

## The "Untold" Stories of Outsiders and Their Significance for the Analysis of (Post-) Conflict Figurations. Interviews with Victims of Collective Violence in Northern Uganda (West Nile)

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**Abstract:** We have conducted interviews with women and men who are victims of collective violence in the region of West Nile in northern Uganda, by the hands either of rebels or of members of various government armies. We show the position and relevancy of their perspectives in public discourses in and about this region. Using biographical-narrative interviews and group discussions, we highlight how their voices are subdued in public discourse in which the ex-rebels present themselves as the victims of history. The interviews illustrate that the narrative interview method is of help also in this non-European research setting as it supports the interviewees to verbalize what they have suffered. The analysis of how collective violence is thematized in the interviews as well as in public discourses brings about important insights into the perspectivity and the biases of these discourses—and how they were generated. For this reason (amongst others), it is important, when analyzing the region's recent history as well as (post-) conflict figurations in general to accommodate the biographical experiences of victims of collective violence.

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## 1. Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> focuses on the experiences, the self-images and the we-images of people in the West Nile region of northern Uganda who have been victims of collective violence. We will show how their voices are subdued in the public discourse in West Nile and how they let themselves be influenced by this discourse. The public discourse is dominated by the perspective of the ex-rebels, who see themselves as victims of Uganda's history. Rebels in this region, which is regarded as the home province of Idi AMIN, maltreated or killed members of the civilian population, forcefully recruited young men or raped girls and women and kept them prisoner, sometimes for years, to work for them or to serve as sex

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1 An earlier and slightly shorter version of this text appeared in German (BOGNER & ROSENTHAL, 2012). We thank the editor and publisher of *Sociologus* for their permission to publish an English version.

slaves. These captives were often forced to take part, passively or actively, in acts of violence. Other civilians were robbed by the rebels, their fields were plundered, they were threatened with death and in some cases mutilated. Broad-scale violent attacks by government troops against the population of West Nile occurred frequently in the two years following the overthrow of AMIN in 1979, and were covered up by the changing governments at that time. Later acts of violence against civilians were committed mainly by rebels in the context of the battles that took place in the region between 1994 and 2002 (RLP, 2004, pp.14-18, 9; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009, pp.16-20). Up to about 2006, peripheral areas and major transport routes in the province were also subject to attacks by the *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) based in the neighboring Acholiland (in Uganda's central north). Although the rebels in West Nile, too, increasingly resorted to a terrorist strategy of warfare vis-à-vis the civilian population, there are considerable differences between them and the LRA, which among other things regularly recruited by force children below the age of puberty and, in the later phase of its existence, consisted predominantly of child soldiers or former child soldiers.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in West Nile the recruiting by force of minors below the age of fifteen was exceptional. [1]

Where the term victims is used without any further qualification in this article, it refers to victims of collective acts of violence, typically in the context of war. We do not use it as a classificatory, definitive concept, but as an open, *sensitizing concept* in the sense proposed by Herbert BLUMER (1969, pp.147-153). This means that a closer definition of the concept comes at the end, rather than at the beginning, of a concrete empirical study. Since the term "victim of violence" can be defined only in relation to a situation, it can frequently happen that a person is both victim and perpetrator. However, in West Nile (as in most war areas), there is little reason to suppose that the majority of victims of collective violence are also persons who committed such acts. But the possibility of overlaps will not be excluded from our concept, nor will the people be reduced to their status as victims. [2]

The findings presented here are mainly based on biographical-narrative interviews (n=28 respondents) and ethnographic interviews (n=33 interviewees)<sup>3</sup> carried out in the course of four joint field trips in the period 2009-2011. Interviews were conducted with members of the civilian population, the political and administrative system, aid or development organizations and ex-rebels. Eight interviewees were specially contacted because of their status as victims of collective violence. We also conducted 19 group discussions, including two with victims of violence and five with ex-rebels. These interviews formed part of a research project<sup>4</sup> relating to local peace processes in Africa, conducted by Artur

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2 On the extreme quality and quantity of the atrocities committed by the LRA; see foremost BLATTMAN and ANNAN (2010), but also ANNAN, BLATTMAN and HORTON (2006).

3 On the method of narrative interviewing see below. We use the technique of narrative questions also in ethnographic interviews (see ROSENTHAL, 2011, Ch. 5.4).

4 The research project "Conflict Regulation and Post-Conflict Processes in Ghana and Uganda" at the University of Bayreuth was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 2009-2012.

BOGNER and Dieter NEUBERT (see BOGNER & NEUBERT, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Gabriele ROSENTHAL, a cooperation partner of the project, is engaged in investigating the different cultural rules governing the presentation of one's own life story and for presenting the history of the groupings or collectivities to which one feels one belongs, in various contexts in Europe, Asia and Africa (e.g. ROSENTHAL, 2003, 2010). [3]

In this article we discuss how survivors of acts of violence can be relatively easily induced to embark on biographical narratives<sup>5</sup>, and the formal features of their self-presentations. In addition, we will show how important it is to take into account the experiences and perspectives of the victims of violence, not only for the survivors themselves, but also for studies of the condition and the history of this region (and probably also of other conflict and post-war figurations). This refers not least to the requirements of a critical analysis of the collective discourses<sup>6</sup> in and on West Nile<sup>7</sup>. We also want to counteract the idea that investigating power relations in an "objective" manner is impossible for the reason that without normative assumptions the most important power mechanisms are "invisible" (see for example LUKES, 1978, pp.34f., 46, 57). This idea is not wrong, but a half-truth which is too often used as a convenient excuse when a *detailed empirical* analysis of conflict and power processes is called for.<sup>8</sup> [4]

In the tradition of figurational sociology (e.g. DUNNING & MENNELL, 2003; GABRIEL & MENNELL, 2011), our study of those voices in West Nile which are in the shadow of the public discourses on this region can contribute to a reconstruction of the interrelationships between we-images<sup>9</sup> and the figurations of established and outsiders (in the sense proposed by ELIAS) in this region. Power balances are a structural element of every social figuration. An established-outsiders figuration is typically recognizable by a very unequal power balance, and above all by the fact that the outsiders adopt the perspectives of the established in their own self-images (BOGNER, 2003, pp.175-178; ELIAS &

5 ALLEN (2006, pp.65-71) describes similar findings for those abducted by LRA rebels.

6 We do not understand the term *discourse* in exactly the same way as FOUCAULT, but in a similar way. FOUCAULT (1988 [1973], p.74) understands it as meaning "practices" of speaking and writing which "form the objects of which they speak." On the combination of discourse analysis and biographical research, see POHN-WEIDINGER (2013), ROSENTHAL (2011, pp.228ff.), SCHÄFER and VÖLTER (2005) and TUIDER (2007).

7 We refer here not least to the apologetic discourse in respect of Idi AMIN (e.g. SEMBUYA, 2009), which is also found in scholarly studies. For example, LEOPOLD's monograph (2005) is striking because it scarcely mentions the active role played by the population of West Nile in their tragic history—nor the active role played by AMIN and his regime.

8 The difficulty arises from the fact that this applies not only to "power" but to all complex research objects in the social sciences. Because of their unavoidable perspectivity, empirical findings will always be open to various interpretations, but the fact that they are based on value-loaded research *questions* and use *the corresponding terms* do not automatically render them invalid. Debates on these issues frequently fail to make the important distinction between "value relevance" (i.e. the fact that the researcher's epistemological interests unavoidably flow into the *research questions*) and "value judgments"; see Max WEBER's (1973a [1904], 1973b [1918]) classic essays on objectivity in the social sciences, and MANNHEIM (1995 [1931], pp.258f.). For a discussion of different concepts of power and of the term *power* as it is used here, see BOGNER (2003).

9 On the terms *we-image* and *we-group*, see ELIAS (1987, pp.207-315, 1994); ELIAS and SCOTSON (1990 [1965], pp.103-105), and ROSENTHAL (2010).

SCOTSON, 1990 [1965], pp.7-56, 183-186). Thus, this study is also a contribution to the understanding of power phenomena. [5]

Before we discuss our respective findings and present a few representative case studies, we shall summarize in the next section the historical background for our research setting, the conflict figuration in West Nile in north-western Uganda. [6]

## **2. On the History of Armed Conflicts and the Peace Process in West Nile**

The north of Uganda, including West Nile, played a subordinate role in the colonial period (on the history of West Nile, see ECKERT, 2010; LEOPOLD, 2005; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009, pp.4-24; RICE, 2009). From this time, like other areas in northern and eastern Uganda, the West Nile area functioned mainly as a reservoir for the recruitment of soldiers and migrant laborers (e.g. MUTIBWA, 1992, pp.2-10). The peripheral position of northern Uganda was temporarily mitigated by the governments of Milton OBOTE and Idi AMIN, who originated from different parts of the north.<sup>10</sup> AMIN, in particular, who overthrew OBOTE's first government in a coup, relied strongly on West Nile, his province of origin, for recruiting higher military officers and government officials (e.g. JØRGENSEN, 1981, pp.303-306). His regime was marked by countless human rights violations, often targeting soldiers (or their relatives) associated with Acholiland and believed to be OBOTE's allies or supporters (see for instance BRANCH, 2011, pp.56-57). Because many of the perpetrators came from West Nile, the province's population found itself in an extremely precarious situation at the end of AMIN's rule. Especially the civilian population suffered from brutal and extensive reprisals by members of the government troops up to the fall of OBOTE's second government (BRANCH, 2011, p.58; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009, pp.11-15; MUTIBWA, 1992, pp.137-142, 133; PIROUET, 1995, pp.362, 298, 304-305; RLP, 2004, pp.5-6, 18). Because of this, until the end of the period of consolidation of Yoweri MUSEVENI's government (approximately 1986-1989), the great majority of the population sought refuge in the neighboring countries of Sudan and DR Congo (then Zaire). Whether and to what extent the civilian population in West Nile was maltreated by government soldiers after MUSEVENI's seizure of power in 1986 requires further investigation.<sup>11</sup> [7]

In the decades following AMIN's overthrow, West Nile became the area of operation of different rebel organizations who were mostly formed by former soldiers and state officials who were (or formerly had been) loyal to the overthrown governments of AMIN and later OBOTE. In the later phase of the insurgency this applied only to the leaders and more senior members of the rebels of West Nile. In the 1990s this region as well as neighboring parts of

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<sup>10</sup> We draw here from our more detailed analysis of the armed conflicts in West Nile in BOGNER and NEUBERT (2012, 2013a, 2013b). For summaries of the recent general history of Uganda and neighboring parts of northern Uganda, see BRANCH (2011, pp.45-89) and MUTIBWA (1992).

<sup>11</sup> See ECKERT (2010, pp.46-56), MISCHNICK and BAUER (2009, pp.16-17, 20-22), and RLP (2004, pp.10-11). At present any evaluation is uncertain, but it seems unlikely that during MUSEVENI's rule, maltreatment of West Nile's civilian population by government soldiers ever reached a scale similar to that during the previous governments controlled by OBOTE or his allies.

northern Uganda also developed into a secondary battlefield of the civil wars in the neighboring countries of Sudan and Congo (Zaire). This led to repeated terrorist attacks by all war parties, and increasingly by the rebels, against the civilian population—with whom the rebels were (and still are) closely intertwined, and by whom they were initially supported (PETERS, 2008, pp.44-46; RLP, 2004, pp.14-18, 8-9; for the rebel groups in adjacent Acholiland see ALLEN & VLASSENROOT, 2010a, 2010b, pp.7-17; BEHREND, 1999, pp.172-195, 19, 23-30; BRANCH, 2011, pp.61-72). [8]

For our case study, three of the rebel groups from West Nile<sup>12</sup> are relevant. Parts of the former Ugandan Army under AMIN's dictatorship formed the "Uganda National Rescue Front" (UNRF I) in 1981 and fought from West Nile in the Ugandan civil war until 1986/87. It had a weaker competitor, the "Former Ugandan National Army" (FUNA), who had a similar agenda and was rooted in the same political and social milieu, and mostly based in the same region. In 1986/87 MUSEVENI's newly established government achieved an important political-military victory when it succeeded in pacifying the UNRF I. The new head of state co-opted its most important leaders into his government's informal circle of power and appointed one of them to his cabinet. But not all rebels from West Nile joined this (rather informal) alliance permanently: some left after a short time, following disagreements and growing distrust (and a number of unexplained incidents) in relation to the government. In the 1990s the "West Nile Bank Front" (WNBF) and the UNRF II were active, both supported by the Sudanese government (BOGNER & NEUBERT, 2013b, pp.61-63; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009, pp.6-7, 12-20; PRUNIER, 2004; RLP, 2004, pp.12-15). The WNBF attracted young men with the promise that they would be paid 300 USD or its equivalent, a promise which was never kept. Their recruiting campaign was also strengthened by the rumor going round in West Nile that AMIN's return was imminent.<sup>13</sup> This group, numbering about 6,000 combatants, gave up its struggle after it was defeated in mid-1997 by the Ugandan army and the allied South Sudanese rebels.<sup>14</sup> The UNRF II, a somewhat smaller rebel group which appeared as an independent faction in 1996/97, was chiefly recruited from the inhabitants of a Muslim enclave (today's Yumbe District) consisting mainly of members of the Aringa (a subgrouping of the Lugbara). It continued to fight until a peace agreement was reached in 2002. [9]

This peace agreement, or the contacts leading to it, were brokered by different actors in the local civilian population, the local administration and the government—among others, by a small local NGO which was supported by the German

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12 As a complement to this article, see BOGNER and NEUBERT (2012, 2013a, 2013b) for a differentiated analysis of the history of the conflict, post-war developments and the role of non-governmental organizations and actors. See also BAUER (2013, 2009), MISCHNICK and BAUER (2009), PETERS (2008) and RLP (2004).

13 From an interview with a former rebel soldier of the WNBF, Koboko District, March 2010. On the promised payment, see also LEOPOLD (2005, p.44) and RLP (2004, p.14).

14 From an interview with a former high-ranking officer of the WNBF, Koboko, 26th August 2011; see MISCHNICK and BAUER (2009, p.19). At least in 1996-97, the rebels from West Nile thus probably had more armed soldiers than Joseph KONY's "Lord's Resistance Army," which during most phases of its existence had scarcely more than 1,000 active combatants.

Development Service (DED) (on this and on the circumstances detailed below, see BAUER, 2009; BOGNER & NEUBERT, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009; RLP, 2004). A positive factor was that both the mediators and the government negotiators included members of the first UNRF, which had entered into an alliance in the 1980s with MUSEVENI, then a rebel leader and today head of state. Many members of UNRF II had also belonged to the first UNRF. One of our informants interpreted this as "generals making peace among themselves." In the preamble (REPUBLIC OF UGANDA, 2002, pp.1-2) the agreement emphasized the fact that the region had suffered from "instability" for a long time and that its development had been blocked. Accordingly, the terms of the peace agreement focused on the "development" of the region, and above all on the demobilization and "reintegration" of the fighters. The peace agreement promised to promote reconstruction and development, in particular through the building of infrastructure, and to provide various benefits for the rebel fighters and help them to (re)build a means of livelihood (for details, see WEBER, 2009, pp.33-40). These benefits were to total 4.2 billion Ugandan shillings (almost 2 million US dollars according to the exchange rate at that time), and different amounts were to be paid depending on the recipient's rank in the rebel army. It promised that some of the rebels would be employed by the army. There were no provisions for helping war victims to deal with their experiences, or compensation for misconduct, or activities to promote reconciliation between perpetrators and victims or combatants and the civilian population. The agreement was supplemented even before the beginning of the negotiations by an extremely generous, practically unconditional amnesty which has been law since 2000 and has applied since then to all rebels in Uganda (with the possible exception of the four most high-ranking LRA leaders). This amnesty law remained in force until 2012 (ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS' PEACE INITIATIVE et al., n.d.; ALLEN & VLASSENROOT, 2010b, pp.13, 15-16; AMNESTY COMMISSION, 2009). [10]

### **3. On the Significance of "Untold" Stories**

The anthropologist Michael JACKSON (2002), following Hannah ARENDT, has analyzed the politics of storytelling and the power relations between the "private" and the "public" spheres of discourses. He concluded that, "[f]or every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored and suppressed" (p.11). In other words, the stories told by the dominant party in a conflict, or socially established groups, are used to suppress the stories of the other party, or of less respected groups. Scholarly analysis should not uncritically reproduce this silence. We can understand and explain the social constellation in conflict situations in general, and a situation like that in West Nile in particular, only if we are prepared to 1. take into account the perspectives of all parties to the conflict, 2. reveal which warring parties, factions or groupings have been involved in the conflict or affected by it, 3. go beyond the accepted patterns of interpretation and consider the history of the actions and conduct of all the parties and groupings involved, and 4. reconstruct the stories that have been hidden, denied or left untold in the public discourse. The important question is which groups and individuals have power over how the conflict and the peace process are interpreted. To answer this, attention must be paid to all those voices that are

inaudible in the public discourse—otherwise we run the risk of only repeating the perspectives of the established groups, in other words the socially established myths. For instance, it would thus be risky to rely only on "expert interviews" with members of formal organizations. It must also be considered that at the beginning of such an investigation it is not possible to know how many groupings and subgroupings (with differing degrees of organization) are involved. These are variables (cf. GURR & PITTSCH, 2003; SCHLEE, 2006; SWAAN, 1997, p.116) which can change even during the period of the investigation. Therefore it is necessary to have a developing sample, as proposed for instance by GLASER and STRAUSS (1967), and to concentrate on what is revealed during the empirical investigation and *on the search for divergent perspectives—in other words not on what is often said by respondents*. [11]

How did we find the suppressed voices? First, we noticed that acts of violence were not mentioned in the public discourses in West Nile, in contrast to the adjacent region of Acholiland in the central northern part of the country<sup>15</sup>. There, the suffering and problems of the victims were, and still are, in the foreground of the discourses conducted by the media and by humanitarian organizations—especially the problems of the former child soldiers forcefully recruited by the LRA. In contrast, the public discourses on and in West Nile were dominated by five topics:

1. questions concerning how to promote the development of economy and infrastructure in the region;
2. questions concerning the implementation of the peace agreement—besides economy and infrastructure this refers chiefly to the provision and distribution of benefits for ex-rebels;
3. the question whether ex-members of rebel groups other than UNRF II should receive comparable benefits;
4. the question whether the ex-rebels would take up arms again if their demands were not met;
5. the question whether former members of the army or security sector of AMIN's regime should receive pensions or equivalent benefits. [12]

Besides the contrast to Acholiland, the findings of a field project on the peace process in Yumbe District, carried out by students from the University of Bayreuth in 2007, yielded some evidence relevant to our research question. Some of the qualitative data gathered by the students revealed considerable friction between the ex-rebels of West Nile and parts of the civilian population. These feelings of resentment, which were sometimes openly expressed, crystallized mainly around the question of why support was given to the ex-rebels but not to the civilian population, even though it had been subjected to acts of violence for many years, and often by rebels from the region<sup>16</sup>. It became apparent that these unfriendly

15 See for instance ALLEN and VLASSENROOT (2010a) and BAINES (2009). On the treatment of LRA victims in the Ugandan press, see for instance AKENA (2011) and LAWINO (2011).

16 See BAUER (2009, pp.26-27), BRIX (2009, p.25), COMMUNITY DNYAMICS (2004, pp.5, 27, 42), MISCHNICK and BAUER (2009, pp.80-81), NEUBERT et al. (n.d.), RLP (2004, pp.9, 14-

feelings entertained by parts of the civilian population were not spoken aloud mainly for fear of endangering the peace that had been achieved (BAUER, 2013, pp.179-180, 2009, pp.39-40; BAUER & GIESCHE, 2007; BRIX, 2009, pp.37-39; COMMUNITY DYNAMICS, 2004, pp.5, 26-28, 42; MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009, pp.80-81; PETERS, 2008, pp.22, 44-47, 53-55; RLP, 2004, p.28; WEBER, 2009, pp.66-67). Yet in our interviews with members of the administration, NGOs and development organizations, we seldom heard anything about violence against the civilian population, while the rootedness of the rebels in the civilian population was often underlined, so that we began to develop an interest in the victims of violence and in the questions this gave rise to. [13]

#### 4. How Do the Victims Tell Their Life Story?

It was not at all difficult to find suitable respondents and they readily agreed to be interviewed. We identified them not only during the group discussions in villages in Yumbe District, which were organized by our local field assistant, Droma GEOFFREY<sup>17</sup>, but also in the environment of the ex-rebels, who are organized in veterans' associations. In the office of one of these associations we met two nurses who were caring for AIDS patients and HIV-positive persons among the ex-rebels and their families. They were also caring for women who had been abducted and/or raped by the rebels. They helped us by arranging interviews with HIV-positive women, and also acted as interpreters during these interviews. Most of the people we interviewed who had been maltreated or abducted, did not speak English. Contrary to our expectations, this constellation presented no great problems. Especially in those interviews at which our field assistant was present, who obviously strived to translate everything faithfully and who carefully refrained from making comments of his own, we had the impression that his presence helped to establish an atmosphere of trust between us and the respondents. In most cases eye contact increased during the course of the interview. Because of the pauses for translation, the respondents did not remain sunk in their memories, as is often the case with traumatized people. We believe that, in a way, the breaks helped to prevent the respondents from being flooded by traumatic memories, helped them to stay in the here and now, and to maintain a feeling of control over the situation. [14]

But is it possible for people in a context like northern Uganda, who have *repeatedly experienced violence inflicted by other human beings*, who have been extremely traumatized (BETTELHEIM, 1980, p.20), and who in most cases have little or no school education, to narrate their life story or speak about their traumatic experiences? Some scholars have doubted if this is possible in non-European contexts (e.g. MATTHES, 1985). Our interviews were structured as narrative interviews following the model developed by Fritz SCHÜTZE (1992, n.d.; see also RIEMANN, 2003; ROSENTHAL, 2004), combined with client-centered and active listening techniques (cf. ROGERS, 1951). The respondents as a rule

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18), and SABIITI (2006, pp.11-12). Furthermore several parts of West Nile such as Adjumani and Moyo suffered greatly under incursions by the LRA until 2005.

17 We would like to thank him for his commitment and his competent assistance. He also transcribed all the interviews and translated all quotations from Lugbara into English.



had no great problems with this method—at any rate no more than comparable groupings with whom we have worked, such as survivors of the Holocaust or of the civil war in former Yugoslavia (ROSENTHAL, 1998, 2003). [15]

We asked the respondents to tell us their life story and at this stage only encouraged their self-presentation by expressions of interest and attentiveness. In the second part of the interview we asked the respondents to tell us more about things they had mentioned, and *only later*, in a third phase of the interview, did we ask them questions about topics that they had not mentioned previously. At this point we would like to underline that the importance of this form of interviewing for developing a relationship of trust and supporting narrative processes should not be underestimated. A narrative interview gives the respondent the feeling that he/she is regarded as the expert for his/her own experiences, and assures him/her that the interviewer does not want to avoid unpleasant subjects, but to help verbalize his/her suffering. [16]

The interviews were analyzed using the method of biographical case reconstructions (ROSENTHAL, 1995, pp.208-226, 2004, pp.53-63). In biographical case reconstructions sequential analysis represents a procedure where the temporal structures of both the *narrated* and the *experienced* life history are analyzed. Based on the given text, we try to reconstruct the *sequential gestalt* of the life story presented in the interview, and in a subsequent step the sequential gestalt of the experienced life history. As well as the question of the sequence and textual sorts used by the biographers to present their biographically relevant data, this approach also examines how the individual biographical experiences have been layered chronologically in the experienced life history. In the reconstruction of the life history we try to break down the process of the genesis of the experienced life history, and in the analysis of the biographical self-presentation we try to break down the genesis of the representation in the present which differs in principle in its thematic and temporal linkages from the chronology of the experiences. [17]

In this approach that ROSENTHAL developed in combination with various other methods (cf. ROSENTHAL, 1995) it is crucial to investigate the two levels of narrated and experienced life history in separate analytical steps. This means that the goal of reconstruction is both the biographical meaning of past experiences and the meaning of self-presentation in the present. [18]

In the following we shall show that these people who have been victims of collective violence:

1. instrumentalize the interviews in order to gain support, and yet
2. have a strong need to recount "their story" or their traumatic experiences;
3. are used to talking about the traumatic periods in their life, but not about the most distressing parts;
4. present their story or stories in a fairly controlled way during the first meeting;
5. often have a consistent construction of their life story or victim story;

6. need to give a meaning to the violent events that have disrupted their life; and,
7. in contrast to other victims of collective violence (such as survivors of the Shoah or of the civil war in Yugoslavia), present themselves in the thematic field<sup>18</sup> of an individual history of misfortune, and not—with one exception—as members of a collective of victims. [19]

In the following we shall present only the *results* of our findings here. We will discuss the features listed above, and we will present the stories of a few of the respondents, in order to illustrate and exemplify these findings. At almost all meetings it was clear that the interviewees hoped to gain material support from us, directly or indirectly, and that this was at least one of the reasons why they were willing to cooperate. It also turned out that they had already had contacts with aid or development organizations and were used to playing the role of petitioner. This was especially clear in our meetings with Yusuf<sup>19</sup>. Unlike other interviewees he was quite successful in his efforts, a fact to which we will return. First it must be remembered that in meetings with, and especially in conducting interviews with traumatized people, greater commitment is required on the part of the interviewer than in other contexts. Thus, in a similar context, David BECKER (2004, p.9) talks of the need for "a bond of commitment," a "conscious non-neutrality towards victims," "breaking the silence and calling the atrocities the regime was committing by the name they deserved." [20]

Artur BOGNER first met Yusuf, who clearly demanded this commitment in the spring of 2009 at a group discussion in Yusuf's village. Unlike the other people in the group, Yusuf presented himself in this public setting as a victim of the rebels, who had beaten and robbed him and, among other things, had cut off his ears. He declared that if war broke out again he would join the government troops. In the summer of 2009 we conducted a biographical interview with him. This interview began with a long negotiation process. He wanted to know how much we were prepared to pay him for cooperating. Before explaining this, we will make a few remarks concerning his experienced life history and narrated life story. [21]

Yusuf presented his early childhood as a phase between life and death, as he explicitly put it. He couldn't walk before the age of three, he was physically very unwell and he regularly used to spit blood. During his childhood the family lived in exile in the Sudan; Yusuf received no school education. Yusuf then began to speak of his traumatic experience in the late or mid 1990s. As the date<sup>20</sup> of these events he gave 1st March 1997. He was married to his first wife and had four children. We suppose that at that time he was in his mid thirties. He explained in detail what happened on that day. At 9.30 a.m. he was attacked by rebels in his house; they stole all his money, raped his under-age daughter before his eyes,

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18 On the concepts of *thematic field* and *thematic field analysis*, see ROSENTHAL (2004, 2006).

19 All names and other biographical data of the interviewees have been changed. We promised the respondents at the beginning of each interview that they would remain anonymous.

20 Even though this calendar date may be considered as unreliable, it is nevertheless understandable that for Yusuf the date and time of this event—unlike in the case of other events—is very important. His life after this cruel experience was dramatically different from his life before it.

took him away, beat him almost to death, cut his ears off and left him bleeding in the bush. Yusuf thinks his attackers assumed he would not survive. He succeeded in dragging himself into the next village. After a period in a hospital, he went to live in distant towns for three years before returning to his family, for fear of meeting his attackers. After some time he married a second wife and had two more children. To his sorrow, his first wife, with whom he had been able to talk about what had happened, left him, because she could not accept the new family constellation. [22]

Yusuf knows who his attackers were; they were his neighbors. He believes that today they live in the capital, Kampala. Yusuf's father told him never to mention their names. We can assume that not a few of the perpetrators of such acts of violence are today among the established, whose "influence" must be feared by outsiders. On the one hand, they enriched themselves by such robberies, and on the other hand, many of them received benefits within the framework of amnesties, and, in the case of UNRF II, further benefits on the basis of a peace agreement. Some of them, especially members of the first UNRF, have risen to high and highest positions under MUSEVENI's government (RICE, 2009, pp.254f.). As some of the interviewees explained, including ex-rebels, some of the rebels used the civil war situation to settle "private scores." Perhaps this applies to Yusuf's case, and maybe his father, by forbidding him to name the perpetrators, wanted to prevent a continuation of the chain of revenge and counter revenge. [23]

As in the earlier group discussion, Yusuf presented himself as a victim right at the beginning of the interview, by removing the cap that he always wears, to reveal his missing ears. He said he knew we wanted to use his story for our own benefit, and asked, "How will it be beneficial for me?" and "I would like to know which group or organization you belong to." We explained the context of our research and that we wanted to report his story. He said he was willing to talk, but he needed us to help him contact an aid organization. On being prompted by us, he spent about ten minutes telling his life story, and then returned to his request:

"People who have got deformations in war like me in Uganda are so many, but some of these have received some kind of help, but for me for my case here there's nothing, I have been neglected, now if someone comes like the way you come or another person comes, and gets the information from me, just leaves me, and I have a feeling that this person now benefits instead of me, so next time it might force me to begin refusing to talk to people." [24]

For the next quarter of hour he tried to convince us that we owed him something. He softened his tone to admit that he appreciated the fact that we had returned. Other "white people," he said, come, promise aid and then never appear again. We offered to pay him something for the interview. Yusuf insisted he needed more aid and our friendship. We offered to pay him for field assistance if he could persuade more people to come and be interviewed. Yusuf agreed, and then a "thick" conversation (in the sense of Clifford GEERTZ, 1973) developed, during which he answered our questions with detailed stories, and gradually became

able to speak about very painful and shame-inducing events. One of these was his feeling of helplessness in the situation where he had to watch while his daughter was raped. At the end of the interview, supported by active listening, he began to speak about his first, failed marriage, and how much he missed his first wife. [25]

It could be objected that this detailed account of the traumatic events was conditioned by the interview context and the respondent's need for material aid. Our reply would be that there is no interview situation without power effects. Among the typical conditions in rural Africa, and especially in a post-war situation, the economic asymmetry between respondents and interviewers is very important. Nevertheless, on the basis of the fine structure of Yusuf's narratives, we assume that his stories 1. are not made-up, 2. point to biographically significant experiences, and 3. are constitutive for his present perspective. Moreover, he had already recounted central parts of his narrative before this interview, publicly and without being requested to do so by us during the group interview. Those public comments had been made in a village context in which he could expect that such allegations would give rise to negative sanctions on the part of the ex-rebels and their many sympathizers. [26]

Next day, Yusuf organized a meeting with nine people, mainly farmers from the surrounding villages, who had been robbed and seriously wounded (in most cases by rebels). They, too, were hoping to receive benefits. Nevertheless, they also showed a need to talk about their traumatic experiences. First, they made it clear that they expected help from us, or that we should arrange for them to receive help. After we had explained that we had no connections with any humanitarian organization or NGO (normally both are referred to as "NGOs") and that what we wanted was to document their story for the public, they willingly told us what they had experienced. In the first account of her experiences given during this group interview, a young woman (we have given her the name Fatma) emphasized the material and economic damage she had suffered in the course of the attack—the loss of all her personal property, including the sewing machine she needed for her work as a dressmaker. She also stressed how difficult it had become for her to work, due to the later loss of her leg through a land mine explosion. She spoke for quite a long time, about ten minutes, and what she said was well structured. She began with a brief, concentrated account of these events in narrative form, including the death of the child she was carrying on her back at the time of the explosion; it suffocated when Fatma fell on her back and was unable to move. She did not say much about this experience, which was evidently a threatening memory for her. Instead, both at the beginning and at the end of her account, and in connection with her request for help, she said more about the loss of her sewing machine, which has forced her, despite her extremely disabled condition, to work ("to dig") in other people's fields for a very small wage. In this situation, she is incapable of adequately feeding and caring for herself and her children. We sensed that she was willing to tell us more. So Artur BOGNER asked her whether she would agree to a personal interview. She agreed readily and he conducted this interview together with his colleague, Dieter NEUBERT, a few days later. Fatma began her narrative with an account of the

attacks on her parents and herself, which both in content and in text structure was very similar to what she had said during the group discussion. Empathic and narrative questions by the interviewers helped her to talk about the shame-inducing details of the attack, during which she was robbed and raped, and about how she was later injured when the mine exploded. At the beginning of the interview she indicated her willingness to talk about these things by saying she was grateful that the two researchers had come back, since she had more to tell:

"In fact I have thanked you very much once again for having come back to still get more from me, it is because, when you came to meet me the other time, though I talked that was not all, I still have more to tell you." [27]

From the beginning of the interview she repeatedly pointed to her lower abdomen and to the scar on her thigh where the rebels had stabbed her with a knife. She not only pointed to the scar with her hand, but also referred verbally to this sign of the attack. Only after she had mentioned the scar twice, and after additional questions from an interviewer, did she admit that she got it in connection with a rape. Let us look at the course of this interview in more detail. After being asked to tell her story, Fatma described again what happened during the attack, and at the end of the story she said: "Before they took off, they also beat and the scar I showed you was knifed (...) pricked by knife with a knife." The interviewer responded to this by asking: "So they intentionally did this?" Fatma answered that she was left bleeding. This prompted the interviewer to ask directly whether she was raped. Fatma first denied this, then admitted that it was difficult for her to talk about it; nevertheless she now wanted to do so. She said the rebels raped her and injured her with the knife, "because first I resisted." This shows that by repeatedly referring to her scar, the respondent was actually inviting questions and signaling that she needed assistance in order to be able to explain the reason for this injury. Failure to respond on the part of the interviewers would have prolonged the collective silence with which rape by armed combatants has generally been treated in this local setting, and by indirectly suggesting that they did not want to hear about or talk about the suffering of the victims, they would have reproduced or exacerbated the trauma of the interviewee (cf. also HAUSER & JOACHIM, 2003). Thus they would have unintentionally helped to implement or exert the "indirect" but very effective form of power which the ex-rebels have gained by the influence of their perspectives on public discourses. The impression gained by the interviewers that Fatma needed to talk about the rape, was confirmed on the one hand by the subsequent course of the interview, in which she openly spoke about her fears (for instance that she might have become infected by HIV as a result of the rape), and on the other hand by the concrete result of this interview. A few months later Fatma founded a self-help group for women who had been raped and encouraged them to speak about it. [28]

Fatma's case, like many others, shows clearly that supportive methods are necessary to enable respondents to speak about their most stressful experiences. Of course, interviewers should watch out for signs of resistance, accept them and refrain from asking more questions if the interviewee signals

that that he or she does not want to speak about a particular topic<sup>21</sup>. In this case the interviewee communicated verbally *and* non-verbally that she wanted to talk about this difficult topic. In this context, the importance of a careful training in how to conduct an interview in a narrative and supportive manner cannot be stressed enough. In our experience—especially in training sessions on how to conduct narrative interviews—it is often the interviewers who are afraid of talking about distressing experiences, and their consequent interactive uncertainties obstruct the narrative process. Not infrequently researchers project their fears onto the interviewees and too readily assume that they are unable or unwilling to speak about their traumatic experiences. [29]

In the interviews it became clear that the survivors of collective violence in this social context frequently have *consistent constructions* of their biography, and their self-thematizations are usually embedded in a thematic field which runs through the presentation like a red thread. Thus, Yusuf presents his life within a thematic field that could be entitled *My tragic life story from my early childhood to the present day*. On the other hand, Rhoda<sup>22</sup>, a woman who was abducted at the age of 13, held prisoner for many years by the rebels and used as a sex slave, presents herself with a success story in the thematic field: *My drama group and educating people about AIDS helps me to forget my past with the rebels*. Rhoda was abducted by rebels, together with some other girls, while they were on their way to school in West Nile. The girls were taken to different camps in the bush and the rebels—as Rhoda puts it—"started now using us to sleep with them, raping us, they raped us badly and if you refuse they beat you." During this time with the rebels Rhoda gave birth to two children; one child died while she was still in captivity. When she was in her early twenties, she succeeded in escaping with her second child. Shortly afterwards she was told in the hospital that she was HIV positive. There, she heard from the nurses about a group of HIV-positive women who were trying to educate people about HIV through the medium of drama. When she was discharged from the hospital, she joined the group. She says:

"So it was like it wasn't only me with problems but I came to realize that there were also others who had even bigger problems than mine unlike from the beginning where I could be there at home thinking about my problems now I have become open and exposed through the group's activities such as going out to the people telling them openly about the dangers of HIV-AIDS." [30]

With the members of the group she can speak about the problems associated with her infection, but not about her past before receiving the diagnosis. Although several of them were also abducted and raped by the rebels, they do not talk about this, according to Rhoda. And so, when asked at the end of the interview how she felt while telling her story, she answered: "When I talk about my experiences in the bush, I do not feel well, but when I talk about AIDS, I feel free." This distinction is an indicator of Rhoda's biographical construction, i.e. that her

21 On conducting interviews with extremely traumatized people, see ROSENTHAL (2003).

22 Rhoda was interviewed in her mother tongue, Lugbara, with the aid of a nurse. The passages quoted are given in the translation written later by Droma GEOFFREY on the basis of the interview transcripts.

life has been better since her decision to join the drama group, which was a biographical turning point. This is also clearly manifested in Rhoda's initial narrative. While her presentation of the phase before joining the drama group was just a brief report and the interpreter had to repeatedly prompt her to continue, the passages referring to the period after joining the group are much longer and more detailed. From her presentation it is also clear that she had previously interpreted and experienced her lot as a more or less isolated *personal* misfortune or bad luck. [31]

The consistent construction of their life story shows that survivors of collective acts of violence feel a need to *give a meaning* to the violent *breaks* in their biography and thus—as far as possible—to restore continuity in their life course (NIEDERLAND, 1980, p.229). While Rhoda is supported in this by the drama group, Yusuf has created a meaningful continuity in his life with the aid of religion. He began his presentation by saying: "First of all I thank the almighty God so much, and the second thanks goes to the prophet Mohammed." Yusuf explained that without God he would not be alive and talked about his early childhood and illness. It was God who had created him between "being alive and being dead." He traced an arc into the present by adding: "as such I continued up to today." Yusuf also repeatedly asked himself in the name of the Almighty what he had done wrong. But since he had done nothing wrong, he knew God would protect him and he would survive. Probably these ideas had already helped him when he was left lying on the ground, seriously injured, and did not know whether he would die. In the same way he also legitimized the fact that his father had forbidden him to name the perpetrators: "let it be that it is God who knows the person who did it to me." It is striking that Yusuf speaks here in the singular of one person. Just as he does not portray the attackers as a group or we-group, he also does not place himself in a we-group of victims. [32]

It is a general feature of our interviewees that they describe the suffering inflicted on them by the rebels as their individual fate—as shown by Yusuf's wondering whether it is at least partly due to his own fault. If they do identify themselves as belonging to a we-group, it is not a we-group of victims of rebels, but an ethnic or religious we-group, or a we-group of HIV-positive people, or, as we will show, an association of "victims of land mines." As the mines were laid by both rebels and government soldiers, this small association unites former soldiers, rebels and civilians. Similarly, the we-feeling in Rhoda's drama group is not based on a common past as victims of violence, but on the shared experience of being infected with a virus. Here, it must be remembered that there are also wives of rebels in the group and among the HIV-positive women who meet each other in the hospital in the district capital. However, our interviewees did not mention any conflicts or tensions arising from this fact. The two nurses, who voluntarily treat not only the women abducted by the rebels but also the rebels and their wives, believe that many rebels caught AIDS while in the bush and then infected the women they raped and their own wives. But for them the drama group, to which one of the nurses also belongs, is a group of HIV-positive women. It is possibly of importance here that Rhoda was advised in the hospital to join a group of HIV-

positive women and not, for instance, a group of people who had been maltreated, abducted or raped by rebels or soldiers. [33]

## 5. The Individualized Narratives of Victims in the Shadow of Public Discourses

How can the absence of a we-feeling and we-image among the victims, and the lack of a collective narrative, be explained? A comparison between the interviews with former rebel fighters and the interviews with victims of violence shows strikingly that the former almost always begin their presentation with a highly stereotyped or standardized version of the history of West Nile, while the victims do not embed their narratives in a collective history. It seems that, if they have any at all, they only have we-concepts that (at least in principle) include both the civilian victims of violence and the ex-rebels. It seems that *both* groups are hardly aware that they have potentially conflicting goals, desires and needs. In interviews with victims of violence, the respondents have the fundamental problem that for their self-presentation they can only use the same we-concepts as the perpetrators. It also becomes clear that the ex-rebels and the victims have very different ways of dealing with and communicating their distressing experiences and the problems they have in their daily lives, even though they belong to the same milieus and on the whole are part of the same contact networks. The individual person's presentation of his or her own experiences and problems in the interview is determined by the features of the public discourses. [34]

For their self-presentation, several of the ex-rebels who were interviewed used (usually at the beginning of the interview) a stereotyped version of the history of West Nile, in other words a version that is more or less *institutionalized* in the public discourses, and which is presented as an almost continuous collective narrative. This version can be summarized in the (usually unspoken) message: "We are the true victims of Uganda's history." It generally remains undecided or unclear whether this "we" refers only to the rebels or to all inhabitants of West Nile. The rebels appear here as a self-evident and prominent part of a great collective of victims, a part that is especially affected by common suffering and handicaps (RICE 2009, p.256; for an illustration, and scholarly version of this narrative, see LEOPOLD, 2005, pp.70-73). They belong to the we-group of the local inhabitants as a whole, and also to the we-group of the "ex-combatants," which includes the ex-soldiers in the region as well as the ex-rebels (in the older generations among the ex-rebels these are often the same people). The fact that they call their associations "ex-combatants' associations" suggests that this name can be understood as the expression of a kind of socio-political coalition—or at least as an offer of coalition. In the meantime the government has created and sealed such a commonality of interests by paying pensions to the soldiers who served under AMIN and by not excepting the ex-rebels of UNRF II (NAMUTEBI & KARUGABA, 2011). Moreover, the peace agreement supports, at least implicitly, the rebels' interpretation of the situation, according to which they achieved something positive for the inhabitants of West Nile with their struggle, namely the agreement of the government to promote the "development" of this region in a special way after many years of a development blockade. This definition of the



situation in the agreement negotiated with the government permits the rebels to present themselves in the public discourse as protectors of the interests of the local population, especially their need for "development." Even if this interpretation of the situation is no longer generally accepted, in practice it is not openly criticized. In one of our group interviews with victims of violence, fear of the ex-rebels and their influence on the government and in the local administration was openly named by one of the participants as the reason why the victims did not talk publicly about their problems. [35]

Unlike the rebels, the victims have scarcely any standardized "historical building blocks" which they can use to construct their narratives. The institutionalized public discourse also offers them no constructions into which they could fit themselves as a group with a potential awareness of common interests. For this reason, their narratives appear as *individual* constructions, as rather personal stories. Nevertheless, in discussions with them it is quite clear that the victims constitute a group for whom, in certain situations, the rebels are "the others." This is clearly illustrated by a story that Fatma told, both in the group discussion (with much approval from the other participants) and in the individual interview. She reported that she had tried several times to meet General Ali BAMUZE, the leader of the former UNRF II, in order to ask him for help, after hearing that BAMUZE "was registering his group to receive compensation from the amnesty commission." At the fourth attempt, she finally met the general, who in the meantime has become a high-ranking officer in the national army. In the group discussion she described the dialogue with the former rebel leader as follows: "How about us, the innocent victims who were no combatants?' Bamuze then told me to wait until he finishes with the combatants so that he can handle our case later on." Later, in the individual interview, she clearly expressed the difference between the rebels and the civilian population as follows:

"So we felt as victims of the war but in actual sense it was Bamuze who went into the bush to begin a war. In actual sense it would have been Bamuze to consider us, especially those who had those kinds of problems. I told Bamuze I asked Bamuze what do you think about us who are the victims of this war yet were civilians but not soldiers?" [36]

Here, Fatma does not speak of the rebels in the plural, but uses the name of the rebel leader as if he alone, as an individual, was responsible for the war. By this means, and by using the term "soldiers," she avoids explicitly distinguishing the rebels from the rest of the local population. But a distinction is made implicitly through her use of the formulation "us who are the victims of this war yet were civilians but not soldiers." [37]

After Fatma had told this story in the group discussion, one of the participants explicitly expressed the wish that all those present should organize themselves as a group: "It is time that we also having an organized group to forward their voices to the authorities above, your [the two researchers] coming is like a reminder to us today now that we have come together." It is unclear whether "we" here refers only to those who are present, or whether the speaker means "we, the victims in

the civilian population," or even "we, the victims of the rebels." Perhaps it is deliberately left vague in order to avoid making an obvious contrast to the we-image that predominates among the inhabitants of West Nile. After the above-quoted passage, this participant asked us interviewers directly whether we thought they should approach the local administration with their request for support. It was Yusuf who asked us to write a note for them which they could use to remind the district officers of their rights. With this turn in the group discussion, we found ourselves unintentionally slipping into the role of action researchers. We turned the request down, explaining that it would be more important for them to become active themselves, and offering to help them with advice. In the long term this turned out to be the right decision. In the following months, without our help, the people who had been present at our discussion founded a small NGO under Yusuf's leadership with the title "Group of Landmine Survivors." (It was later registered under the name "Land Mine Survivors Association.") In summer 2011 we learned to our surprise that the group had already achieved a modest but remarkable success. Each member of the group had been promised an amount equivalent to the value of two goats from a program for agricultural development, and half of this amount had already been paid. Perhaps it is interesting to note in this context that Yusuf, who had become the leader of the group and who surely has been a victim of violence, has not been (to the best of our knowledge) a victim of any landmine explosion. [38]

Let us return to the we-image of the rebels, because this makes it easier to explain why the victims do not have a we-image. The decisive point is that with their standardized version of the collective history of West Nile, the rebels see themselves as fitting into a homogeneous we-image involving all the inhabitants of the region, who are presented without distinction as *passive* victims of marginalization and persecution. This image includes neither the acts of violence committed by government soldiers against civilians under AMIN's government (not only, but also in West Nile), nor crimes committed against civilians at a later time by rebels from the same region. With this homogenization of the inhabitants and the history of West Nile in the form of an *undifferentiated* collective victimhood discourse, questions relating to reconciliation or transitional justice are avoided in discourses above the levels of village and neighborhood.<sup>23</sup> This generalizing victimhood discourse is obviously shared by the majority of the local population and by the "village elders"—even if attacks by the rebels are occasionally admitted and, as already mentioned, are sometimes explained as resulting from "private feuds." Even acts of violence committed by soldiers of the governments controlled by OBOTE or his allies, which were opposed by the present head of state, are mentioned in our interviews only in very general terms. Victims of violence in the context of war seem to not exist, even though the narratives in our interviews often show that many relatives or acquaintances of the interviewees were killed or maltreated. This is confirmed by the fact that the victims also seem to be absent in the awareness and in the data of the health authorities. According to the District Health Officer in Koboko District, the most recent census data showed the existence of only around 400 disabled people in a

23 BUCKLEY-ZISTEL (2008, pp.95-110, esp.109f.) makes a very similar assessment with regard to a different region in (eastern) Uganda.

population of 130,000—a strikingly small number. Asked about the seeming implausibility of such a ratio below even one per cent, this interlocutor made clear that he did not have any doubts about the accuracy of this figure and explained it by the above-average share of young persons in the district's population.<sup>24</sup> For the NGOs active in West Nile, the war victims do not constitute a specific target group. As far as we know there is only one noteworthy exception—a small project run by an Ugandan NGO called "Transcultural Psychosocial Organization" (TPO) which was financed for one year by DANIDA<sup>25</sup> (see PETERS, 2008, p.53). Interestingly enough, the staff member who was responsible for implementing this project was a former rebel. [39]

Except for the victims of violence themselves, a leader of the Muslims in West Nile was one of very few interviewees who *of his own accord* brought up the existence of victims and the problem of compensation. Towards the end of a long interview with Artur BOGNER, he mentioned war victims and said that religion was there to comfort them. Anyone who had had his ears cut off would be given new ears in the next world. This is characteristic of the attitude to this subject in public discourses in and on West Nile. [40]

Besides the we-images or we-concepts in the discourses, there are other grounds (or power sources) for the position of the perpetrators and that of the victims in the post-war process. Out of necessity the rebels of UNRF II made a peace agreement with the government. The members of the first UNRF, who helped to mediate this peace, had been allies of MUSEVENI since the mid-1980s—one of several reasons for a kind of collusion between the ex-rebels and the government. Apart from such interconnections, the perpetrators profit from a high degree of organization, in contrast to the victims. In West Nile, the local NGO with by far the highest number of members in the field of psychosocial support for civilians affected by the war is the "West Nile Disadvantaged Widows and Orphans Association" (WENDWOA), with a membership of almost 2,800 at the beginning of 2010 (by its own account). Our interviews showed clearly that this organization was led by a former leading female officer of the WNBF and consists almost entirely of family members of ex-rebels. In 2007 the veteran association "United Ex-Combatants Development Association" had around 7,100 members (BRIX, 2009, p.29). These figures reflect an important difference between the ex-rebels and the civilian victims of collective violence. Apart from religious communities and their affiliated groups, the associations of the ex-rebels and their families form the biggest civil society organizations in the region, while the victims of violence are not organized. [41]

This difference in the degree of organization is linked to a further dimension of the power imbalance between ex-rebels and civilian victims of violence. Ever since the conclusion of the peace agreement, the ex-combatants have repeatedly made a publicly unspoken, but informally perceptible threat to "return to the bush." In 2007, following rumors to this effect and an attack on a bus, the

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24 Informal conversation with the District Health Officer of Koboko District, Koboko, March 2012.

25 "Danida" is the term used for Denmark's development cooperation.

government approved about 100 projects which had been applied for by ex-rebels in the framework of a regional development program (BAUER, 2009, p.43; BRIX, 2009, pp.32-33). The different power resources of the ex-rebels complement each other synergetically and form a whole. It would be wrong to separate the we-images and discourses from the social figurations (or webs of interdependencies) to which they belong and which they help to constitute. The difficulties which the victims of violence have in organizing themselves and making their demands heard, arise from the fact that the perpetrators and the local civilian population are closely intertwined; the victims are unable to construct a we-image for their purposes which is different from that of the perpetrators, and which would distinguish them from the latter—together with their different needs and wishes (at least in the current phase of their relationship). If the victims do explicitly present themselves as belonging to a collectivity (which they must do, at least implicitly, in order to be able to construct their *own* narrative, with a concrete historical location), they usually present themselves as members of a religious community or ethnic grouping. In the concrete context, however, these we-concepts give them no basis for a we-concept which would help them to communicate, or simply construct for themselves, their specific problems, needs and wishes. It is not insignificant that in the attempt to construct a specific we-concept for the victims of violence, they resort to categories like "mine victims" or "HIV-positive people," which dethematize the differences between victims and perpetrators. An exception is Fatma, who succeeded in defining a we-concept in the interview which distinguishes civilian victims and combatants. When there was a first attempt at organizing war victims in the West Nile region (which took place in a different district of West Nile in 2006), the founder called it "Kony's War Victims Association." As this name<sup>26</sup> referred to the LRA rebels (led by Joseph KONY and originating from neighboring Acholiland), this attempt avoided any confrontation with the ex-rebels rooted in West Nile. Here the same difficulty is visible as the one that we observed in our interviews with Yusuf and other war victims in Yumbe District. In their case they use the category of "landmine survivors" as their label even though their leader himself does not fit into it. [42]

The victims' deficiency of formal organization and a wider network of relationships is closely connected with their lack of symbolic capital, in the sense proposed by BOURDIEU (1984, pp.7-8), i.e. a lack of *public recognition* for their special situation with the right to sympathy and support which this potentially brings. Because figurations are also constituted by discourses and the interpretations of the people involved, they should be "separated" only theoretically in the analysis (and even then only temporarily). [43]

We are not concerned here (at least not directly) with discussing the legitimacy of differently constructed we-images. The ex-combatants are currently different from the victims of violence, not because of their group-specific past *per se* or because of their need to identify themselves with a broader we-group (whether Muslims, Lugbara, Aringa, inhabitants of West Nile, or anything else), but because of the construction of a homogenized we-image in which all inhabitants of West Nile (or

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26 From the interview with Sam BUTI, the founder of this association, Arua, 16th August 2011.

all members of the respective we-group, e.g. Muslims or Lugbara, irrespective of the criteria of its construction) appear equally as the victims of undefined, or only vaguely defined, powers, or of "Ugandan history." In such a homogenizing we-image no distinction is made between acts of violence against combatants and acts of violence against civilians, or between victims of physical violence and victims of political marginalization. These homogenizing we-images or we-concepts that predominate in the public discourses in West Nile make it difficult for the victims to articulate their particular situation, problems and needs. Although empathy with the veterans is justifiable (and required for the purpose of any thorough sociological analysis)<sup>27</sup> including on the level of the construction of we-images, this may easily turn into a form of cruelty to the victims. At least in effect it tends to entail a public rejection of their rights to empathy and recognition as persons whose problems and needs are distinct in important points from those of the perpetrators. The hope cherished by many in the civilian population that the local elders could bring about a reconciliation between victims and perpetrators in the "traditional" manner has as a rule remained unfulfilled, and as time goes on is increasingly unrealistic in the light of the many turmoils of war and the duration of the conflicts (BOGNER & NEUBERT, 2012, 2013b; PETERS, 2008). As in the case of the LRA, a genuine willingness in this respect appears to be lacking among the leaders of the ex-rebels (ALLEN, 2010, pp.250, 258). The dominant discourse of collective victimhood helps to reinforce and legitimize this attitude. [44]

## 6. Conclusion

Our analysis has shown how the voices of the victims of violence in the conflict setting of West Nile have been neglected in the public discourse and how important it is to make these voices heard, to let them speak, to document and analyze them. This is true, even though this region is well known for its history of violence. For not all collective acts of violence and not all victims attract the same degree of interest. Even scholarly publications reproduce the collectivist victimhood discourse dominant in West Nile with the corresponding homogenizing we-image (examples are LEOPOLD, 2005 and, to a lesser extent, MISCHNICK & BAUER, 2009). If one listens properly to the victims of violence who are marginalized by the public discourse, one gets a very different impression of the overall figuration—for example, in relation to the persisting power chances of the ex-rebels and ex-soldiers, and the depth of the cleavages between different parts of the population. Analysis of the "untold" stories can contribute not least to an understanding and reconstruction of the varied perspectivities built into the discourses of the public space. In the case of West Nile, such an analysis suggests, among other things, that among the people of this province there is still a hegemonic we-image, or a dominant discourse operating with various but related we-concepts, which shapes the interpretation and memory of the recent past in a way which is in sharp contrast to the way this past is remembered in all other parts of Uganda (see MUTIBWA, 1992; RICE, 2009; for a summary, see BRANCH, 2011, pp.56ff.). This shows that the perception of acts of violence is influenced by collective we-images and

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<sup>27</sup> A further article will be devoted to the dominant perspectives among the veterans, which can only be sketched here.

interpretations of history, and *vice versa*. This complex interplay needs to be taken into account, even in contexts where the effects of physical violence as a power resource appear to be obvious. [45]

An analysis of these interrelations is so important because a considerable part of the power of the established consists in their control over public discourses and collective memories, and, like their we-feeling and we-image (their "group identity"), has here one of its most important bases. Their power is constituted to a large measure by the broad definitions of the historical situation that enter the "social construction" of reality, and thus determine the rules for public discourses. *However, this does not mean that it is impossible to analyze it empirically.* For all dominant discourses have their cracks, and very often these are revealed by the way they treat experiences of violence, especially collective violence. Consequently, for any serious analysis of discourse power (like other forms of power) the researcher needs now and then to confront the victims and immediate consequences of *physical* violence, in an intensive manner and through direct interactions, and not only the anonymous, impersonally aggregated manifestations of "structural violence." [46]

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