frontiers | Frontiers in Political Science

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
published: 01 June 2022
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.850969

"They Now Know That They Are Children of War": Forcibly Abducted Mothers and Fathers Balancing Disclosure and Silencing to Their Children Born of War in Northern Uganda

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In recent years, scholars have emphasized the need for a relational understanding of the impact of collective violence pointing to the myriad interconnections between individual and communal experiences and consequences. These interconnections are particularly strong in the (re)integration of formerly abducted children and youth, and their children born of war, since various social, relational and cultural processes play a key role in their wellbeing and healing. One example is the way in which trauma communication is shaped by culture and context, and intersects at the level of the individual and the collective. In this paper, we will explore how forcibly abducted mothers and fathers in post-conflict Northern Uganda perceive the trauma communication about the context in which their children born in forced captivity were conceived. Case study research was used to understand the dynamic trajectories of this trauma communication, placing parents' experiences within broader life histories, and the social and relational context. Repeated interviews were performed with six mothers and four fathers who became parents in forced captivity with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Central in the participants' stories is their agency in the careful, individual choice "to be silent" or "not to be silent" toward their children, family and community members. However, these choices are shaped—and often restricted—by the relational and cultural context. A dynamic interplay of several factors, such as the age of the child, the emotional impact of disclosure, a lack of resources and support in the upbringing of children, identity and belonging, and perceived or potential future stigmatization are explored in this paper. Trauma communication can be seen as a socially negotiated choice, interacting in a complex dialectic relationship between silencing, disclosing, forgetting and remembering. As such, the study revealed important insights into post-conflict healing and reintegration in the day-to-day lives of formerly abducted children and youth, and their children born of war, on an individual and collective level.

Keywords: children born of war, trauma communication, post-trauma healing, armed conflict, Uganda

OPEN ACCESS

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Specialty section:
This article was submitted to Peace and Democracy, a section of the journal Frontiers in Political Science

Received: *08 January 2022*
Accepted: *03 May 2022*
Published: *01 June 2022*

Citation:
De Nutte L, De Haene L and Derluyn I (2022) "They Now Know That They Are Children of War": Forcibly Abducted Mothers and Fathers Balancing Disclosure and Silencing to Their Children Born of War in Northern Uganda. Front. Polit. Sci. 4:850969. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.850969

INTRODUCTION

Various scholars have emphasized the need for a relational understanding of the impact of collective violence, pointing to the myriad interconnections between individual and communal experiences and consequences (Derluyn et al., 2013; Kevers, 2017; De Haene et al., 2018; De Haene and Rousseau, 2020). This understanding is supported by a range of research pointing to the importance of social relationships and networks, and the larger social fabric during and after collective violence (Vindevogel et al., 2014; De Nutte et al., 2017). Consequently, research and practice need to broaden their focus beyond the individual toward addressing the impact of collective violence onto the social and communal level (Barber, 2013a,b; Derluyn et al., 2015; Vindevogel, 2017). Healing must be located in its social context, acknowledging the far-reaching and long-term impact of collective violence, and emphasizing the need to study post-conflict contexts and focus on reconciliation processes (Derluyn et al., 2013; Shanahan and Veale, 2015).

Interconnections between individual and communal worlds seem to be particularly strong in the rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly abducted children and youth, and their children born of war, since various social processes play a key role in their wellbeing and healing (Song et al., 2014; Stewart, 2017; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018; Allen et al., 2020; Macdonald and Kerali, 2020). One example is the way in which trauma communication is shaped by culture[1] and context (Fivush, 2010; Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic, 2012), and intersects at the level of the individual and the collective (Elsass, 2001; Eastmond, 2007; Kevers, 2017; De Haene et al., 2018, 2020).

Trauma communication has been highlighted as a central dynamic and mediating factor in children's and families' adjustment and wellbeing following collective violence (Kevers, 2017; De Haene and Rousseau, 2020). Based on Dalgaard et al. (2016, p. 71), we define trauma communication as "the way in which parents talk to their children [, their families and community members] about their traumatic experiences from the past" and, more specifically, about the context of forced abduction and captivity in which their child(ren) is/are born.

In this paper, we will explore how forcibly abducted mothers and fathers in post-conflict Northern Uganda perceive the trauma communication about the context in which their children born in forced captivity were conceived.

In this introduction, we shall first elaborate on trauma communication in the aftermath of collective violence. Then we will explore the context of collective violence that resulted out of the armed conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda. Third, we will focus on the context of forced marriage and parenthood within the LRA, before reflecting on the interconnections between gender and collective violence. We shall conclude with an outline of the specific research questions and gaps in the current literature that will guide the exploration of the topic at hand. The introduction shall be followed by an exploration of the methods of this study.

Trauma Communication in the Aftermath of Collective Violence

In studies and (clinical) practice on trauma communication, several scholars have complicated the interconnections between disclosure, silencing, forgetting and remembering (Fivush, 2010; Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic, 2012; Kevers, 2017; Dalgaard et al., 2019).

Verbalization and disclosure, and their presumed healing effects, have known a long history (Shaw, 2007). In various strands of clinical trauma care, recounting traumatic experiences is perceived to be a central mechanism of recovery for survivors, as verbalization and revisiting of traumatic memories are linked to improved emotional healing (Measham and Rousseau, 2010; De Haene et al., 2012). Here, trauma narration is used to enable a coherent and meaningful integration of the traumatic memories in order to heal (Almqvist and Broberg, 1997; Kevers et al., 2016; De Haene et al., 2018, 2020). In addition, strongly framed within narrative research among Holocaust survivors, verbalization connected to remembering became imperative "so that it will not happen again" (Shaw, 2007, p. 193), effectuating a "conspiracy of silence" as its main risk (McKinney, 2007; Dalgaard et al., 2016, 2019). Silencing or forgetting of traumatic experiences are, by consequence, seen as less adaptive for the individual and the broader context (De Haene et al., 2012; Dalgaard et al., 2016; Kevers, 2017).

However, throughout research and practice, the protective effects of silencing and forgetting were explored on the level of the individual, family and wider community. Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2012, p. 505) conceptualized silence as "being more than the absence of speech; rather, it is a form of social communication that is as rich and multifaceted as speech and narration." Simultaneously, scholars have pointed out that open disclosure of parental trauma can lead to increased mental health problems in children, especially when they also experience high levels of war-related stress (Dalgaard et al., 2016, 2019). Within the broader context and culture in which the reintegration of formerly abducted persons and their children unfolds, various examples have highlighted the potential healing and restorative nature of silencing and forgetting (Song and De Jong, 2013; Alipanga, 2015; Justice Reconciliation Project, 2015; Apio, 2016; Mukasa, 2017; Stewart, 2017). It is important to note, however, Fivush (2010)'s distinction between "being silent" as a deliberate choice and "being silenced" as imposed.

Within the caregiver-child relationship, the concept of "modulated disclosure" following collective violence has been connected to children's positive adaptation, mental health and development (Rousseau and Measham, 2007; Measham and Rousseau, 2010; Dalgaard and Montgomery, 2015). The manner, timing and content of trauma communication have been brought to the fore, that is, to carefully consider what aspects of the traumatic events should be disclosed, how and when. In this regard, the child's developmental status, his/her level of exposure to traumatic events, the family situation and the cultural meaning

[1] Throughout this paper, culture is conceptualized as "socially-constructed and socially-shared ways-of-being-and-doing" (Theron and Liebenberg, 2015, p. 32). In this way, we subscribe to a dynamic perspective on culture, forever in flux and change.

of trauma communication have been emphasized (Rousseau and Drapeau, 1998; Dalgaard and Montgomery, 2015; Dalgaard et al., 2019). Caregivers assume the "role of gatekeepers of the past for the sake of their children's wellbeing" (Rousseau and Measham, 2007, p. 282), balancing between sharing enough information to make sense of children's experiences and protecting them from getting overwhelmed.

Importantly, trauma communication is shaped by culture and context (Fivush, 2010; Dalgaard and Montgomery, 2015; Kevers, 2017). In the same vein, notwithstanding the influence of Western perspectives (Pain et al., 2020), scholars have indicated the context-specificity of the meaning of trauma, what is considered traumatic, and how people heal and cope with trauma (Rousseau and Drapeau, 1998; Diab et al., 2015; Kevers et al., 2016).

Moving beyond a dichotomous understanding, we will illustrate how disclosure and silencing in the aftermath of collective violence are interacting in a complex dialectic relationship (Fivush, 2010; Measham and Rousseau, 2010; De Haene et al., 2012, 2018, 2020; Kevers et al., 2016). Scholars have related this dynamic to the back-and-forth alternation between forgetting, remembering, distancing and appropriation of traumatic experiences and memories (Rousseau et al., 2001; Kevers, 2017).

Context of Collective Violence and Forced Parenthood in Northern Uganda

Over 20 armed groups have tried to gain power since Yoweri K. Museveni's army overthrew the Ugandan government in 1986 (Dolan and Hovil, 2006; Dolan, 2011). The collective violence resulting out of the armed conflict between the Ugandan Government, led by President Museveni, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony, has by far received the greatest attention. The LRA organized major massacres, killing and maiming many, and abducted thousands of children and youth to serve as child soldiers in a variety of roles (Annan et al., 2008). About 90 percent of the Northern Ugandan population was forced into internally displacement camps by the Ugandan government where they experienced a lack of adequate security and protection, food, water, sanitation, livelihood and educational opportunities, medical care, and overcrowding (Finnström, 2008; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2011; Blackmore, 2020). Many people still experience the economic, physical, psychological, and social consequences of the collective violence up to this day (Mazurana et al., 2019; Amanela et al., 2020).

Within the context of forced abduction, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) set up a highly organized and controlled system of forced marriages and parenthood (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Watye Ki Gen et al., 2013; Baines, 2017; Atim et al., 2018b). In this paper, we define forced marriages as the "forced imposition of the status of marriage" (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008, p. 15), that is, without consent of the persons involved and their families. Simultaneously drawing on and transgressing Acholi conjugal practices (Porter, 2015; Apio, 2016; Aijazi and Baines, 2017; Baines, 2017; Madhani and Baines, 2020), forced marriage became one of the LRA's defining and critical features (Watye Ki Gen et al., 2013; Apio, 2016). Annan et al. (2009) estimated that about one out of four abducted females became forced wives in LRA captivity.

Orchestrated by the top leadership of the LRA (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Aijazi et al., 2019; Denov and Drumbl, 2020), the practice of forced marriage served several purposes: (1) it was part and parcel of the LRA's "political project of nation-building" (Baines, 2014, p. 407), "a way of reproducing—literally giving birth to—the nation" of "morally pure" Acholi (ibid, p. 406); (2) forced marriages were meant to create dependencies between abducted children/youth and the LRA, and amongst abducted children/youth themselves (Kramer, 2012; Aijazi and Baines, 2017); and (3) it was implemented as a system of renumeration and privilege, a "surrogate payment system in the absence of distributable material goods" (Kramer, 2012, p. 28). Notwithstanding noted exceptions (Aijazi et al., 2019), sexual relations were only permitted within the construct of forced marriage (Annan et al., 2009; Baines, 2014). Considering the purposeful implementation of forced marriage and parenthood, children were perceived as a status symbol within the LRA (Denov and Lakor, 2017).

It has been estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 children were born in forced captivity (Annan et al., 2008; Stewart, 2017). While Apio (2007) noted that a majority of mothers "emphasized that life was even worse when one became a mother" and "parenting in the confines of the LRA enclaves was a most difficult experience" (p. 100), research has also pointed to the protective and meaning-making aspect of becoming a parent in forced captivity. In fieldwork with mothers and fathers who became parents in forced captivity, it was revealed that "men draw meaning, rootedness, identity and ontological stability from their children" (Aijazi and Baines, 2017, p. 16) and mothers "say that the love of their child is what kept them going during the harsh times with the LRA" (Watye Ki Gen et al., 2013, p. 20). Research among children born in captivity also found that, notwithstanding the violence they endured, they felt valued and accepted within the LRA, expressing a feeling of belonging and being cared for (Justice Reconciliation Project, 2015; Denov and Lakor, 2017; Denov and Piolanti, 2020).

Recently, scholars have started to explore the impact and continuation of post-captivity forced marriages for women and men, and the lives of children born of war (Aijazi and Baines, 2017; Denov and Lakor, 2017, 2018; Stewart, 2017; Oliveira and Baines, 2020; Suarez and Baines, 2021). Many accounts have related challenges in reintegration to rejection, discrimination and/or stigmatization connected to forced marriage and parenthood (Denov and Lakor, 2017; Stewart, 2017). In particular, women's gender-specific roles as forced wives and mothers have hampered their own and their children's return and (re)integration (Baines, 2011), resulting into difficulties in post-conflict lives, marriages and parenthood (Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018b; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018; Oliveira and Baines, 2020).

Interconnections Between Gender and Collective Violence

Given that this paper combines data out of interviews performed with both mothers and fathers who became parents in forced abduction, it is key to highlight the differential impact

of collective violence, military conscription and post-conflict settings onto gender (Saferworld., 2014; Reinke, 2016; UN General Assembly Security Council, 2021).

Within the context of Northern Uganda, scholars have emphasized the role gender plays in abduction, initiation and roles within the LRA (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Baines, 2011), and reintegration experiences connected to poverty, family and community acceptance, marriage and parenting (Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018b; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018).

Notwithstanding conflicting findings, many scholars have stated that women and girls experience more difficulties during reintegration into their communities (Veale and Stavrou, 2007; Kohrt et al., 2015). Various reasons contribute to this finding, namely (1) the girls' and women's experiences of rejection, discrimination and/or stigmatization given their specific roles (e.g., forced women and mothers) within the armed forces (Annan et al., 2008; Muldoon et al., 2014), which are often complicated by the prevailing patriarchal values (Kiconco, 2015; Kohrt et al., 2015; Porter, 2015), (2) the mismatch between girls' and women's needs, and the reintegration programmes, leading to only a few of them to go through such official processes (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Muldoon et al., 2014), and (3) the specific physical and psychological challenges experienced by girls and women during and after abduction (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Mukasa, 2017; UN General Assembly Security Council, 2021).

In addition, in many post-conflict societies women and girls shoulder the burden of care though they have less access to, for example, economic resources such as property and land (Reinke, 2016; Whyte and Acio, 2017; Atim et al., 2018a; Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2018).

To conclude, this paper will elaborate on how forcibly abducted mothers and fathers in post-conflict Northern Uganda perceive the trauma communication about the context in which their children born in forced captivity were conceived. The following research questions will support the exploration of the topic at hand:

1. Which coping strategies do parents use in communicating to their children about the context in which they were born?
2. How do parents conceptualize the choice regarding trauma communication toward their children?
3. Which cultural and contextual factors influence the parents' trajectories on trauma communication toward their children?

As such, our study addresses the need for more research on the underlying factors and processes of trauma communication within families and among non-Western war-affected populations (Dalgaard and Montgomery, 2015; Kevers, 2017; Dalgaard et al., 2019).

METHODS

This paper draws upon a study on the meaning of upbringing in the context of (past) collective violence, in particular in the context of the armed conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government. Throughout the interviews with one of the participating groups, namely the forcibly abducted youth who became parents in captivity, trauma communication came to the fore as a key consideration in the upbringing of their children.

Gaining Access

A careful process was conducted in order to gain access to the research context and participants. First, permission to carry out the research from the ethical review boards of Ghent University and the Republic of Uganda were obtained, as well as consent from several government offices in Kitgum District. This was followed by informative meetings about the study in every Sub-County (i.e., Mucwini, Lagoro, and Omiya-Anyima) in which officials, representatives, potential participants and all interested others were invited. During these meetings, a participant mobilizer was appointed who "brokered" the initial relationship between the research team and potential participants. Importantly, given the need to protect the privacy of the target group (see further), six participants were selected using snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014; Kiconco, 2019).

Participants and Data Collection

Repeated interviews were performed with six mothers and four fathers who became parents in forced captivity with the LRA, aged between 26 and 38 years old at the first interview. The participants were abducted when they were between 11 and 16 years old, and spent between 5 and 12 years in forced captivity. They became first-time parents when they were between 15 and 20 years old, with the majority having had two children while in captivity. None of the participants had children together. All their children were currently either living with their biological parent (i.e., individual participant and his/her new partner and children), their extended family (e.g., maternal or paternal grandparent or great-grandparent) or former "partner" from forced captivity.

A semi-structured interview guide was used that was piloted during fieldwork performed in 2014. The guide included divergent topics regarding the upbringing of children. The participants were asked about their own upbringing, their experiences as a caregiver during and after the context of forced captivity, and how they perceived upbringing in future.

During the interviews, the first author was supported by research assistants who provided interpretation between Luo/Acholi and English. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in English by an independent transcriber who was not present during the interviews.

Given the often complex and rich experiences during and after forced captivity, we decided to follow-up our participants during a period of about 2 years (July 2014 to July 2016) for two mothers, as we were able to meet them during the pilot, and 1 year (March 2015 to July 2016) for the other mothers and fathers. Overall, we did at least four recorded interviews with each of the participants.

The second and third interview provided a chance to ask the participants for clarification and elaboration on the previous interviews, and to answer any questions they might have on the research (cf. informed consent as an iterative process MacKenzie et al., 2007).

The fourth interview provided an opportunity for an individual member check. Member checking, a "process in which collected data is "played back" to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reactions" (Cho and Trent, 2006, p. 322), was applied as a potential strategy to address the power imbalances between the research team and the participants. Member checking has been described to have a 2-fold objective (Goldblatt et al., 2011). First, from a methodological standpoint, it serves to minimize misinterpretations of the narratives shared by participants (ibid). Second, from an ethical stance, it can be seen as a way to increase active participation of respondents by giving them more control on the way their accounts are represented (Koelsch, 2013). In addition, it also served as a valuable opportunity to "wrap up" the various interviews, listen to participants' experiences on the research process itself and thank them for journeying together. The member checks were carefully prepared to include broad themes that were touched upon by each individual participant, giving them the opportunity to make additions, deletions or adjustments to the information they had shared in previous interviews. The reactions to the member check varied. Some participants perceived it as a chance to clarify and add on to their stories. Others were hesitant to engage with the information that they had shared earlier as it was too sensitive, or they interpreted the member check as a way to rectify "errors" in their stories.

Data Analysis

Case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2006), supported by NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2015), was used to understand the dynamic trajectories of disclosure, silencing, forgetting and remembering while placing experiences within broader life histories, social and relational context, and time (Ames, 2007; Fassin et al., 2008; Kohrt et al., 2015). Case study research was chosen because of its bottom-up approach and, consequently, a close linkage with the empirical data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The findings resulting out of the within-case analysis were accumulated and merged into cross-case clusters. These clusters were polished and connected to the research questions, leading to several assertions. The final assertions were revised against each other and the data.

Ethical and Methodological Reflections

Research with participants who experienced traumatic events as a result of collective violence is fraught with methodological and ethical challenges (De Haene et al., 2010). Throughout the whole research process, the team reflected upon various methodological and ethical challenges associated with gaining access to the research context, collaboration with research brokers, autonomy, agency and vulnerability of participants, narration, power and privilege, and completing the data collection (for a detailed account, see De Nutte, *under review*).

Provision of Emotional Support to Participants: Co-construction of Trauma Communication in the Research Relationship

Since we asked participants to recount potentially traumatic experiences and mental health and psychosocial support services are scarce within the area, we wanted to make sure that we were able to provide the necessary emotional support during and after the interviews and in between fieldwork periods. Four out of five research assistants were recruited because they had expertise as counselors to provide psychosocial support to the participants.

Throughout the course of data collection, multiple psychosocial services were offered to five participants (i.e., four mothers and one father). It was clarified to the participants that partaking in psychosocial services did not in any way influence their participation in the research and that all what was shared during these sessions was kept confidential between the participant and the research assistant. Generally, the first session of psychosocial support was offered to the participants immediately after the interview as it could have touched upon sensitive information and/or the participant seemed uncomfortable or in distress. In two instances (i.e., one mother and one father), the interview was stopped and immediate support was given. If certain issues that required more time and space were touched upon, another appointment was made at a later time in consultation with the participant. The sessions varied in length and included the participant's spouse and/or other family members in three instances. The latter was necessary as some of our participants experienced urgent challenges in their relationships with others, some of which will be laid out in this paper.

It is important to note that the research process and team could have had an influence onto the trajectories of trauma communication of our participants.

The research assistants' double role as both interpreter and counselor sometimes shaped the course of the interviews. In one instance, during transcription, it became apparent that one of them put emphasis on the presumed healing effects of trauma narration (see supra). In some instances where participants chose not to expand on certain interview questions, the research assistant encouraged them to verbalize their stories by telling them "it would be good for you to talk about this' and 'it will make you feel better." This could have potentially put pressure on participants to speak despite their wish to be silent in order to protect themselves and others around them. This also speaks to the tension between implementing certain data collection methods, such as interviews and focus groups that entail a verbalization of experiences and thoughts, and preferred modes of trauma narration within the research relationship.

The influence of the research process onto parents' trajectories was also apparent in two other examples. After the second interview, one of the mothers (C., 28 years old) started living together again with her child she conceived in the LRA because of the psychosocial support that was provided to her and her new husband. One father (D., 33 years old) also shared during the third interview that he recently disclosed how he became a

parent in forced captivity to his son after he started to reflect upon the issue as a result of the questions he was asked during the interviews.

We assess that offering psychosocial support during, after and in between the interviews supported participants to reflect on several emotional and social concerns, and deepened the relationship between the participant and the research team. However, the sessions often couldn't provide a sufficient answer to the various other needs that most participants experienced (e.g., lack of material/financial means, medical issues, relationships with the broader community) and, consequently, they proved to be complicating the phasing out of the data collection and field work.

In what follows, we will first elaborate on the main assertions on trauma communication among mothers and fathers about the context in which their children born in forced captivity were conceived. Afterwards, we shall discuss the findings of this paper before concluding with key reflections on the research design and process.

RESULTS

Throughout the within-case and cross-case analysis, it became apparent that our participants' trajectories on trauma communication included both elements of disclosure, silencing, or modes in between that came together in a dynamic interplay that could change over time.

Central in the participants' stories is their agency regarding the careful, individual choice "to be silent" or "not to be silent" (Fivush, 2010) toward their children:

> 'I told him about where his father is, but I haven't told him where I gave birth to him from.' (C., mother, 28 years old, fourth interview)
>
> 'I didn't tell them because in the past when I told them they were still young but now they are big … I'm not repeating it because I don't want them to know where they were born.' (M., father, 30 years old, fourth interview)

However, notwithstanding the perceived importance of the parents' choice to disclose or silence, in all instances they were shaped—and often restricted—by their social and relational context. Our participants' choices were repeatedly renegotiated within their broader context and culture. In the next sections, we shall highlight several key factors in the parents' trauma communication toward their children, including (1) the age of the child, (2) the emotional impact of disclosure on the child and parent, (3) a lack of resources and support in the children's upbringing, (4) identity and belonging, and (5) perceived (potential) stigmatization of the child and parent.

Children's Age

Parents asserted that their child had to be old enough to understand the context in which they were born. If participants felt their child was too young or "not knowledgeable," they would rather silence as young children "didn't understand" (M., father, 30 years old, fourth interview) if they would receive information about the context in which they were born:

> 'For the boy, I haven't told him everything how we started living, how I got him, because he's even still young and cannot be told that thing.' (C., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

On average, upon escape from the LRA, the children who were born in forced captivity were 2 years and 2 months old[2]. Consequently, many of these children didn't remember their time with the LRA:

> 'There's nothing that reminds that child of the things that happened from the bush because I came with him when he still didn't know anything at all. So right now he's studying where there's nothing that disturbs him like nightmares about things that happened in the bush.' (D., father, 33 years old, second interview)
>
> 'They don't ask. They have all forgotten. They don't know and that issue is not talked about.' (M., father, 30 years old, fourth interview)

Disclosure was most appropriate to older children (i.e., more "knowledgeable," "clever," or "aware of their body") as they would be better able to understand what was being conveyed:

> 'I want to tell her … When she becomes mature, I will tell her, when she now knows herself, when she's a bit big.' (E., mother, 26 years old, third interview)

At the time of the interviews, the children who were deemed of age were often the ones who were older when leaving captivity and did have some memories from their time with the LRA:

> 'It was the child that would ask that 'mother where are we? Here we are running' … I could tell her 'we are in the bush. Tomorrow we shall go back home' … She now stays but sometimes she frightens at night crying when she's dreaming.' (E., mother, 26 years old, third interview)

Linking the appropriateness of disclosure to age sometimes resulted in various trajectories of disclosure and silencing within the same family when children conceived from forced captivity had varying ages:

> 'For the boy who I moved with and came back with when he was already knowledgeable. He knows. But the one I produced from here asked me that 'where's our father?" (G., mother, 26 years old, first interview).

Emotional Impact of Disclosure

Parents who were afraid that disclosure would have a negative emotional impact on their child would often follow a trajectory of silencing:

[2]The youngest children were born at the reception and rehabilitation centers and the oldest child was seven years old. The majority of the children were less than two years old upon escape.

> 'I shouldn't tell him because if I tell him I think he won't feel well.' (C., mother, 28 years old, third interview)

These accounts also were linked to the emotional struggle of the parents themselves and the inability to express the meaningless of experiences of forced captivity:

> 'I cannot tell and exhaust all the conditions of the bush, there are certain things that happened which were very, very painful but I didn't tell them. They cannot be told … I haven't told him that 'you were abducted or born in the rebel's captivity' because it is still difficult.' (C., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

Through silencing, parents tried to be protective of themselves and their children, as not to get overwhelmed by emotions when narrating about these traumatic experiences. Connected to this, forgetting was perceived as a coping—even survival—strategy to manage past experiences and move on with one's life:

> 'Right now I am back, I am no longer thinking about those things that this is what I did in the past. I am forgetting them and I am living freely.' (E., mother, 26 years old, third interview)

Lack of Resources and Support

A lack of resources and support in the upbringing of children, such as food, clothes, school fees and land, led to various trajectories of silencing and disclosure. Some of our participants opted for current silencing as the lack of support was manageable at a time when children were still young and required less resources. However, connecting the idea of appropriateness of disclosure toward children of a certain age (see supra), the increasing demand of resources when children grow older and the unavailability of certain support figures in future, made all of our participants to emphasize the need for future disclosure:

> 'When I had just come back, there were some little support that I would get but nowadays there's a difficulty … The difference is that the child has now become big. The means of taking care of him, it is also bad if you don't take a child to school. That is the only difficulty I'm facing.' (C., mother, 28 years old, third interview)
>
> 'It is important because if they don't know and in the future my grandmother isn't there and the issue of land may become trouble and so there won't be a place where they are supposed to stay. So they are supposed to know.' (E., mother, 28 years old, third interview)

Some participants connected the lack of resources as an obstacle to forget what happened to them in forced captivity:

> 'For us to forget, we should be supported with the problems that press us, like clothes, beddings and other things that we can use to raise children, like money. Because if we are still in problems like this … it makes us to still recall the things that happened in the past. (M., father, 30 years old, second interview)

As a way of accessing resources in the upbringing of their children, some mothers indicated that they have or would want to reconnect with their "partner" with whom they had stayed in forced captivity:

> 'I asked him that 'you, do you have any interest on the child? The child knows that this time is for study. If you know that this child we got during the war and it wasn't my will, the child should be well. You are also present and even in the past my father went and shared with your parents. Why don't you get time, you come and see how the child is growing?' Then he said for him, he didn't refuse the child.' (C., mother, 28 years old, second interview)
>
> *Participant*: 'Definitely I will have to go there.'
>
> *Interviewer:* 'Then do you think there's any way you should be helped so that you know the home of those people? Or you feel it is of no importance for now?'
>
> *Participant:* 'For now, it is not yet bad, but maybe in the future, when the children have grown, when there's trouble now, that's when it will be necessary.' (E., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

For the participating fathers who were living with their child(ren) born in captivity, this connection between the lack of resources in the upbringing of children and the wish to connect with the mother or the maternal clan of their child born in forced captivity wasn't found, probably because the father's side is deemed responsible for the child's upbringing in Acholi.

Importantly, reconnecting with their forced "husband" or "wife" was framed within customary Acholi practices on marriage and childbirth. Certain payments, such as *luk*, to amend transgressions and align the lineage of the child with the paternal clan have to be paid to the mother's family (Porter, 2015, 2019; Madhani and Baines, 2020):

> 'My mother is saying that if the child is to go, they don't give the child randomly. If he wants the child, then the people from his home should know first. Because it is better if they come with a letter and they share and finish every issue and you don't just steal a child. If you want to get the child, everyone should know. So, I, the mother of the child wants the father to take the child because that is a boy. Since I am now somewhere else his growing up becomes difficult without a father.' (C., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

However, our participants noted several challenges in reconnecting with their child's maternal or paternal clan. First, not all parents received (correct) information about the whereabouts of their forced partner's family or the family had relocated after staying in the internally displaced people's camps for several years, resulting into an inability to reconnect:

> 'I didn't take her to her mother's home, because I don't know where it is.' (O., father, 30 years old, third interview)
>
> 'He used to say [village] but his village or whatever wasn't there. I don't know. Because that one is good, if I knew the people from their home, they would have known me also. Since he's no longer there and if there was some knowledge, since I feel I cannot raise these children and if there's any means at their home, I could tell my children to go there.' (G., mother, 26 years old, second interview)

Second, not all fathers were able to pay the necessary customary fines as they lacked resources. When first approaching the maternal clan in a wish to support his "wife" and child from forced captivity, one father stated:

> 'The people from our home said they wanted to see that woman. So when we went there, I went with my uncle, he was still alive, and we saw her from their home there. After we had seen her, their people didn't allow her to come with us. They said that this issue was of the bush and not of home. If we wanted the child and the mother, we should first pay, but money wasn't there.' (M., father, 30 years old, second interview)

At the same time, and again most prominent among the mothers in this study, was the feeling that they didn't want to reconnect with the biological father of their child(ren). In addition, the mothers' choice to reconnect or not to reconnect was often influenced by her family:

> 'My husband that was given to me was saying that when that child becomes mature, he should take him to their home in [village]. So we were arguing with him, because I didn't want the child to be taken there, but he was saying that the child should be taken to their home or I should also go and stay at their home in [village], but I also didn't want. And so there was no good relationship because of the issue of child.' (J., mother, 30 years old, second interview)
>
> *Interviewer:* 'Did you know where the father of the first child is?'
>
> *Participant:* 'Yes.'
>
> *Interviewer:* 'Is he alive?'
>
> *Participant:* 'Yes, he's in [village].'
>
> *Interviewer:* 'He's come back?'
>
> *Participant:* 'It was said that he's back but I didn't confirm it.'
>
> *Interviewer:* 'What does your grandfather say about that issue?'
>
> *Participant:* 'They don't say anything. They say the child won't go anywhere. She will stay at home here with them.' (E., mother, 26 years old, second interview)

However, we hypothesize that because of a pressing need for resources when children born in forced captivity grow older (e.g., school fees and land), combined with a lack of such support in their upbringing, some mothers and/or their families might feel more inclined than others to reconnect with their forced "husband" and his family.

Identity and Belonging

Connected to the tendency to reconnect with the child's biological mother or father, is the importance of identity and belonging. "Knowing one's home" (Justice Reconciliation Project, 2015, p. 15), that is, the paternal village and clan, is a key component of identity and belonging in Acholi. This assertion was mostly highlighted by the fathers who believed it was important for a child to know his/her "real" identity:

> 'I was telling him so that he can also know who he really is. It doesn't mean that if I tell him, I'm just segregating him from the other children. But I saw that it can be important for him to have the knowledge on who he is.' (D., father, 33 years old, third interview)

Perceived (Potential) Stigmatization of Child and Parent

Rejection, discrimination and/or stigmatization of the child and/or the parent by family and community members (both current perceived stigmatization as the fear of future stigmatization of the child) led to various trajectories on silencing and disclosure. On the one hand, perceived stigmatization led to disclosure as parents wanted to provide an explanatory framework for the child to understand why they were treated differently:

> 'At one point when they were staying in the village, the children of our neighbors in that area were insulting the child ... 'You go to your father. Your father is there burning fire in the bush. Your father is in the bush'. So the child came and told me those things.' (C., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

One of the mothers accompanied disclosing about the context in which her child was born with an advice on how to cope with insults:

> 'The reason why I now tell him is because of the insults from people where people insult him when he goes to play or at the brook... like these people talk and then he comes and asks me. He says 'mother what was happening in the past? People say that I came back from the bush with you' and so I tell him because right now he's becoming clever. I told him that 'even if someone insults you like that, do not worry, because if you look around in Acholi here, in each of these houses that you see, at least one person was also abducted from there by the rebels. You just keep quiet even if someone insults you. Do not fight on them, do not insult them. Just come home. Come and tell me so that if I can go and talk to the parent, then I will go and talk or to the person who insulted you'. So sometimes he tells me that he gets angry when he's told those things because that wasn't our choice also. So I tell him not to worry about those issues. I always tell him.' (J., mother, 30 years old, second interview)

On the other hand, some parents decided to silence as they didn't want to overburden their child emotionally (see supra) or out of fear that separation, discrimination and/or stigmatization might be initiated if the child, and their environment, were to know:

> 'I was thinking that it is not very important to tell them because when I start telling them it may sometimes bring separation among them, like for the other one whose mother is not here, the one whose mother died. And so I saw that I shouldn't tell them, even for the other one, if you go there, that child knows that the mother is the one I am with, he doesn't know the mother who died ... If she tells the child that this one was from the bush, it may sometimes bring confusion. That's why I didn't even tell her anything, because I feel that for people to have one heart it is difficult.' (D., father, 33 years old, second interview)
>
> 'The reason why I don't want to tell her, it will make her fellows insult her with it, that 'for you, your father is not here. You were

born randomly from the bush you don't know where your father is'. So I feel I shouldn't tell her. Let her stay the way she is.' (G., mother, 28 years old, third interview)

However, these protective strategies were not always possible to uphold as all mothers at some point during data collection were separated from their child(ren) born in forced captivity because they were not accepted by the mothers' new partner and/or his family. Consequently, many children were living with their maternal grandparents or great-grandparents. The following quote describes how G.'s current husband didn't accept her children born in forced captivity, forcing her to send them to live with their grandmother who isn't able to fully take care of them because of her old age:

'The reason why I said that is because there's no proper understanding in the house and also I have three children with him [her new husband] there, and the way we are staying, there's no marriage between us yet. But it is better than the other one. If there was a good relationship, the children which I came back with, we would be taking care of them together with him. But the children were separated from me … I took the children to my mother and she's also very weak, I go and visit them. When it reaches time for work like this, my mother cannot now even dig. She cannot do anything and so I should dig from here and then I should also go and do for them something there definitely … Those children are the ones I suffered with so much, that they shouldn't now suffer. I should now stay together with them.' (G., 26 years old, first interview)

Furthermore, stigmatization of the child and/or the parent by family and community members posed a threat to the parent's choice to decide on his or her own terms if, when and how to disclose:

'I was thinking I shouldn't tell the child that he was born from the bush, but because of gossips from people, it will be known eventually … There are people who know me, but it is only me who knows what I went through … If the child I produced gets to know that he was produced from the bush, he can have many thoughts and so I think that even though I will have to tell him, he will now be big and he will have heard about it from out. Because even though I now think not to tell him, he will definitely hear about it from people telling him.' (C., mother, 28 years old, third interview)

All our participants' stories that referred to rejection, separation, discrimination and stigmatization were narrated against the importance of unity, respect and living in harmony with others. By emphasizing a clear need for parents and their children to be part of the community, they inscribed themselves as a valuable part of the social fabric:

'The start to unity is staying with people in a certain area as friends. And to add to that, for you to stay with people together in harmony, it needs exhibition of a good life to people. So this is how I am living with people in the village or area.' (D., father, 33 years old, second interview)

'The lesson that I have memorized very well is the issue of respecting people and doing things you have been told without disobeying the elders. That is what I sued until I came back from the bush. Up to now I am still following it like that and it is that I am telling my children. But my mother is the one who is topping up with others.' (G., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

In addition, forgetting was also perceived as a resource to enhance reconciliation, increase acceptance and reintegration into the community. One father stated that:

'I just want to live with people together, so that I get an easy life, so that there can be some change like it is there now. That is the advice I want from people. Because it is people who give advice and remove worries from the heart and makes one forget. Because I am now an orphan. If I don't do like that, if I don't stay with people, then I won't forget. Yes, I stay with people all the time and that makes people to give me good advice and makes me to forget.' (M., father, 30 years old, second interview)

The potential healing effect of forgetting was also reflected in the lessons that were passed on to our participants in the reception and rehabilitation centers when they returned from forced captivity:

'We stayed very well in [the rehabilitation center], because we were being made to forget all the things that had happened in the past. Sometimes we would be made to play also so that you forget about the things that passed … Until when my time for coming back home reached, I was discharged from there and brought home together with that child. They were cautioning us that when we come back home, we shouldn't worry about the things that are passed because, when you think about it, it will remind you about the many things that happened. And that there will be many talks by people in the villages and so you are supposed to be a person who is courageous and patient.' (J., mother, 30 years old, second interview)

It is important to note that not all children and parents experienced rejection, discrimination or stigmatization, or that these experiences were only apparent in some relationships with family and community members:

'Where I escaped and stayed, the people gave me a welcome, they gave clothes, they gave me shoes and they gave me small things like cooking oil and other small things. They welcomed me well.' (M., father, 30 years old, second interview)

In several instances where our participants followed a trajectory of silencing toward their children born in forced captivity, other family members were appointed as their designated "biological" mother or father. This coping strategy was meant to create a sense of identity and belonging, and deflect (potential) stigmatization of the child, and, by consequence, the parent and his or her family:

'They don't ask. They call my brother that 'their father'.' (E., mother, 28 years old, second interview)

'He calls her the way the children of that woman call her.' (D., father, 33 years old, third interview)

However, for one mother this proved to be challenging as the person she appointed as her children's biological father passed away:

'I used to point at the uncle. They used to know their uncle as their father, but now he's dead and there's no one now that I can start pointing to that 'your father is there' and yet they knew this one. For those children I can't now tell them they have three fathers. I start pointing that 'this one is your father, that one is also your father and the other one is also your father'. It is not possible.' (G., mother, 26 years old, first interview)

DISCUSSION

This paper explored how mothers and fathers who became parents in forced captivity with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) perceived the trauma communication about the context in which their children born in forced captivity were conceived. In all the parents' stories, elements of disclosure, silencing or modes in between were brought to the fore. A complex dialectic relationship (Fivush, 2010; Measham and Rousseau, 2010; De Haene et al., 2012; Kevers et al., 2016) was apparent as our participants moved between the two, making evident a plurality of experiences, coping strategies and meaning-making processes that could change over time.

A dynamic interplay of several factors, such as the parent's own choice, the age of the child, the emotional impact of disclosure, a lack of resources and support in the upbringing of children, identity and belonging, and perceived or possible future stigmatization were discussed in depth. This paper thus underlines the conceptualization of trauma communication as including socially negotiated choices and reciprocal processes (Shaw, 2007; Fivush, 2010; Kevers et al., 2016).

Conceptualization of Parents' Choice in Trauma Communication

Considering narratives of war-affected populations as situational, positional and relational (Sigona, 2014) implies the need to recognize the agency of forcibly abducted mothers, fathers and their children, and their acts as political agents (Baines, 2015, 2017; Stewart, 2017; Atim et al., 2018b; Denov and Cadieux Van Vliet, 2020). Our participants felt very strongly that the choice to disclose or silence the context in which their children were born had to be left to them. They also created their own narrative within their social and relational context, and the web of existing dominant cultural narratives on reintegration, healing, reconciliation and justice. Our study thus aligns with research that has equally emphasized the focus on agency among various groups of war-affected populations. Consequently, it is important for researchers and practitioners to respect and protect the privacy and identities of these parents and their children (Kohrt et al., 2015; Opiyo, 2015; Shanahan and Veale, 2015; Stewart, 2017; Rodriguez Di Eugenio and Baines, 2021).

Although the agency of our participants is clearly framed within the culture and broader context in which they live, it is key that these parents do have the freedom to make this choice—not "to be silenced" (Fivush, 2010), which would jeopardize their agency.

Influence of Cultural and Contextual Factors on Trauma Communication

In all accounts, parental choice and decision-making processes in trauma communication were shaped—and often restricted—by their social and relational context. Our participants' choices were repeatedly renegotiated within their broader context and culture.

First, the *age of the child* was deemed important. Parents emphasized that their child had to be old enough to understand the context in which they were born. Since many children returned from forced captivity when they were quite young, many parents preferred to silence. However, some parents did disclose to children who had some memories of their time with the LRA. These stories relate to the concept of "modulated disclosure" (Rousseau and Drapeau, 1998; Rousseau and Measham, 2007; Measham and Rousseau, 2010) since our participants take into account the child's developmental status and exposure to traumatic memories when considering the timing and manner of trauma communication.

Second, the perceived negative *emotional impact of disclosure* on both parents and children led to trajectories of silencing as a protective strategy. Based on an autoethnographic study, Peter Rober noted that his "grandfather's silence was protective and meant to spare himself, as well as his loved ones, from the pain and fear of his past" as a survivor of the Holocaust (Rober and Rosenblatt, 2015, p. 8). This finding has come to the fore in much research on trauma communication within families and communities (Almqvist and Broberg, 1997; Eastmond, 2016; Kevers, 2017), also among forcibly abducted mothers (Mukasa, 2017). In addition, forgetting was perceived as a coping—even survival—strategy to manage past experiences and moving on with one's life (Rousseau and Measham, 2007; Alipanga, 2015; Eastmond, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Trauma has also been linked to the fragmentation of memory and the inability of expression and narration (Eastmond, 2007; De Haene et al., 2012), as was apparent in one mother's inability to express the meaningless of her experiences of forced captivity.

Third, *lack of resources and support* in the upbringing of children born in forced captivity led to various trajectories of silencing and disclosure. Research among children born of war and their families in Northern Uganda and other contexts has pointed to a higher exposure to poverty, material deprivation and a general lack of support if compared to the general war-affected population (Justice Reconciliation Project, 2015; Ladisch, 2015; Opiyo, 2015; Denov and Lakor, 2017, 2018; Stewart, 2017; Mochmann and Skjelsbæk, 2018). At a time when children were still young and required less resources, various participants opted for current silencing. However, the parents indicated a need for future disclosure when the demand of resources and support (e.g., school fees, land) would increase. Customary "marriages are patrilocal, a woman marries into her husband's

clan" (Madhani and Baines, 2020, p. 3) and, consequently, her children belong to and are supported by the man's wider family and clan (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Porter, 2015; Apio, 2016; Mutsonziwa et al., 2020). Consequently, as a way of accessing more resources, some mothers indicated that they have or would consider reconnecting with their "partner" with whom they stayed in forced captivity. When exploring forced marriages among forcibly abducted children and youth who returned from forced captivity, scholars have pointed to the complex, conflicting emotions that "partners" hold toward one another (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Watye Ki Gen et al., 2013; Denov and Drumbl, 2020). Especially studies on forced marriages highlighted that the vast majority (e.g., 98% in a study performed by Annan et al., 2008) of the mothers did not wish to be reconnected with the child's biological father. However, more recent studies have indicated that biological parents and clans do reconnect to support children born of war (Mutsonziwa et al., 2020; Oliveira and Baines, 2020; Baines and Oliveira, 2021) as they seek to "transform relations of violence into relations of care" (Rodriguez Di Eugenio and Baines, 2021, p. 341). We hypothesize that these differences in research outcomes could be connected to the increased need of resources and support when children born in forced captivity grow older, combined with the importance of belonging and identity for children born of war (see further).

Fourth, especially the fathers included in this study highlighted the importance of *identity and belonging* of their children born in forced captivity. Ethnographic research has explored the importance of the paternal home in Acholi, providing accountability, identity, embeddedness in wider social spaces and, by consequence, various material and social resources in the upbringing of children (Mergelsberg, 2012). Consequently, children who did not know their biological fathers don't or have less access to crucial resources for belonging, marriage, and land access and inheritance (Opiyo, 2015; Denov and Lakor, 2017, 2018; Mutsonziwa et al., 2020; Baines and Oliveira, 2021). However, in her research among children born of war in Northern Uganda, Stewart (2017) found that "the children challenge the boundaries of their positionalities to negotiate a partial, or limited, belonging" (p. 17) as they "refuse to accept their exclusion" (p. 179). The same also seems to be the case for mothers (and fathers) who became parents in forced captivity (Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018).

Fifth, *rejection, discrimination and/or stigmatization* of the child and/or the parent by family and community members led to various trajectories on silencing and disclosure. Stigmatization has mostly been explored as a factor hampering the (re)integration of forcibly married women and their children (Baines, 2011; Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018b; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018). In our study, either the parents disclosed as they wanted to provide an explanatory framework for the child as to why they were treated differently, or they silenced as they wanted to create a "protective capsule" [Apio, 2016 in Apio, 2016, p. 222] for their children as not to overburden their child emotionally (see supra) or out of fear that separation, discrimination and/or stigmatization might be initiated if the child, and their environment, were to know. Children born out of wedlock, be it within the context of forced captivity or another relationship, are often not or less supported and cared for within new marriages and relationships (Annan et al., 2009; Opiyo, 2015; Stewart, 2017; Atim et al., 2018b). Importantly, all our participants' stories that referred to rejection, separation, discrimination and stigmatization were narrated against the importance of unity, respect and living in harmony within their families and communities. Supported by the lessons our participants received in the reception and rehabilitation centers, forgetting was brought to the fore as instrumental in reweaving oneself into the social fabric and enhancing reconciliation (Alipanga, 2015; Stewart, 2017). It's important to note that 'many people, however, were unable to reach this Archimedean point of forgetting through the direction of memory' (Shaw, 2007, p. 196) as, for example, some participants stated that they weren't able to forget what happened to them in forced captivity due to a lack of resources and support in their current lives (see supra).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This paper provided some important insights resulting out of various strengths connected to the research design, target groups and transparency about the research process.

First, trauma communication appeared to be a significant issue in the daily lives of mothers and fathers who were coerced into partnerships and conceiving children within the LRA, and provided an example of the long-term and complex impact of forced marriages and parenthood in post-conflict Northern Uganda (Kramer, 2012; The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen, 2016; Denov and Drumbl, 2020).

Second, doing multiple interviews with our participants over a period of time provided everyone involved to build trust and discuss certain topics in-depth. Following up on our participants also enabled us to have an idea of their living situations and surroundings. We came to realize that this living situation could indeed quickly change over time. For example, during data collection, three mothers started a new relationship and moved to their new partner's village, three mothers became pregnant, and one mother and two fathers welcomed a new child into their families.

Third, an important contribution of this study was the inclusion of the perspective of fathers, which has been lacking in research on forced marriages within the LRA (Apio, 2016; Aijazi et al., 2019; Denov and Cadieux Van Vliet, 2020; Denov and Drumbl, 2020; Mutsonziwa et al., 2020; Oliveira and Baines, 2020), and, more generally, in research and practice regarding the upbringing of children during and after collective violence (Wieling et al., 2015; El-Khani et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2017; Mehus et al., 2018). When laying out the findings of our study, the gender-specific experiences and difficulties in the trajectories of trauma communication were highlighted. For example, especially mothers connected a lack of resources with a tendency to reconnect with the biological father of their child(ren) born in forced captivity, and all of them narrated about their poor current marriages and a consequential separation from their children born in forced captivity at some point during data collection. Fathers, on the other hand, placed much more emphasis on the need of the child to know his or her "real" identity. These findings indeed reflect the previously stated influence of gender

onto experiences during and after collective violence and forced abduction (Baines, 2011; Apio, 2016; Mukasa, 2017; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018).

Fourth, by revealing the impact of our research process and team onto the trajectories of our participants, we wanted to highlight the ethical and methodological consequences of a co-construction of disclosure, silencing, forgetting and remembering in the research relationship. Such considerations are key within research on trauma communication (Kevers, 2017).

Since we prioritized to have multiple interviews over a period of time, our research only included a small sample of 10 participants. In addition, six of them were recruited through snowball sampling, which could have affected the representation of the target group (Jacobson and Landau, 2003).

The positionality of the research team, including European scholars and Ugandan research assistants who had a background in providing emotional support, also continuously influenced the research (see England, 1994; De Nutte, under review), including the recruitment of participants, informed consent processes, how participants and research brokers engaged with the research, etc.

Lastly, this study did not include the perspectives of children born in forced captivity themselves (Denov and Lakor, 2017, 2018; Stewart, 2017; Denov and Piolanti, 2020). The children's viewpoints could enhance the exploration and depth of the presented research assertions. However, including children born of war also needs to be approached with caution as to respect their parents' trajectories of trauma communication (see supra).

CONCLUSION

Post-conflict healing and reintegration of formerly abducted children and youth, and their children born of war, can be regarded as complex and ongoing processes, which play out at the level of the individual, family and community (Betancourt, 2012; Derluyn et al., 2013, 2015) and take place in a "changed and changing social landscape" (Veale and Stavrou, 2003, p. 42). It thus remains important to focus on the social fabric of communities during and after collective violence (Barber, 2013b; Derluyn et al., 2013) and simultaneously consider conflict and post-conflict factors (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Betancourt, 2012) that could impact the daily lives of war-affected populations.

This paper unraveled the various individual and collective aspects of trauma communication (Elsass, 2001; Eastmond, 2007; Kevers, 2017) in the context of reintegration and reconciliation after forced abduction, marriage and parenthood in Northern Uganda. Trauma communication appeared to include socially negotiated choices and reciprocal processes, and our study explored a dynamic interplay of several factors, such as the age of the child, the emotional impact of disclosure, a lack of resources in the upbringing of children, identity and belonging, and perceived or possible future stigmatization. At the same time, reflecting on the centrality of the parents' own choice, our paper highlighted the need to provide sufficient attention to the individual trajectories on trauma communication and healing (Measham and Rousseau, 2010; Kevers et al., 2016).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors are not able to make the raw data supporting the conclusions of this article available given the inability to properly anonymize the interviews. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to leen.denutte@ugent.be.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by (1) Ghent University and (2) Republic of Uganda. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LDN, LDH, and ID contributed to the study design. LDN performed the field work, organized the database, performed the data analysis, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the revision of the manuscript and approved the submitted version.

FUNDING

This research was supported by the Special Research Fund of Ghent University (grant number 01N011114).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would want to thank all participants who shared their stories, and Amono Milly Grace, Acayo Beatrice Latigo, Loum Janani, Ojede Milton, Opoka Christopher Arnold, and Okidi Denish for their support during fieldwork, interpretation and data transcription.

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