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### **A collaborating chronicler? Researching tales, truths and the Lord's Resistance Army**

I conducted research with one of the world's most violent rebel groups, Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) over the course of four years from 2005 - 2008, including the only field work done inside the LRA camp on the Sudan/DRC border and the only sit-down interview ever conducted with Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA. I will argue that doing research in an extremely tense and fast-moving conflict environment under the spotlight of international interest comes at high personal and professional cost and is impossible without self-censorship. Researching the LRA perspective posed various challenges. The war in Uganda has been characterized by unspeakable violence inflicted by rebels and government, humanitarian suffering on a breathtaking scale, an inconclusive international response, misinformation and propaganda. At the same time, the conflict in northern Uganda has received huge international attention since the ICC issued arrest warrants for LRA top commanders, including Joseph Kony. Conducting this work posed logistical challenges as well as ethical and personal dilemmas. Logistically, negotiating access to one of the most feared rebel groups in the world proved a complicated endeavor. Ethically, I had to decide whether to accept inquiries from the ICC to share my data. Being the only field researcher in a developing conflict environment focused attention of the ICC and aid agencies on me. This in turn created tension between the LRA and myself, making my research very difficult. Doing such close research on the LRA took its toll on me personally. In order to be able to do this research, I had to gain the trust of reviled individuals by assuring them fair representation of their viewpoint. When I failed to achieve this fair representation – through editorial politics and a willingness to spin in major news organizations such as the BBC and the Times of London – I had let down my research subjects. I had not stuck to my researcher's promise, but at the same time 'only' let down men who are wanted internationally for crimes against humanity. Their anger at what was perceived as betrayal resulted in both temporary denial of access, but also physical violence. My solution was to take a one-sided approach in my research in order to understand the LRA's perspective and re-gain access, rather than establish the "truth". This in itself posed several problems. How could I openly approach some of the most violent rebels in Africa without pre-judgment or without fear to ask certain questions? How could I, after identifying obvious lies in Kony's answers, proceed? How could I deal with accusations of being an LRA collaborator, especially accusations from the Ugandan army? Did I, in fact, become a collaborator by not handing over my findings to the international prosecutors? In the end, I chose self-censorship to protect my access and my own security. The conclusion of the paper is that while it was vital to take a one-sided perspective during the fieldwork to allow access, this approach comes at high personal and professional cost.

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