

The Politics of Portrayal in Violent Conflict: The Case of the Kony 2012 Campaign

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Abstract

A global discourse on cosmopolitan humanism can become tragically disconnected from how it plays out locally. By analyzing Invisible Children's *Kony 2012* campaign, this article examines how and why the "new war" discourse presented in *Kony 2012* does not correspond to how an array of local actors frame the violence that took place in Uganda. It also highlights how the *Kony 2012* narrative and the interventions it advocates are translating into "perverse consequences": a militarization of the central African region and a decline in awareness and in funding for more complex security issues on the ground. Finally, insight is provided into why the development of cosmopolitan norms and laws favors strong states and institutions, while civilians on the receiving end of "humanitarian interventions" lack the power to define what rights should be protected, by whom and how, and have no way of holding the intervening "humanitarian" actors accountable for their actions.

Keywords

critical discursive approach, social media campaign, cosmopolitanism, humanitarian war, militarization, Uganda

On March 5, 2012, the US-based international nongovernmental organization (INGO) Invisible Children (IC) launched a thirty-minute social media campaign dubbed *Kony 2012*.¹ Drawing on Internet language and Facebook style, it called upon its audience to cooperate in an "experiment" that would lead to the arrest of Joseph Kony, the leader of the Ugandan rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The campaign instantly created a sense that "we," an informed part of "humanity whom has a need to belong and connect," "can do something [to] stop him, the bad guy," and bring him to justice at the International Criminal Court (ICC).² The campaign proposed to "make Kony famous," just like a Hollywood star. This would, they argued, increase the awareness of global civil society, resulting in pressure placed on the US government to arrest Kony, thus sustaining America's military commitment to the Ugandan government. In order to achieve this goal, the video asked viewers to buy an action kit, to make donations, and above all to "share" the video through social media.

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Within a week of its launch, *Kony 2012* was viewed over seventy-six million times on YouTube.³ It became the most viral video in history, drawing a massive following among (predominantly) youths from the United States, but also Europe, Australia, and elsewhere around the globe.⁴ In 2012 alone, the campaign took in nearly 10.5 million dollars in surplus funds for IC.⁵

The campaign and the “humanitarian war” it called for led to a frenzy of media attention. Various actors praised the campaign. Representatives from INGOs admired its ability to simplify a complex reality and distinguish between “good” and “evil”; “I believe that the success of the Kony video stems from its ability to plainly, simply and unambiguously articulate both the problem and an actionable solution.”⁶ It was also celebrated for highlighting how the abuse of human rights in Africa is an injustice to the whole of humanity: “when a warlord continues to kill and torture across a swath of Congo and Central African Republic [. . .] it’s a human burden.”⁷ Finally, many admired IC’s tactical use of social media to increase awareness and mobilize the masses toward online activism. Jay Carney, the White House Press Secretary, congratulated the “hundreds of thousands of Americans who have mobilised to this unique crisis of conscience.”⁸

The campaign was also severely contested. Ugandan and foreign journalists, activists, and regional specialists were outraged by the simplified and outdated nature of the footage presented, asserting that “the war is much more complex than one man called Joseph Kony.”⁹ Furthermore, “its portrayal of his alleged crimes in northern Uganda are from a bygone era,”¹⁰ and “in the areas where the LRA operates today, residents’ main concerns involve the general lack of security—including protection from Ugandan and Congolese army operations. In short *Kony 2012* misses the point.”¹¹ In addition, it was argued that “[the video] evokes the problematic metaphor of a Western saviour who has come to improve the lives of Africans without any reasonable measure of African input on the matter.”¹² Others questioned the humanitarian discourse presented in the film: “Invisible Children’s portrayal of the LRA crisis was designed not primarily to make these issues accessible to a wide audience, but to maximise the amount of revenue that would accrue to the agency itself.”¹³ Some made more far-reaching claims, stating, “Invisible Children are ‘useful idiots’ being used by those in the US government who seek to militarise Africa [. . .].”¹⁴ Finally, a few described the campaign as a form of *slactivism*, saying, “it suggests to the next generation that one can fight the injustice and evil in “dark Africa” from the comfort of your own home, without any knowledge of the geopolitical causes or local consequences.”¹⁵

At the core of these debates, one can identify a divide between those who look at *Kony 2012* through different lenses. One is the lens of “cosmopolitan humanism.” Those who apply this lens see the campaign as meaningful solidarity, with its foundations in Immanuel Kant’s idea of “perpetual peace” and Jürgen Habermas’s later rendition “cosmopolitan order.” Through this lens, a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere and calls for a humanitarian intervention in the name of protecting human rights. There are others who are skeptical of such universal claims and argue, in line with Carl Schmitt, that every argument about values and the humanitarian war doctrine is an exercise of power.¹⁶

Discussions of “humanitarianism” and the “protection of distant others” easily get stuck in this abstract dualism (cosmopolitan humanitarianism vs. hegemonic interest). My aim is to look beyond these mutually excluding understandings, trying thereby to unravel the complex interconnected dynamics between global discourses on conflict, their enactment by various actors, and their local consequences. *Kony 2012* provides an empirical example of how discourses on violent conflict do not just describe and characterize contemporary conflict; they also justify and legitimize particular interventions, in this case a military intervention, which then translates into concrete lived realities on the ground. For however contested the campaign may have been, shortly after its release, US President Barack Obama announced that he would continue AFRICOM’s military support to bring this “madman to justice.”¹⁷ In addition, the African Union (AU) promised to send an international brigade of 5,000 troops “to stop Kony, to stop his atrocities and neutralize this man.”¹⁸

Informed by a critical discursive approach, this article poses the following four central questions: (1) what discourse on violent conflict did *Kony 2012* produce? (2) What practices and policies have been legitimized in its name? (3) How are these practices and policies playing out locally? and (4) Who has an interest in maintaining *Kony 2012*'s signifying discourse? Methodologically, this article draws from a discursive frame analysis of *Kony 2012*, in-depth interviews with spokespersons from IC and other INGOs, representatives from the ICC, the advisor to the AU Special Envoy for LRA issues, the public relation (PR) officer of the Ugandan military, academics and journalists specialized in the region, and long-standing grassroots fieldwork conducted by the author in Uganda between 2007 and 2015, and during a three-month period in the spring of 2013.¹⁹ Although my findings are tentative and the need for more micro-level research is evident, this article argues that the *Kony 2012* narrative is “tragically disconnected” from how an array of local actors frame the violence that took place in Uganda. It also illustrates that, despite a number of military advances, the humanitarian intervention promoted in the campaign is having perverse consequences, namely, an increase in human rights abuses in central Africa and a declining awareness and funding for more complex violent realities on the ground.

The Critical Discursive Approach to Violent Conflict

The critical discursive approach provides an analytical framework to study the complex interconnected relationship between global discourses on violent conflict and their local outcomes. Its core components will be unraveled here and will stand as a theoretical backdrop to the four central questions posed in the remainder of this article. Drawing on Anthony Giddens's idea of duality of structure,²⁰ scholars within the critical discursive approach have extensively theorized how discursive and institutional continuities are drawn upon and reproduced by various actors both “within” and “outside” of violent conflict to give meaning to the violence perpetrated and legitimate particular responses.²¹ Although these scholars give incidental empirical examples to illustrate the validity of this approach, in his article, “Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and Other Violent Actors,” Michael Bhatia systematically illustrates, with numerous empirical examples from the “Global War on Terror,” how “names” do matter and are seen to “hurt” in contemporary violent conflict.²² He also provides examples of how complex local variations, motives, histories, and interrelationships are often played down in favor of dominant classificatory lenses. He argues that this can have crucial repercussions for the effectiveness of the policies they inform.²³ Yet, aside from a number of empirical studies on the local outcomes of international master narratives on sexual violence in Africa, very few scholars have analyzed how dominant discourses on violence play out locally.²⁴ Thus, while the critical discursive approach has theoretically come of age, the field of study lacks empirical grounding—a crucial dialogue between ideas and evidence. This is something this article aims to provide.

At the core of the critical discursive approach to violent conflict lies the assumption that war is, in fact, not an aberration but a social continuity. As Vivienne Jabri describes in her book *Discourses on Violence*, “war as a social phenomenon involves individuals, communities, and states and any attempt to uncover its genesis must incorporate the discursive and institutional continuities which render violent conflict a legitimate and widely accepted mode of human conduct.”²⁵ Discourse, and its ability to authorize, enable, and justify particular policies and practices, is thus believed to be central in the lead up to and continuation of war. Herein, the ability to frame violence, and have that frame accepted by a broader audience, is closely related to power. Certain agents simply have more “power to define” than others, and can mobilize structures of signification to legitimate their sectional interests. However, as will become clear when discussing how *Kony 2012* plays out locally, discourses on violence are always subject to competition, resistance, and reinterpretation, and they generate in their wake counterdiscourses that challenge the established order.

The critical discursive approach, therefore, tries to identify when people are receptive or resistant to certain discourses. Jolle Demmers clarifies that discourses of violence are most likely to become hegemonic when they are “both socially meaningful and politically functional.”²⁶ Highlighting the crucial relationship between power, discourse, and institutional policies and practices, she explains that critical discourse analysis is about, “‘the politics of portrayal,’ examining how names and images are made, assigned and disputed, and how this battle at times translates into political and judicial measures and instruments.”²⁷

Important for our discussion is that not only people in and at war are engaged in processes of framing and sense making, so too are so-called outsiders, including (I)NGOs, donor governments, UN agencies, the ICC, the AU, the World Bank, academics, lawyers, commercial enterprises, and military establishments: referred to by Jolle Demmers as the “conflict industry.”²⁸ In line with Michel Foucault’s concept of substitutability, these actors are themselves subjects whose understandings have been constructed within particular meta-narratives that make them see violent conflict in a particular way, just as much as they are instigators of these meta-narratives. Parties to a conflict, for their part, often appropriate these meta-narratives to garner international support and allies, expand their hold on power, and legitimize particular interventions.

From colonial racism and the Cold War ideological standoff to ethno-nationalist conflict and the War on Terror, different international classificatory lenses have arisen through strategic interaction between an assemblage of actors within the conflict industry.²⁹ These actors not only define and interpret local incidents of violence but also, importantly, act upon these interpretations.³⁰ A number of scholars have critically reflected on this close relationship between contemporary classificatory lenses and their role in justifying particular international interventions.³¹ They argue that, with the end of the Cold War, hegemonic discourses have shifted to what Mary Kaldor termed a new war understanding of civil war.³²

New wars are signified to take place within failed states, to blur lines between crime, warfare, and human rights violations, to be void of traditional war aims, to be supported by informal economies, and to include a variety of actors from child soldiers, to paramilitaries, to terrorists. Above all, they are believed to be caused by internal factors and are characterized by mass civilian casualties. As Duffield argues, this creates a “formative contrast between *borderland* traits of barbarity, excess and irrationality, and *metropolitan* characteristics of civility, restraint and rationality.”³³ This, in turn, provides the moral cosmopolitan justification for increased Western interventionism in the name of the “protection of distant others,” transforming the violence of war into the language of “rescue.” As will be illustrated in the following section, *Kony 2012* clearly reproduces this global new war and humanitarian intervention discourse.

These contemporary discourses on conflict and conflict resolution have been increasingly institutionalized in international policies, such as the 2005 UN “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) initiative and the ICC’s Rome Statute. Such prohibitions provide the constraining normative and legal baseline for judging violations of human rights norms and laws of war. Significantly, they also applaud international humanitarian intervention when states themselves do not live up to their obligation to deal with these violations. Both under the UN R2P norm and the ICC’s complementarity principle, if a state is defined as “unable” or “unwilling” to fulfil its responsibility to “protect” its citizens or “prosecute” its war criminals, sovereignty can be temporarily suspended to give way to an international judicial or military humanitarian intervention (termed the New Humanitarian Order by Mahmood Mamdani).³⁴ Often the former legitimizes the latter, as we will see in the frames used in *Kony 2012* and in the realities of the international interventions taking place in Uganda.

With regard to these developments, Jabri points out that “humanitarian intervention sets the stage for a post-Westphalian international political order that is no longer necessarily based on the sovereignty of states as the baseline of legitimacy, but on the judgment of conduct in relation to the realm of the human and its expression in human rights.”³⁵ Hence, the power of discourse in our

contemporary conflict policy landscape lies in the ability to frame these judgments of conduct, to define what is a “failed state,” who is a “war criminal,” and who is in need of “rescue.”³⁶

Whether one understands these developments as a progressive form of value-led “postimperialism” or a form of interest-led “new imperialism,” it is safe to say that liberal and cosmopolitan thought, at the very least, provide the discursive and institutional backdrop for the current social practice and continuation of the humanitarian war. This has profound repercussions for the populations targeted. As highlighted by both Michael Bathia and Paul Brass, the power to define local incidence of violence, to place them within a specific contemporary classificatory lens such as the new war frame, is removed from but certainly feeds into the local societies in which they occur.³⁷ This relocation, described here as a “disconnect,” can have tragic repercussions on the day-to-day lives of those targeted.

A number of scholars researching gender violence in Africa illustrate, for example, how international policy narratives on sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Niger Delta have achieved prominence because they provide straightforward explanations for the violence, suggest feasible solutions to it, and resonate with foreign audiences.³⁸ However, they also demonstrate that these narratives recycle racial stereotypes of the African male as a barbaric, vengeful rapist and obscure the central role of international conditions facilitating such violence. These narratives and the policies they inform have led to local results that clash with their intended purposes, termed by Severine Autesserre as “perverse consequences.” These include downplaying the importance of raising awareness of and fundraising for victims of other forms of (structural) abuse. In the DRC, it has also allowed sexual violence to increasingly become a bargaining strategy for various local actors.³⁹

Informed by these findings, my objective here is to not only analyze how the discourse reproduced in *Kony 2012* has authorized international intervention at a macro level, I also aim to trace its effects at a micro level, on the ground, where we can discern the consequences of its broader discourse, both discursively and materially. To do this in a systematic manner, I apply the analytical tool of “frame analysis” that forms part of the larger field of discourse analysis. David Snow and Robert Benford, who adapted Erving Goffman’s concept of “framing”⁴⁰ to the field of social movements theory, argue that social movements (such as IC) are deeply involved in naming and interconnecting grievances, constructing larger “frames” of meaning that resonate with populations’ cultural predispositions, and communicating a uniform message to power holders and others.⁴¹ Termed later by Sidney Tarrow as “collective action frames,” these frames are understood to “redefine social conditions as unjust and intolerable with the intention of mobilizing potential participants, which is achieved by making appeals to perceptions of justice and emotionality in the minds of individuals.”⁴² Benford and Snow’s research shows that the more culturally believable these collective action frames are, the more credible the framing and the broader its appeal.⁴³ Applying this analytical model will allow me to identify the core collective action frames within *Kony 2012*. In so doing, I will analyze why they are so socially meaningful and politically functional for some, as well as trace the alternative frames that various others have developed to challenge IC’s master narrative. All the while, I will reflect on how IC’s broader discourse is playing out in people’s day-to-day lives.

Framing Kony 2012

In light of its millions of viewers and the revenue it produced, *Kony 2012* has been heralded for its ability to “mobilize the world.” As Richard, a twenty-six-year-old intimately involved with IC since his college years explained, “IC can be so effective in motivating people because they all share a common understanding of the world, common language, common experience, that you can then use to motivate them.”⁴⁴ To understand how IC spoke to “the children of our times,” we now turn to our

first central question: what discourse on the violent conflict in Uganda did *Kony 2012* produce; and why was it so socially meaningful to a Western audience?

The first core collective action frame identified by Robert Benford and David Snow is the “diagnostic frame.” It focuses on some event or aspect of life that is troublesome and in need of change.⁴⁵ The most noticeable diagnostic frame used in *Kony 2012* is the so-called injustice frame, which “identifies the victims of a given injustice and amplifies their victimization.”⁴⁶ In *Kony 2012*, victimhood is clearly inscribed upon the bodies of the Acholi community in northern Uganda and manifests itself in Jacob Acaye, a former LRA child soldier. Acaye is introduced as “our friend in Africa,” through a series of short video clips and photographs on a Facebook profile page. Scrolling through the timeline the viewer is presented with his life history, which goes back to 2003, when IC’s Jason Russell, the maker of the film, met Jacob, “in very different circumstances. He was running for his life.”⁴⁷ The smooth, well-known world of digital social media suddenly fades away to confront the viewer with a rediscovery of the borderlands. The footage, shot at night and supported by off-camera lighting, creates a dark and ominous image of the war-torn town of Gulu. The young Jacob tells how he witnessed his brother being killed by the LRA and breaks down in tears. Russell immediately comforts him and tells him, “it’s okay.” Elaborating on his moral urge “do something,” he promises the young boy, “we are going to do everything that we can to stop them.”⁴⁸

Second, the diagnostic frame serves to point out who is responsible for the issues at hand; who is the “enemy” but also, more generally, who is “with us” and who is “against us.” It thus engages in both “adversarial framing” and “boundary framing.”⁴⁹ This is where *monstration* becomes manifest in IC’s discourse. Peter Chambers, who conducted a case study on the *monstration* of militant Islamist, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, argues that a community always exists in an ongoing, mutual relationship with its monster. It creates it, fears it and seeks to destroy it.⁵⁰ The monster in *Kony 2012* is Joseph Kony, top commander of the LRA and wanted by the ICC for numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. This diagnostic frame is introduced when Russell explains the essence of the LRA conflict to his four-year-old son, Gavin. With the simplistic narrative of good versus evil, accompanied by pictures of Kony and Jacob laid out side-by-side, Kony is identified as the “the bad guy” who abducts thousands of people “and makes them shoot and kill other people.”⁵¹ Kony is later portrayed on a poster alongside Osama Bin Laden and Adolf Hitler. His villainous portrayal is finalized with his criminalization and the depoliticization of the LRA conflict. Luis Moreno Ocampo, the first ICC Prosecutor argues, “the criminal here is Kony,” and Russell claims, “as if Kony’s crimes aren’t bad enough, he is not fighting for any cause, but only to maintain his power.”⁵²

Kony is thus portrayed as a monster, a one-dimensional representative of the dark side of human existence, in violation of the law and humanity. Peter Chambers highlights that monsters always manifest “against the law” in the broadest sense and, “their existence, as living violations, has a primary function *for* law; it draws the circle within which the lawful community of peace, order, and goodness takes shape and retains form.”⁵³ Moreover, it provokes an irrepressible desire on the part of the law-abiding communities, “[...] to hunt down, destroy, vanquish or in some respect ‘bring them to justice.’”⁵⁴

This brings us to the “prognostic frame,” which presents a solution or plan of action to tackle the problem introduced in the diagnostic frame.⁵⁵ In the case of *Kony 2012*, the goal is repeated over twenty times that “Kony must be stopped.” The only way to achieve this, Russell argues, is through military intervention by the Uganda military, backed by the 100 US military advisors stationed in central Africa since late 2011. The military advisors are identified as agents of peace; they are sent in, “because the people demanded it, not for self-defence, but because it was right.”⁵⁶ Their presence, moreover, is considered pivotal. If they leave, we have failed and Kony can continue his rampage. The story warns that the military advisors may be pulled out “at any time.” The proposed way to ensure this does not happen is to “make him famous,” thereby pressuring the US government to act. This can be achieved by sharing the video, by buying an action kit and plastering the *Kony 2012*

poster on “every corner” in “every city” during the Cover the Night action of April 20, 2012. The poster symbolizes not only the ultimate identification of the monstrous enemy but also a call to defeat Kony by Western intervention, just as were Osama Bin Laden and Adolf Hitler.

The final core collective action frame identified by Robert Benford and David Snow, and dominant throughout *Kony 2012*, is the “motivational frame,” which constitutes a call to collective action. It features notions of collective identity, agency, vocabularies of severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety.⁵⁷ IC’s constituency is personified in the campaign by groups of young metropolitan adults that are afforded a tremendous amount of agency, from putting up posters to demonstrating or speaking in public about the Ugandan cause. It is argued by Ocampo that we are “living in a new world, a Facebook world,” in which, “the people of the world see each other and can protect each other.” It is repeatedly claimed that what we do in life “defines us” and that we have the power to end the war in Uganda, to change “the course of human history.” We are also continually reminded that “the time is now,” but also that “time is running out,” and that the expiry date of the campaign is December 2012.⁵⁸

This detailed analysis of *Kony 2012* shows, as argued by Michael Bhatia, that discursive representations of violent conflict fulfil at least two functions. They recruit supporters by propagating a concrete “us” versus “them” divide, and they justify action through labeling.⁵⁹ The campaign clearly reproduces the popular cosmopolitan notion that a violation on one side of the world is felt all over the world. However, instead of diminishing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, we see that this notion of humanity reinforces a strong discourse of victimization and *monstration* of the “other.” Kony is diagnosed as the evil monstrous other, who perpetrates human rights abuses against innocent victims without any political goals. The northern Ugandan peasantry are robbed of self-determination and agency, expected to collectively suffer in silence as a homogenous mass until they are discovered and rescued by us, Western agents of peace. This legitimizes a humanitarian war above politics, a moral and universal responsibility of the law-abiding community.

This discourse is “socially meaningful” to a broad Western audience because it creatively combines the contemporary hegemonic new war, cosmopolitanism, and humanitarian war discourses of our time. In addition, it reinforces a familiar Western *racialising* of African bodies as violent and in need of “discipline,” as repeatedly addressed by postcolonial scholars.⁶⁰ More specifically, the campaign reproduces what Sverker Finnström calls the dominant “official discourse” on the northern Ugandan conflict: the meaningless, criminal brutality of the LRA, the innocent child victims, and the Western Saviour.⁶¹ As Adam Branch illustrates in his book, *Displacing Human Rights*, this discourse has been upheld for years by an assemblage of actors within the conflict industry and has informed numerous international interventions in northern Uganda.⁶² Since 2009, a number of INGOs have shifted the emphasis within this official discourse. They have moved from stressing the need for international humanitarian aid and humanitarian law enforcement, toward the need for humanitarian military intervention by the US government.⁶³ IC has been at the forefront of this discursive shift and “the high profile Kony 2012 campaign is undoubtedly the most influential example of this trend.”⁶⁴

In Name of *Kony 2012*

Given that discourses not only describe and characterize but also authorize, enable, and justify specific policies and practices, it is significant to discern what events followed the campaign and analyze whether they were legitimized through alignment with *Kony 2012*’s broader collective action frames. The following important developments will be analyzed: (1) US President Barack Obama’s commitment to the continued presence of 100 US military advisors in the region, (2) the creation of a Regional Task Force (RTF) under the leadership of the AU, and (3) the expansion of the United States’s War Crimes Rewards program to include Kony and two of his military advisors.

On April 23, 2012, less than two months after IC's campaign was released, President Obama announced that he would continue to commit 100 AFRICOM soldiers to assist the mission to arrest Kony.⁶⁵ In his speech, Obama clearly alluded to IC, *Kony 2012* and its signifying discourse:

We are joined today by communities who have made it your mission to prevent atrocities in our times; the museum's committee of conscience, NGOs, faith groups and college students. You have harnessed the tools of the digital age, online maps and satellites, a video, a social media campaign seen by millions. You understand that change comes from the bottom up, from the grassroots.⁶⁶

He continues by drawing on the official discourse on the conflict and reinforcing the *Kony 2012* campaign's injustice frame and adversarial frame to justify AFRICOM's military presence:

Today, I can announce that our advisers will continue their efforts to bring this madman to justice and to save lives. It's part of our regional strategy to end the scourge that is the LRA and help realize a future where no African child is stolen from its family and no girl is raped and no boy is turned into a child soldier.⁶⁷

However, the intervention these frames are used to legitimize is not an alteration but a continuation of a practice that has been in place for many years. The 100 AFRICOM soldiers were already deployed in October 2011. Their stated objective is to train soldiers and assist the mission through intelligence and advice. They are not to "engage LRA forces unless necessary for self-defense."⁶⁸ The groundwork for this mission was laid under the earlier adopted LRA's Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009, which was signed into law in 2010 after intense lobbying by IC and other INGOs working on the "LRA issue." It calls for "increased, comprehensive US efforts to help mitigate and eliminate the threat posed by the LRA to civilians and regional stability," and requires regular official reporting to Congress on how the fight against the LRA is proceeding.⁶⁹ The law thus makes the defeat of the LRA part of US foreign policy. Again, this act only further institutionalized a well-established alliance between the US and the Ugandan government. As will be explained later, since 9/11 the US government has been providing the Ugandan government with military aid for its "war against the LRA" and in 2008 AFRICOM already became more actively involved, where it provided intelligence as well as military advisors in the regional joint military mission Operation Lightning Thunder.⁷⁰

A more significant change in the wake of *Kony 2012* was the establishment of an RTF under the mandate of the AU. This was announced on March 23, 2012, during a joint press conference including, among others, Francisco Madeira, the Special Envoy of the AU for LRA issues, and Abou Moussa, the Secretary General's Special Representative and Head of the UN Office for Central Africa.⁷¹ Madeira relayed herein that Uganda, DRC, Southern Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR) had committed to providing 5,000 troops for a RTF that would be "free to move in all four countries," in order to address the threat of "Kony and his team." He further explained the RTF would be commanded by Uganda, backed by the United Nations, and would receive support from the 100 AFRICOM military advisors present in the region.⁷² During the press conference, Abou Moussa mentions *Kony 2012* directly, stating that although the video was controversial, it had been useful and important in increasing international awareness about Kony.⁷³ Indeed, the plans for an AU-led RTF had been on the table for a long time. In 2009, an action plan had already been adopted during a special summit in Tripoli. Thereafter, numerous meetings took place to create a regional brigade that would be able to intervene directly in all LRA-affected countries.⁷⁴

However, the idea of a central command with direct operational authority over troops in the entire region met with heavy resistance, especially from the DRC and the CAR. These countries distrusted the deployment of Ugandan troops on their territory and argued that they faced more

imminent threats to state security than the LRA.⁷⁵ Mike Bugason, advisor to the AU Special Envoy on the LRA, explained in a personal interview, “IC’s campaign, although out-dated, brought the international attention, engagement, and pressure that was needed to launch the RTF two months after its release.”⁷⁶ When asked why the AU wanted to lead the mission, he explained, “the LRA issue is not a national problem, it is a regional problem, and a regional problem needs regional coordination and therefore the AU is the only suitable institution to lead this mission with the support of the US military.”⁷⁷

Finally, on April 3, 2013, over a year after the release of *Kony 2012*, it was announced that the US Secretary of State, under the War Crimes Reward Program, would offer up to five million dollars for information leading to the arrest, transfer, or conviction of three top leaders of the LRA, namely, Joseph Kony, Okot Odhiambo, and Dominic Ongwen.⁷⁸ This signified the first time ever that ICC fugitives were added to the War Crimes Rewards Program list. Only eight days after this announcement, a Google+ hangout session took place between Stephen Rapp, the Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues, Fatou Bensouda, the current ICC Prosecutor, Lisa Dougan, Director of Civic Engagement at IC, and Marc Quaterman, Director of Research at the INGO Enough Project.⁷⁹ All participants repeatedly praised each other’s institutional work and the move to put Kony on the War Crimes Reward Program as an important contribution to international justice and ending impunity. Lisa Dougan thanked the thousands of activists, “who were lobbying their members of Congress to see the passage of legislation that enabled this extension.”⁸⁰ The mere fact that both the ICC Prosecutor and the Senator participated in this thirty-minute online conversation alongside IC illustrates how willing both actors were to embrace IC’s collective action frames to justify their policies. Senator Stephen Rapp relayed that the five million dollar reward would help the US military, “chase Kony, bring him in and neutralize the LRA,” and would send out “a message that there will be accountability for mass atrocities; that there are consequences.”⁸¹ Ironically, only Marc Quaterman briefly mentions that the United States itself is not signatory to the ICC Rome Statute.

Nevertheless, the Obama administration is clearly changing its approach to the ICC, in contrast to the Bush administration that rejected the ICC outright and tried to persuade other states to follow suit. The Obama administration “is prepared to listen and to work with” the ICC, this may “involve diplomatic or political efforts; it could involve other things,” although it is not prepared to sign on to the treaty that established the court.⁸² The counter-LRA mission and the five-million reward symbolize these new “efforts.” When questioned about the inherent paradox in this new collaboration, Gilbert Bitti, a senior legal adviser at the ICC stated that “in some circumstances your biggest enemy becomes your best friend, you take what you can get and admit there is injustice in the ICC’s selection process.”⁸³

From the above-mentioned, we can conclude that an assemblage of actors have been keen to further embrace and reinforce IC’s *monstration* of Kony and their plea for a humanitarian war, ostensibly to protect the rights of others, so as to legitimize a number of key policies and practices. This has strengthened particular transnational alliances between, among others, the ICC, the US and Ugandan government, and the AU. But do these others indeed embrace the IC’s framing of their local reality? And what consequences have the previous developments had on their day-to-day lived realities?

Playing Out Locally

First and foremost, it is worth noting that while *Kony 2012* gained massive attention in the West, the spread of the movie in Uganda, and especially northern Uganda, was much more marginal. This is partially due to the lack of broadband Internet connection. However, IC also admits that, unlike the countrywide screening tour in the United States, they put “little-to-no-effort in spreading the movie in northern Uganda.”⁸⁴ Those who missed the two organized screenings were out of luck, although

some heard about it over the radio. In an interview with Jimmy Otim, the Head of the ICC's Outreach Department in Uganda, it became clear that even he had not been informed about the former Prosecutor's participation in the campaign or of its release. Jimmy Otim claimed northern Ugandans were very pleased with the movie, though he had not gauged the local reactions directly.⁸⁵ This highlights how a global cosmopolitan narrative can target an entire population, despite them having very little knowledge of its existence.

Ugandan respondents who had seen the movie, including journalists, nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives, and Ugandan lawyers, all stressed that it portrays an outdated image. The video uses footage from 2003 to show the threat of LRA violence, presenting northern Uganda as a region torn by war. However, since the LRA moved out of Uganda in 2006 and into its neighboring countries, northern Uganda has experienced a peaceful period of rebuilding and growth.⁸⁶ Several respondents therefore doubted IC's incentive to portray these images now. As a Ugandan journalist explained, "how can this thing come out, when Kony was here six years ago? [. . .] These guys, for them, they just want to go and make money, money for their own selfish gain, of course."⁸⁷

A number of respondents emphasized that the campaign's footage made painful memories and old fears resurge, and former LRA combatants were afraid that the images used might jeopardize their already fragile position in society. This discourse was prevalent among those who had attended the screening in Lira, organized by the local NGO African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET).⁸⁸ They felt further that "making Kony famous" was very insensitive to the suffering they had endured. Reflecting on the memory of IC activists wearing *Kony 2012* T-shirts, Victor Ochen, Director at AYINET, quotes one of the villagers as saying, "[. . .] why do you put on this t-shirt, yet I am suffering? Why do you celebrate a terrorist?" The film and the visual metaphor of the *Kony 2012* posters were thus met with confusion and hurt, and in the end the screening was stopped when people started throwing rocks at the screen.⁸⁹ A similar screening, organized by IC in Gulu, did not fare much better. The event was documented in an official IC video, which portrayed a peaceful showing.⁹⁰ However, the *Acholi Times* and a number of my respondents who attended the screening reported that police dispersed an angered crowd with tear gas and live ammunition.⁹¹

In response to the victims' pleas, Victor Ochen asked representatives of IC to stop the Cover the Night action.⁹² He conveyed the following about their conversation:

They insisted about the Cover the Night, and then we asked them, "can you explain [to] us why you can't avoid Cover the Night? The victims are saying, "please don't do it." They [IC] said, "for your sake, we are going to do it." And that's when I said, "Ok fine, if you can't hear the voice of the people, who are saying it hurts us, it creates more injuries, don't do it, then you have an invisible agenda [. . .] then your agenda is different from theirs."⁹³

In addition to the evident discomfort and, at times, outrage triggered by IC's injustice frame, many of my Acholi respondents felt it did not do them justice to leave the war crimes committed by the Ugandan military "out" of the *Kony 2012* narrative. This shows how a very different adversarial frame exists locally. From the start of the protracted conflict in 1987, many Acholis, as well as human rights organizations, have accused the Ugandan government and its army of rape, beatings, and extrajudicial killings. Moreover, from 1996 onward, the government forced, often violently, the civilian population into so-called protected camps. Civilians found outside of these camps after curfew were often abused by soldiers and, at the height of the conflict, as many as 1,000 people per week died in these camps as a consequence of the crowded and miserable living conditions.⁹⁴ This was a much higher death rate than that incurred by LRA violence. However, none of this is included in *Kony 2012*. In fact, research has repeatedly shown that the ICC's arrest warrants against the LRA top commanders—a key legitimizing frame in *Kony 2012*—are perceived as highly partial by the Acholi population precisely because the prosecutor did not investigate the crimes committed by the Ugandan military.⁹⁵

This alternative local adversarial frame (including both the LRA and the state actors) partially explains people's mixed reactions to the prognostic frame presented by IC. Although an array of my respondents expressed being in favor of Kony's eventual arrest and prosecution, answers varied immensely when it came to questions of when, by whom, and how. Notably, war-affected rural respondents expressed optimism and high expectations about the collaboration between the United States and the AU to arrest Kony. They believed that the United States's military and technical support will help capture Kony, something they felt was important to ensure that the LRA does not return to northern Uganda. Yet, these same respondents also said that this was not their highest priority; rebuilding their lives and access to health care and education were given precedence. When questioned about the War Crimes Reward Program, an Acholi lawyer reiterated this sentiment, stating that "the five million dollar bounty would better be spent on rebuilding the lives of the victims. Is Kony really that elusive that you need a bounty?"⁹⁶

War-affected respondents were especially skeptical about giving international support to the Ugandan government and its military in the mission to "hunt down Kony." As stated by one respondent, "the government of Uganda are not the right people; they are not the right people to arrest Kony [...] because the government—they also contributed to what is this war."⁹⁷ Not only is the Ugandan government perceived as a party to the conflict but also, in the respondents' view, the alliance between the international community and the Ugandan government has, thus far, yielded little success in bringing the war to a formal end or Kony to justice. For many, Museveni's 2003 self-referral of the "LRA situation" to the ICC, and the subsequent arrest warrants against the LRA in 2005, gave Kony and his top commanders little incentive to lay down their weapons and return from the bush. As such, these actions were seen as obstacles toward achieving peace during the locally supported 2006 to 2008 peace negotiations.⁹⁸ Instead, many local as well as foreign actors believed that Museveni's self-referral was not so much a call to "universal justice," but a political tool to portray the government's opponent as an "enemy of mankind." This, in turn, cleared the way for the government's preferred militarism in the region by providing international legitimacy and support in name of "enforcing international law."⁹⁹ Indeed, since the start of the conflict, Museveni has often pulled out of peace negotiations prematurely and has vigorously promoted a military solution to the LRA issue, including missions such as Operation Iron Fist (2002), Iron Fist II (2004), and Operation Lightning Thunder (2008).¹⁰⁰

It is a strategy that has shown, as yet, no success in indefinitely defeating the LRA, and has regularly led to mass scale retaliation against civilians. For example, the joint regional Operation Lightning Thunder (2008–2009), led by Uganda and supported by AFRICOM, saw Kony escape unharmed only to later launch a series of attacks killing over 865 civilians in the DRC and South Sudan.¹⁰¹ As Adam Branch observes, neither Uganda nor the United States was held accountable for leaving these civilians unprotected or for the subsequent instability, insecurity, and militarization of the communities affected.¹⁰² Advocating for a Ugandan military solution, supported by the United States, was therefore a very unpopular prognostic frame among my northern Ugandan respondents; it reminded them of decades of suffering, during which one military attempt after another failed. Disillusioned by these efforts, the Archbishop of Gulu argued that "instead of relying on military intervention, let us redouble our efforts to engage in dialogue."¹⁰³

Not only has the *Kony 2012* narrative been highly contested by many northern Ugandans, the military intervention it promotes seems to be having perverse consequences in its neighboring countries. Recent reports by regional specialists and IC themselves demonstrate that IC's *Kony 2012* discourse does not necessarily connect with the current realities on the ground and confounds local security dynamics.¹⁰⁴

As mentioned earlier, the last major reported LRA attacks were in retaliation for Operation Lightning Thunder, and in December 2009, a massacre took place in Makambo, killing at least 321 people.¹⁰⁵ Since 2010, the level of LRA violence and abductions declined dramatically,

reaching an all-time low in 2012, when *Kony 2012* was released.¹⁰⁶ Since then, the LRA has continued to survive with an estimated 250 armed fighters that operate in vast areas in the DRC and the CAR, and in a small enclave in South Sudan. They have persisted in an under-the-radar fashion; their trademark attacks becoming of much smaller scale and much less frequent.¹⁰⁷ In their 2013 Annual Security Report, IC even define the LRA as “[a] group whose modus operandi resembles that of common bandits,” a far cry from the monstrous war criminals they were made out to be in *Kony 2012*.¹⁰⁸

Conversely, the current mission to “hunt down Kony” has led to a sharp militarization of the region, as the presence of many armed actors in the region is publicly justified exclusively in terms of the fight against the LRA. From 2012 until the time of writing, the Congolese army, backed by the UN mission in DRC, continued their counter-LRA strategies in affected areas in the DRC. Concurrently, the AU RTF, with the support of AFRICOM, operated irregularly in all LRA affected countries—CAR, DRC, and South Sudan. The soldiers’ presences have, to a certain extent, deterred the LRA. For example, in 2013, IC reported that several LRA camps were destroyed and 16 of the estimated 250 combatants were killed or captured while another 16 had defected.¹⁰⁹ In August 2014, LRA top commander Dominic Onwgen released seventy-four women and children, and in January 2015, he surrendered himself in CAR.¹¹⁰ However, the AU has faced many regional issues that have hampered its operations. Ugandan troops are still not permitted on DRC soil due to an ongoing lack of trust. Congolese and South Sudanese troops were inactive during the first half of 2013 due to insufficient supplies. A Ugandan contingent (1,000 soldiers) remained idle between March and October 2013 in CAR after a coup. Currently, all South Sudanese troops have withdrawn due to the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan, and some of the Ugandan RTF troops have been redeployed to support the South Sudanese President Kiir in his struggles.¹¹¹ In light of these military deficiencies, peace activist in Gulu, including the local PR manager for IC, claim that recent LRA defections are in fact due to the messages broadcasted on the local “Come Home” radio program above and beyond any pressure exerted by deployed soldiers.¹¹²

As the AU battles to overcome the deep-seated regional divisions and remains to a large extent ineffective, various actors are taking advantage of the militarization of the region and the international focus on the LRA. In some cases, the very soldiers who have been deployed to fight the LRA and protect civilians are reportedly posing a major threat to the population. For years, the Ugandan military has been renowned for its human rights abuses against civilians across its borders. Discussing its violations in Sudan, Mareike Schomerus concludes “continued operations of the UPDF outside its borders recreate the same problems they purport to be fighting: abuses of civilians.”¹¹³ Moreover, it has been reported that Congolese soldiers stationed in LRA affected areas have done little to protect the civilian population and have in fact committed more violations (including looting, sexual violence, murder, and arrest) in comparison to presumed attacks carried out by the LRA.¹¹⁴ The word “presumed” here refers to another major security issue, namely, that an array of actors, including bandits, poachers, armed groups, and again soldiers, have allegedly been copying LRA attacks. This has been done in order to not only scare the local population into submission and facilitate looting but also to misdirect the blame to the LRA.¹¹⁵

The *Kony 2012* discourse obscures these and other threats, such as more malicious rebellions in the DRC and CAR and civil unrest in South Sudan. Moreover, it is making it harder for local humanitarian organizations to rally support for a comprehensive approach. Regional specialist Kristof Titeca highlights that humanitarian actors increasingly have to emphasize the LRA in their programs to raise funds and “as a result, a number of programs were implemented which were specifically targeted towards LRA-effects, but—in a situation of strongly reduced LRA attacks—had relatively little results; while the increased attacks and dangers of other actors were not sufficiently addressed.”¹¹⁶ Fellow regional specialist, Professor Koen Vlassenroot, stated at a conference on the LRA in The Hague that “the number of LRA attacks and attacks by other forces

are meeting each other [. . .] reducing it to an LRA threat and reducing it to a military response is a major risk we are taking.”¹¹⁷

Maintaining *Kony 2012*'s Signifying Discourse

In light of the recurring unsuccessful counter-LRA operations and the current dwindling “threat” of the LRA in relation to much more pressing security issues in the region, several of my respondents, as well as Ugandan and foreign academics and political journalists, have questioned why an assemblage of actors within the conflict industry are so keen to reinforce IC’s signifying discourse and push for a military solution to the LRA issue.

For IC, the new war depiction of the Ugandan conflict in terms of a mass of human rights abuses against helpless child victims by a cynical war criminal, justifies why IC, as part of a global civil society, can claim rights on behalf of others. Moreover, as Jonathan Fisher illustrates, IC is much more likely to achieve one of its main goals “to influence political leaders to adopt our proposals,” if their recommendations are in line with the political interests of the policy makers they are lobbying.¹¹⁸ As explained subsequently, rallying for a military solution is clearly aligned with the interests of both the Ugandan and the US government. Over the years, this has allowed IC to gain access and build a close alliance with both administrations.¹¹⁹

Faced with the reality that many state parties have failed to deliver indicted war criminals to the ICC, the ICC’s Prosecutor, on its part, has changed its approach to the United States in recent years. It has gone from trying to avoid US condemnation toward actively seeking collaboration with the Obama administration to enforce its arrest warrants. As the special advisor to the Prosecutor, Beatrice Le Fraper Du Hellen, stated in an interview with the CNN,

We have our shopping list ready of requests from the—from the American Government. The American Government first has to lead on one particular issue: the arrest of sought criminals. President al-Bashir, Joseph Kony in Uganda, Bosco Ntaganda, the “Terminator in the Congo”—all those people have arrest warrants against them, arrest warrants issued by the ICC judges, and they need to be arrested now.¹²⁰

Featuring in *Kony 2012* and vying for US military intervention is the discursive embodiment of this newfound approach by the ICC.¹²¹

With regard to the government of Uganda, over the years my respondents have often reiterated that “if Museveni truly wanted to bring this war to an end, he would have done so a long time ago.”¹²² Critics argue instead that Museveni has actively maintained an image of the “LRA threat” in need of military defeat, especially vis-à-vis the US government. This has offered a number of benefits for the government. On the international level, it has allowed Museveni to reinvent himself as a key US ally, especially in the wake of 9/11. In return for significant American military aid and diplomatic support for his “war on terror” against the LRA (in 2001, the LRA was put on the US Terrorist Exclusion List), Museveni has proven to be “a valuable and important partner in the worldwide anti-terrorism coalition,” now especially in Somalia and Sudan.¹²³ This reputation continues to be crucial in avoiding donor censure and accountability for his worsening democratic and human rights record, as well as corruption.¹²⁴ On a regional level, the military solution legitimizes sending Ugandan troops into neighboring countries, where prior interventions have led to massive looting of resources and atrocities against civilians.¹²⁵ After the failure of the 2008 Operation Lightning Thunder, for example, an informal agreement permitted a few Ugandan intelligence groups to stay on Congolese territory, ostensibly to chase Kony. These few troops turned out to be an estimated 3,000, which remained in the DRC until 2011. This created tensions with the Congolese troops, who accused the Ugandan military of involvement in illicit ivory trade and complicity with the LRA, for example, through staging LRA attacks and supplying the LRA.¹²⁶ Ultimately, the DRC banned

Ugandan forces from entering the country.¹²⁷ As Kristof Titeca explained, “with the AU’s move to combine the RTF forces, the DRC fears that the Ugandan military will use it as an excuse to once again cross its border.”¹²⁸ Indeed, ever since discussions about an RTF commenced, the DRC has been pressurized to allow Ugandan soldiers back on its territory, frequently being referred to as a “weak state” unable to “protect its citizens.”¹²⁹ At a national level, Museveni’s “counter-LRA operations” earn at least thirty million US dollars annually for the Ugandan military, upon which the president increasingly bases his power.¹³⁰ Finally, the “war on Kony” serves as a pretext for restricting Ugandan civil liberties, harassing the opposition, and rallying southern support.¹³¹

Similarly, a number of Ugandan as well as foreign actors also question the United States’s moral incentives to stop Kony. Even the INGO and ICC representatives with whom I spoke thought it was unlikely that the campaign and the military intervention it calls for will lead to the actual arrest of Kony any time soon because, “too many actors, including the US, have an interest in maintaining the status quo.”¹³² Milton Allimadi, Ugandan Publisher of the *Black Star News*, conveyed the following about the financial interests of the United States in the region:

Many sceptics believe that the US has other interests; it is no coincidence that major oil discoveries have been made in the northern part of Uganda, Southern Sudan, parts of the Congo and in Central African Republic. [...] Many people believe that the US wants boots on the ground.¹³³

Indeed, between 2001 and 2007, the “oil rush” of sub-Saharan Africa grew from 5 to 7 percent of world production, accounting for roughly a fifth of US oil imports. This increase has risen most quickly in eastern Africa.¹³⁴ More specifically, by 2009, Tullow Oil discovered an estimated two billion barrels in Uganda.¹³⁵ These developments have not gone unnoticed by the United States, other Western powers and emerging economies, who continue to seek new energy resources. China, especially, is becoming a “formidable competitor for both influence and lucrative contracts on the Continent.”¹³⁶ China owns 40 percent of the largest oil producing company in Sudan, and by 2013, it had become the second largest foreign investor in Uganda, after India. According to Daniel Volvan, the Director of the African Security Research Project in Washington, China’s and other emerging economies’ growing economic and military involvement in Africa has ignited what has come to be known as “the new scramble for Africa. [And] in response the US has dramatically increased its military presence in Africa and created a new military command—the Africa Command or AFRICOM.”¹³⁷ According to its mission statement, AFRICOM, “[...] builds defense capabilities, responds to crises, and deters and defeats transnational threats in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.”¹³⁸ In more unguarded moments, officials have been more straightforward; Vice-Admiral Robert Moeller declared, in a conference in 2008, that AFRICOM was about preserving, “the free flow of natural resources from Africa to the global market,” while citing terrorism, oil disruption, and China as major “challenges” to US interests.¹³⁹ Political journalist Dan Glazebrook argues that:

The small number of US personnel actually working for AFRICOM—approximately 2000—belies the ambition of the project [...]. The US soldiers employed by AFRICOM are not there to fight, but to direct; the great hope is that the African Union’s forces can be subordinated to a chain of command headed by AFRICOM.¹⁴⁰

Libya was a test case. Preceded by a Security Council referral to the ICC and an R2P resolution, it was the first war actually commanded by AFRICOM. It proved remarkably successful, as a significant regional power was destroyed without the loss of a single US or European soldier. But for AFRICOM, the significance of this war went much deeper than that. In taking out Muammar

al-Gaddafi, AFRICOM had actually eliminated one of the AFRICOM's fiercest adversaries.¹⁴¹ As Jolle Demmers explains:

Gaddafi's regime had been one of repression, human rights abuses, and nepotism since he came to power in 1969; it was only when he became a serious obstacle for western access to African resources as Chairman of the African Union in 2009—stepping up efforts to build a militarily and financially unified Africa and forcing the US established AFRICOM to house its headquarters not in Africa itself, but in Stuttgart, Germany—that state violence in Libya became the “responsibility of humanity.”¹⁴²

It was within months of the fall of Tripoli—and in the same month as Gaddafi's execution—that President Obama announced the deployment of the 100 AFRICOM forces to Uganda and the three other African countries depicted in *Kony 2012*. Critics argue that this was no coincidence, and the United States's new willingness to act as the ICC's police force and the success of the *Kony 2012* campaign has helped justify US military action across the resource rich terrain. As Adam Branch wonders, “how often does the US government find millions of young Americans pleading that they intervene militarily in a place rich in oil and other resources?”¹⁴³ Moreover, it seems that the AU—after losing in Gaddafi one of its most avid supporters and financial backers—is once again willing to collaborate with AFRICOM and is keen to reposition itself as a regional conflict-solving mechanism.¹⁴⁴ The “hunt for Kony” provides a perfect opportunity to pursue this course of action under the sympathetic eye of the international community.

The analysis developed here illustrates how dominant discourses on new war violence and cosmopolitanism can be instrumentalized and reinforced by an assemblage of actors that bring together an array of institutions, interests, and forms of authority. It also empirically illuminates one of David Keen's observations that war is not always about winning but can, in fact, have complex economic, political, and psychological benefits for some of the actors involved, including Western youths who, from the comfort of their own home, feel like they are saving innocent victims.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

There is nothing “new” about IC's representation of violence in Africa; it contributes to the recycling and reinforcing of racialized stereotypes of the African male and a new war frame of civil war. In *Kony 2012*, the roots of the violence in Uganda and its neighboring countries are diagnosed to lie at the level of monstrous Kony, who has no political goals, engages in criminal human rights abuses against innocent civilian victims, and who is a moral threat to the law-abiding global community. By applying this frame, IC attempts to justify why it believes it can claim rights on behalf of others, while at the same time legitimizing a particular type of military intervention, namely, a war fought on humanitarian grounds. This war is portrayed as standing above politics; it is equated with merely enforcing cosmopolitan norms and laws, which are socially meaningful to us in the West.

Looking through the lens of a critical discursive approach, this article illustrates how an assemblage of actors within the conflict industry have jumped on the *Kony 2012* bandwagon and are upholding its narrative to sustain a military presence in the region. This has entrenched particular forms of transnational governmentality. By tracing some of the micro-level effects of this process, this article offers empirical evidence of how a global discourse on cosmopolitan humanism can become tragically disconnected from local lived realities.

The first disconnect lies between the actors who claim rights on behalf of others, and those others. My data illustrate that the rights claimed on behalf of others, by INGOs international institutions, or “moral” governments, often stand independently from, and sometimes in opposed relation to, the agency of those others. Neither IC nor representatives from the ICC made an attempt, before or after

the campaign's release, to consult with and to verify whether their reading of the "victims'" reality was socially meaningful to those they claim to represent.

This brings us to the second disconnect, namely, between a simplified new war framing of local incidence of violence and its more complex local counterparts. Situated in its historical, social, and political contexts, the *Kony 2012* narrative is highly contested based on the social-psychological impact of its injustice frame, and it is rejected based on its one-sided adversarial frame. Moreover, various actors are believed to have little interest in truly resolving the LRA issue. This latter sentiment was even reiterated by representatives of the ICC and INGOs, who admit that geopolitical interests, above and beyond any cosmopolitan incentives, are more likely to clarify the current humanitarian intervention. These interests include improving the effectiveness and international legitimacy of the ICC and the AU, strengthening the Ugandan government's national power, regional influence and international alliances, and justifying flexible expansion of AFRICOM in the region.

Most pressingly, this article highlights that the *Kony 2012* narrative, and the humanitarian war it calls for, is not necessarily connected, but certainly feeds in to local security dynamics. This has led to a number of perverse consequences. Although LRA attacks have decreased and the amount of defectors has risen, it is leading to a militarization of the region, where numerous actors conduct crimes, some under the guise of the LRA. Moreover, it hampers humanitarian organizations in drawing attention and resources for more pressing security issues. This could ultimately mean that the *Kony 2012* narrative will lead to results that are disconnected from IC's intended purpose; that is, it could lead to an increase in human rights violations.

Finally, this article clearly exemplifies that the development of cosmopolitan norms and laws favor strong states. Western states and their allies, in this case the United States and the government of Uganda, simply have more power to define the special rights of intervention, while states defined as weak, such as the DRC, are increasingly demoted. Moreover, the party that can portray itself as acting in the name of these norms and laws is not put under the same conditions as the party being pursued. The United States is actively involved in enforcing international criminal law, a law it itself is not signatory to. Meanwhile, by aligning itself with the United States and initially with the ICC, the Ugandan government has been able to evade prosecution of its war crimes and has increasingly seen its military powers strengthened in the name of enforcing international law.

Whether you see the humanitarian intervention rallied for in *Kony 2012* as a move towards a new cosmopolitan order, or as a form of new imperialism or as something in between, my analysis has shown that it has profound consequences not just at a geopolitical level but certainly also at a micro-local level. With reference to the latter, the civilians on the receiving end of a humanitarian war evidently lack the power to define what rights should be protected, by whom and how, and they have no way of holding the intervening humanitarian actors accountable.

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87. Personal interview with Risdal Kasasira (Daily Monitor), Kampala, Uganda, April 24, 2013.
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89. Reactions to the movie were so emotional that AYINET decided not to continue with the tour. Personal interview with Victor Ochen (AYINET), Gulu, Uganda, May 17, 2013.
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97. Personal interview with confidential source, Awach, Gulu, Uganda, March 21, 2013.
98. See Brants, Brants, and Gould, “Communicating the ICC,” 156.
99. Sarah Nouwen and Wouter Werner, “Doing Justice to the Political: The International Criminal Court in Uganda and Sudan,” *European Journal of International Law* 21, no. 4 (2010): 941–65; Adam Branch, “Uganda’s Civil War and the Politics of ICC Intervention,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2007): 179–98.
100. Fisher, “Framing Kony,” 690–91.
101. “Trail of Death. LRA Atrocities in North-eastern Congo,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 2010, 5.
102. Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 228.
103. Personal interview with John Baptist Odama, Gulu, Uganda, January 7, 2015.
104. Considering I have not done field research myself in the DRC, CAR, or South Sudan, I predominantly base my findings in this section on the field research conducted by regional experts Kristof Titeca and Koen Vlassenroot. Kristof Titeca is a postdoctoral fellow from the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO), based at the Institute of Development and Management (University of Antwerp) and the Conflict Research Group (University of Ghent). Koen Vlassenroot is a professor in the Conflict Research Group at the University of Ghent. Both have done extensive research on the LRA in both Uganda and the DRC. My information is drawn from their presentations, published articles, and a personal interview with Titeca (University of Antwerp and Ghent), Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 5, 2013. Information is also drawn from “LRA Crisis Tracker, Annual Security Brief; January–December 2013,” *The Resolve and Invisible Children*, 2013, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/pdf/2013-A-LRA-Crisis-Tracker-Annual-Brief.pdf> and “LRA Crisis Tracker, Mid-Year 2014 Security Brief January–June 2014,” *The Resolve and Invisible Children*, 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/midyear-2014/>. The LRA Crisis Tracker collects, analyzes, and digitally presents data concerning LRA incidents, including attacks, abductions, and killings in LRA affected areas.
105. “Trail of Death. LRA Atrocities in North-eastern Congo,” 18.
106. Adam Branch, “The Paradox of Protection: Aligning against the Lord’s Resistance Army,” *African Security* 5, no. 3–4 (2012): 161.
107. Kristof Titeca and Theophile Costeur, “An LRA for Everyone. How Different Actors Perceive and Construct the LRA Differently, and How This Leads to Less Effective Interventions,” *African Affairs* 114, no. 454 (2015): 9.
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109. Ibid.
110. Personal interview with Lacambel (Radio presenter Mega FM), Gulu, Uganda, January 7, 2015. Although an in-depth discussion of Dominic Ongwen's case falls outside the scope of the present analysis, his surrender and referral to the ICC raises a number of important questions and debates that beg for further research. Although his surrender is obviously a symbolic event and will be used to justify further military intervention and will likely stand to improve the ICC's legitimacy, it is first unclear whether his surrender is in fact due to military pressure or due to the local "Come Home" radio messages or due to his deteriorating relationship with Joseph Kony. Second, it is unclear whether his surrender is a major military setback for the LRA, considering the current fragmented nature of the LRA and Ongwen's ostracization by Kony. Finally, it is unclear whether the victims in Acholi-land will support him being brought to the ICC, considering he was abducted at the age of ten and many Acholi respondents I spoke to just after his release argued that he should be given amnesty and used as an example to persuade the remaining LRA commanders to lay down their weapons and return.
111. Personal interview with confidential source (Uganda Peoples' Defense Forces [UPDF] Commander), Gulu, Uganda, January 6, 2015.
112. Mega FM has been broadcasting the "Come Home" radio program for over a decade. Herein, LRA combatants are ensured that they will be welcomed home by the broader community and will receive blanket amnesty under the Ugandan Amnesty Act. An LRA commander who returned less than a year ago after being in bush for over fifteen years confirmed that it was these messages that inspired him to come home. Personal interview with confidential source (former LRA Commander), Gulu, Uganda, January 7, 2015.
113. Mareike Schomerus, "They Forget What They Came For: Uganda's Army in Sudan," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (2012): 124.
114. Titeca and Costeur, "An LRA for Everybody," 20. See also "LRA Crisis Tracker, Mid-Year 2014 Security Brief January-June 2014," *The Resolve and Invisible Children*, 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/midyear-2014/>.
115. As representatives of IC and The Resolve mention in their Annual Security Brief, this makes it much more difficult for protection actors to identify perpetrators; "LRA Crisis Tracker, Mid-Year 2014 Security Brief January-June 2014," *The Resolve and Invisible Children*, 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/midyear-2014/>. This was also confirmed in a personal interview with Kristof Titeca (University of Antwerp and Ghent) Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 5, 2013. See also Kristof Titeca, "The (LRA) Conflict: Beyond the LRA Lobby and the Hunt for Kony and Towards Civilian Protection," *African Arguments*, May 17, 2013, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://africanarguments.org/2013/05/17/the-lra-conflict-beyond-the-lra-lobby-the-hunt-for-kony-and-towards-civilian-protection-by-kristof-titeca/>.
116. Titeca, "The (LRA) Conflict," accessed April 8, 2014, <http://africanarguments.org/2013/05/17/the-lra-conflict-beyond-the-lra-lobby-the-hunt-for-kony-and-towards-civilian-protection-by-kristof-titeca/>.
117. Koen Vlassenroot, "Regional Tendencies, Governance in a Non Government Zone and Options," speech given at Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, October 3, 2013.
118. See Fisher, "Framing Kony," 695–96.
119. Ibid.
120. Beatrice Le Fraper Du Hellen; Christiane Amanpour, "Seeking Global Justice, Transcripts," *CNN Transcripts*, March 25, 2010, accessed August 29, 2014, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1003/24/ampr.01.html>.
121. In an interview with the legal advisor to the President of the ICC, it was confirmed that the ICC supported the Prosecutors participation in the campaign and viewed it as a great success. Personal interview with Hiram Abtahi (ICC), The Hague, the Netherlands, June 12, 2013.
122. Personal interview with confidential source (Directorate of Public Prosecution in Uganda), Utrecht, the Netherlands, August 29, 2013.

123. Jonathan Fisher, "Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012): 10–19.
124. Fisher, "Managing Donor Perceptions," 7; International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 4.
125. In December 2005, the International Court of Justice found the Ugandan state guilty of killing and torturing civilians, destroying villages and plundering natural resources during its five-year occupation of North-Eastern DRC, between 1996 and 2001. Reparations for violating its sovereignty have still not been paid. See "Case Concerning Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo v. Uganda," judgment, December 19, 2005.
126. Titeca and Costeur, "An LRA for Everyone," 14; International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 6–8.
127. A similar process happened in CAR, where the government first welcomed the Ugandan military to engage in counter-LRA operations. But it increasingly fears that the Ugandan military is profiting from their natural wealth and Bangui has repeatedly ordered for limited Ugandan engagement. See International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 8.
128. Personal interview with Kristof Titeca (University of Antwerpen and Ghent), Utrecht, the Netherlands, May 5, 2013. See also International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 11–13.
129. Fisher, "Framing Kony," 693. Various representatives from the AU, IC, the UN, and EU also reiterated this sentiment during the conference "The Lord's Resistance Army Conflict: Where State Security and Human Security Meet," Brussels, Belgium, October 2, 2013.
130. This budget is provided for through the LRA Disarmament and Northern Ugandan Recovery Act. In principle, this is paid to contractors, but in reality, as regional specialist Kristof Titeca explained, the UPDF makes a list of goods it needs and this is given to military contractors. Personal interview with Kristof Titeca (University of Antwerpen and Ghent), Utrecht, the Netherlands, May 5, 2013.
131. Andrew Mwenda, "Uganda's Politics of Foreign Aid and Violent Conflict: The Political Uses of the LRA Rebellion," in *The Lord's Resistance Army. Myth and Reality*, ed. Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London, UK: Zed Books, 2010), 45–58, 54. See also International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 4.
132. Personal interview with Joost Pruijenbroek (IKV Pax Christi), Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 10, 2013. This opinion was repeated in a number of interviews. Personal interview with Frederick de Vlaming (Amnesty International), Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 24, 2013; Personal interview with Hiram Abtahi (legal advisor to the President of the ICC), The Hague, the Netherlands, June 12, 2013; Personal interview with Robert Bodegraven (War Child), Amsterdam, the Netherlands, June 10, 2013.
133. Milton Allimadi, "Kony 2012: Ugandans Criticize Popular Video for Backing U.S. Military Intervention in Central Africa," *Democracy Now*, April 18, 2012, accessed April 9, 2014, http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/18/kony_2012_ugandans_criticize_popular_video.
134. See Nicolas van de Walle, "US Policy towards Africa: The Bush Legacy and the Obama Administration," *African Affairs* 109, no. 434 (2009): 8; David M. Anderson and Adrienne J. Browne, "The Politics of Oil in Eastern Africa," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 370.
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136. Thabo Mbeki, "Is Africa There for the Taking?" *New African*, London, UK, March 2012, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://newafricanmagazine.com/is-africa-there-for-the-taking/>.
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141. Maximilian C. Forte, "Libyan Pan Africanism and Its Discontents," in *Slouching Towards Sirte. NATO's War on Libya and Africa*, ed. Maximilian C. Forte (Montreal, Canada: Baraka Books, 2012), 137–85, 172.
142. Demmers, "Theorizing the Politics of Judgement," 434.
143. Branch, "Dangerous Ignorance," *Al Jazeera*, March 12, 2012, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/201231284336601364.html>.
144. Personal interview with Kristof Titeca (University of Antwerpen and Ghent), Utrecht, the Netherlands, May 5 2013. See also International Crisis Group, "The Lord's Resistance Army," 12.
145. David Keen, *Complex Emergencies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008).

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