

## Research Project

### Dissertationsprojekt: The Organisation of Violence in Armed Groups. The Case of the LRA

#### **Project funded by own resources**

**Project title** Dissertationsprojekt: The Organisation of Violence in Armed Groups. The Case of the LRA

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**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Soziologie (Paul)

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#### **0.1 PhD-project in Sociology, University of Basel**

The northern Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is one of the most notorious and cruel rebel movement in Africa. Its inner politics build on forced recruitment, the instrumentalisation and (sexual) exploitation of mainly minors and adolescents. Its repertoire of violence against civilians includes highly symbolic acts like dismemberment, public execution and desecration. The uncompromising nature of their actions stands in stark contrast to their alleged senselessness. Despite the lack popular support, material resources and a political agenda likewise, efforts of regional and international actors to smash the rebel organisation have constantly failed. The LRA has undermined all attempts at sustainable development and peace in the Great Lakes region for more than 20 years now. While there is a rich literature that addresses the macro-dynamics of rebel action and civil war as its context, it has proved incapable to explain both the violent excess and the resilience of the LRA.

##### **0.1.1 Research Questions / Objectives**

The idea of this thesis is to provide insights on the rationale of the LRA by focusing on concrete violent action, i.e. its organisation, dynamics and individual and collective actors. The main questions are:

What processes and institutions enable violence under the conditions of forced recruitment?

What accounts for the resort to different 'repertoires of violence' and atrocious practices in particular?

The research proposal intends to answer these question by focusing on the meaning of organisational structures, group-level processes and situational dynamics.

It understands the LRA as an organisation that has to cope with genuine problems concerning membership, recruitment strategies, norms and incentives structures that are likewise cause and effect for the extraordinary violence of their actions. On the other side, the project will explore how restrained actors cope with these institutional demands, i.e. how they translate authoritative directives into individual behaviour. While rebel group leaders are successful in imposing violence on their subjects – both active and passive – individuals and groups may act upon divergent rationalities. Young combatants, though abducted, make choices that are not perfectly determined by the imposition of organisational pressures. They struggle to give meaning to their actions. To explore these performances of agency and identity in collective violent action will be a main objective of this project.

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#### **Financed by**

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