, Gulu, February 13 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Musa, Khalil. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. ARLPI, Gulu, February 13 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Damalie, Atim. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. World Vision, Gulu, February 8 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Irene, Among. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Laroo Boarding School, Gulu, February 5 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Rose, Adek. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. World Vision, Gulu, February 7 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Lydia, Ayot. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Coope IDP camp, Gulu, January 20 2009.

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who had no chance to go to school in order to prepare them for their future responsibilities as mothers and home caretakers. The practice has however dwindled with the introduction of the universal primary and secondary formal education. The practice of turning the young girls into maid servants to the wives of commanders is not foreign to the OT. In 2 Kgs 5:1-2, we see that when Naaman goes out to fight against the Syrians, he brings back with him a captive (maid servant) from the land of Israel who waits upon his wife:

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.<sup>2</sup> Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

Thus here we see an example of how practices within the LRA seem to have links with OT roles of girls and women.

It was further revealed by my interviewees that since the LRA soldiers had no families in the bush, they were not committed to fighting. Therefore the spirit instructed Kony to recruit female soldiers and give them out as wives to male fighters. That was the start of marriage in the LRA because; the abducted women would give birth to children.<sup>24</sup> That way, it became an obligation for the LRA fighters to fight hard so as to protect their families. Having one's family in the bush made them settle and relax without desiring to come out of the bush. To affirm this, Steve, John and Arnold in an informal discussion explain that there was a time when many men who were abducted would struggle to escape because in the LRA, it was forbidden to "eat the mango."<sup>25</sup> As a result, some LRA members would go and sleep with women and then come back to the bush. For fear of losing members and contracting the deadly HIV infection, Kony – apparently under the guidance of the spirit –allowed the LRA members to "eat the mango." Consequently, the level of escaping tremendously reduced. This is confirmed by Kwoyelo, a former commander in the LRA, who was captured by the UPDF during *operation lightning and thunder*. In an interview with the Sunday Vision Kwoyelo argues: "There were no marriages or relationships. You all stayed as captives and became soldiers."<sup>26</sup> But when asked as to when the rule changed, he says, "In the beginning of the nineties, some members would go into the community to sleep

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<sup>24</sup> Steve, Ogot. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi-Inn, Gulu, February 12 2008.

<sup>25</sup> The forbidden mango is an analogy made in reference to the forbidden fruit in Genesis accounts.

<sup>26</sup> Juma, Kwoyelo. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recorded. UPDF 4th Division, Gulu, Februaruary 14 2009.

with somebody and then come back. That is when Kony decided to abolish the rule on marriages."<sup>27</sup>

The LRA's idea of the forbidden mango does in some ways give associations to the story in Gen 2:16-17 – where man is allowed to eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree in the middle of the garden.<sup>28</sup> In both cases – the LRA and the OT text of Gen 2:16-17 – there are instructions given to the members not to eat a fruit. However, the stories divert where the spirit is said to have granted permission for the LRA to eat the mango. But, in the Gen 2 text, when the woman and the man eat the fruit, they are chased out of the garden, an act which shows that in the OT text, permission was never granted for anyone to eat the forbidden fruit.

Furthermore, on the issue of marriages, Arnold conveys that the girls were abducted because there was a need to make a generation survive from the prevalent Human Immune Virus (HIV) infection. And since, they were considered to be relatively safe from HIV infection, once abducted, the young women and girls were given out as rewards to the commanders for procreation purposes. An example often referred to in this case was that of the Aboke girls who were abducted on 10th October 1996 from their school in Apac.<sup>29</sup> David explains that out of 139 girls, the spirit commanded them to retain only 30 who were divided among the high ranking commanders in the LRA as wives by Kony. He recounts: "It is Kony who distributes. As the case was with Aboke girls, Arnold had one and Steve had one."<sup>30</sup>

Arnold confirms David's statement when he confesses that he returned from the bush with his wife who happens to have been one of the Aboke girls given to him by Kony as his wife while they were still in the bush.<sup>31</sup> From my interviews, it was further revealed that many female soldiers had no choice to make when it came to choosing partners. It is only Kony who had the right to give out girls in marriage to a man of his (Kony's) choice. Once one was given to a man as a wife, she was not allowed to raise any objections regardless of how many wives such a man had. Instead, the women were expected to remain

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<sup>27</sup> Juma, Kweyolo. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recorded. UPDF 4th Division, Gulu, Febraruay 14 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Worth to mention here is the view that while for the LRA the mango meant sexual intercourse this may not be the case in the Genesis account.

<sup>29</sup> Aboke Girls is a Catholic founded boarding secondary school. At the time of the abduction of the girls, it was headed by an Italian catholic nun. Being a religiously founded school, it is possible that the girls in this school were considered to be pure and safe from HIV infection compared to other girls.

<sup>30</sup> David, Ongom. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Gulu Support the Children Organisation, Gulu, February 12 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold, Okot. Informal conversation with Helen Nkabala. Senior quarters, Gulu, February 7 2008.

loyal to their polygamous men. To affirm this, Kelly explains: "I was wife number 16 to Otti Lagony but I had to wait for him alone."<sup>32</sup>

The practice of polygamy seems to be borrowed from the Acholi culture where a man was free to have many women, but a woman was to submit to only one man and this remains the norm of Acholi culture to date.<sup>33</sup> On the view that women in LRA had no choice when it came to choosing partners, scholars explain that the female abductees were forcefully given off to senior commanders as wives and mistresses. Many of the female abductees were impregnated and forced to bear children without consent.<sup>34</sup> The former LRA highly placed commanders I interviewed, find nothing wrong with the abduction of girls and women or even giving them out forcefully as wives to commanders. A case in point is Steve who explains that abduction was only used as a means of recruitment, and it was the only way to get wives for the commanders, since women did not want to join the LRA willingly.<sup>35</sup> In this practice of forcing women to become wives of men who are not of their choice, one sees traits of the African culture which sanctions male dominance over women thus promoting patriarchal alienation, marginalisation and oppression of women: this is a practice which must be stopped.<sup>36</sup> Comparatively, the OT also seems to grant permission for the abduction of women and girls during war. The abducted girls and women are then turned into wives for the commanders. In the OT, Deut 21:10-13, states:

<sup>10</sup> When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God hands them over to you and you take them captive, <sup>11</sup> suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, <sup>12</sup> and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, <sup>13</sup> discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly, Lagony. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. World Vision, Gulu, February 7 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Rwot Onen, Acana II*. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi Cultural Offices, Gulu, February 9 2008.; Knowles F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), 27; E. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 57.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. De Temmerman, *Aboke Girls*, 69; Deusdedit R. K. Nkurunziza, "The Dynamics of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Challenges of Building Peace in Uganda," in *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (ed. Bård. Mæland; BTA 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 78.

<sup>35</sup> Steve, Ogot. Interview with Helen Nkabala. Tape recording. Acholi-Inn, Gulu, February 12 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 126; Masenya, "How Worthy?" 123.

These verses seem to justify that a soldier can force a woman caught in captivity to marry him without paying attention to whether the woman loves him or not. When the LRA do actions – forcing women/girls into marriage – which are like those we read in the verses of Deut 21:10-13, we see an example of how a text is interpreted from a male perspective to promote male dominance. Sadly, like the case is for the LRA, there are texts in the OT which show that while males are protected, in most cases women are left to be chosen as victims of the lust of men (cf. Gen 19:8; Judg 19:24).<sup>37</sup> The OT is also embedded with texts which show that women are used, battered, tortured and abused, yet no one seems to care for them. In the texts about Hagar and Tamar, we see clear examples of women who are used and abused. Trible discusses four women in the OT who are used and abused. First she presents Gen 16:1-16 and Gen 21:9-21, which is a narrative about the slave girl in the house of Abraham and Sarah. Hagar is used by her mistress who is barren but wishes to be fulfilled through her but at the end of it all, Hagar and her son are rejected and sent away from home. Next is Tamar who is raped by her brother Amnon. Using his position as a prince filled with power, Amnon rapes his sister Tamar after which he hates her. Amidst that all, Tamar is commanded to be silent about the act of Amnon and not to take to heart what he does (2 Sam 13:20). In the third text, Judg 19:1-30, Trible discusses the fate of an unnamed woman who is raped, tortured, and murdered by her master without the intervention of anyone. Commenting on the text, Trible observes that the woman in this text is treated as the least, as a property, an object, a tool and a literary device without friends to aid her in life or mourn her in death.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, even when asked about the act the master finds no remorse for his act. On the contrary, revenge is taken against the Benjamites who are accused of refusing to give up the men of Gibeah (Judg 20:13). No one – not even Yahweh condemns the master's act and this suggests that violence against women seems to be sanctioned and justified.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, Trible presents the unfair sacrifice of Japheth's daughter who comes out to welcome her father from the battle front, where he had made a vow that if the Ammonites are given to his hand, he will sacrifice to God the first thing that meets him on his return from the battle front (Judg 11: 8-40). The one he meets, is his only daughter and consequently he sacrifices her.

In the same way, the fact that the women and girls in the LRA are used and abused by the rebels cannot be denied. Moreover, even when they return from the bush, society does not make it any easier for them as they are

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<sup>37</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 75.

<sup>38</sup> Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 80-81.

<sup>39</sup> Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 83.

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rejected.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, since the LRA claims to be influenced by the Bible in all their actions, it can be argued that the way the LRA treats girls and women leads to associations with some of the roles of girls and women in the OT texts.

#### D EVALUATING THE LRA'S AND THE OLD TESTAMENT'S VIEWS ON GIRLS AND WOMEN

The presentation of the roles of women and girls' roles in both the LRA and the OT shows some similarities between the two entities in the way girls and women are treated. Such untold oppression most of the time comes as a result of the beliefs and practices of patriarchal influences. What has been presented here both from the LRA and the OT shows patriarchal mechanisms at work. The danger with patriarchy is that it robs people of their dignity, hope, self-worth and God-given creativity.<sup>41</sup> Indeed that is exactly what we see in the LRA: the girls and women are robbed of their dignity and self-worth by being forced as wives to men who are not of their choice as expressed by Kelly and other interviewees. Schüssler Fiorenza has also observed that, patriarchy is a source of women's oppression.<sup>42</sup> In a more elaborate way, she explains that from the past, biblical religion is responsible for making women invisible by ignoring their experiences and deeds. Besides, the Bible presents God in a male form thus promoting male dominance at the expense of the females. She writes:

Western language and patriarchal religion have "erased" women from history and made them "non-beings." Feminists argue that biblical religion and theology is sexist to the core. It is not retrievable for women, since it ignores women's experiences, speaks of the god head in male terms, legitimizes women's subordinate positions of powerlessness, and promotes male dominance and violence against women. Therefore feminists must move beyond the

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<sup>40</sup> Annan & al, "Women and girls at war: Wives, mothers, and fighters in the Lord's Resistance Army" (2009), 10. Cited 12 December 2011. Online: <http://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2009.Women@War.pdf>.

Emeline Ndossi has discussed the experience of stigma as encountered by female returnees in an article published in 2010. See Emeline Ndossi, "Stigma as Encountered by Female Returnees and the Role of the Church in Northern Uganda," in *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (ed. Bård Mæland; BTA 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 133-148.

<sup>41</sup> Nyambura J. Njoroge, "The Bible and African Christianity: A Curse or a Blessing?" in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Musa W. Dube; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 214; Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 86.

<sup>42</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 85.

boundaries of biblical religion and reject the patriarchal authority of biblical revelation.<sup>43</sup>

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, biblical scholars and other Bible readers should therefore come out to condemn the various texts which tend to sanction the oppression of women in the OT and the Bible at large. A good reading of OT texts and the Bible in general must ensure that the interpretative community is not oppressed. I agree with feminists who suggest that emphasis should be put on a reading that would promote the common good and comfort of women and girls together with others who are oppressed in various societies.<sup>44</sup>

There is also a need to rethink and reconceptualise the position of women not only in our societies but also in our religious beliefs and practices. Other than presenting God as one who favours men at the expense of women's freedom, biblical studies must lay more emphasis on the texts which highlight the important roles played by women. Stories of Deborah and Esther must be emphasised more than those which depict women as a weaker sex, people without a voice. I am aware of the views of some scholars that in terms of visibility and humanity these women in the Bible are an embarrassment to their modern sisters because they lack the power to take decision and for that matter cannot empower the uplifting of women today. However, I am more inclined to Schüssler Fiorenza's observation:

As long as the stories and history of women in the beginnings of early Christianity are not theologically conceptualised as an integral part of the proclamation of the gospel, biblical texts and traditions formulated and codified by men will remain oppressive to women.<sup>45</sup>

And, like Kanyoro, I would tend to look at the positive side of the stories of the Bible which depict women as working together across borders to overcome challenges.

Additionally, I am inclined to share Masenya's argument that the transformation of society should be the ultimate goal of interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Biblical texts must be re-read in ways that promote life and empower the marginalised in society leading to wholeness.<sup>47</sup> That way, women and other marginalised people will be freed from the sufferings and pain they tend to

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<sup>43</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xviii.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 107 (1988): 15; Masenya, "How Worthy?" 7.

<sup>45</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xv.

<sup>46</sup> Masenya, "How Worthy?" 23

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Njoroge, "Bible and African Christianity," 233. Teresa Okure, ed., *To Cast Fire upon the Earth: Bible and Mission Collaborating in Today's Multicultural Global Context* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000), 198.

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experience at the hands of male or patriarchal and power-related dominant interpretations.

Concerning the place of women, Trible contends that there is need to direct our hearts to the suffering women and to speak on their behalf.<sup>48</sup> I take this further and suggest that more than just speak for such women, it is important for women to come out and tell their stories – albeit the difficulties they have endured – without fear because that is the only way they can be in a position to regain their pride has robbed them for a long time. As Judy Chicago notes, all the institutions of culture tell through words, deeds and silence that women are insignificant. However, their heritage is their power.<sup>49</sup>

## D CONCLUSION

The essay argues that there is a very close link between the roles of girls and women in the Lord's Resistance Army and those in the OT. The way that the LRA treats girls and women gives associations to the way some OT texts treat girls and women. The fact that the LRA continuously claims to be influenced by the Bible, confirms the link that the LRA makes to the OT. Also Acholi cultural beliefs and practices seem to agree. Therefore, even if it may not seem evident to some scholars that Kony may have got his teachings about girls and women from the OT, Kony's and the LRA's continuous claims that their actions are supported by the Bible, give a logical explanation for the connection. Moreover, both the OT and Acholi culture present themselves as patriarchal systems which – I argue – support discriminatory treatment against the girls and women, and have led to untold suffering of the female LRA soldiers. The situation would therefore call for a gendered approach when dealing with the texts or any cultural beliefs which open up for Kony's or any similar understanding with regard to the roles of girls and women, to avoid discrimination such as those which the former female LRA fighters were exposed to.

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<sup>48</sup> Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 86.

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