



When the Walking Defeats You: One Man's Journey as Joseph Kony's Bodyguard

By Ledio Cakaj

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The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a cultish Christian rebel group operating in Uganda and in other parts of Eastern and Central Africa, has been accused of widespread human rights violations for decades. It has been reviled for its use of child soldiers and sexual slavery, as well as for waging a long campaign of violence and terror across a large swathe of the region. Educated and harboring humanitarian dreams of becoming a teacher, George Omona would thus seem an unlikely recruit for the LRA. And yet, after he was expelled from high school, Omona was caught by the charismatic pull of the LRA's messianic leader, Joseph Kony, and he came to think that joining the group might be his best chance for rebuilding his life. *When the Walking Defeats You* is his unlikely and powerful story.

Drawing on hours of interviews with Omona, Ledio Cakaj here offers a rare and fascinating insider account of one of the world's most notorious terrorist groups. As Cakaj describes, Omona's education and fluent command of English allowed him to rapidly rise through the ranks and eventually become a personal bodyguard to Kony himself. At Kony's side, Omona spent almost three years with the group before finally making his escape, and his personal account of those years provides unique, unsettling, and often brutal insight into the inner workings of the LRA as well as the mind of its self-appointed prophet.

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Editorial Review

Review

"When the Walking Defeats You is that rare achievement: an account of a rebel movement as seen from the inside. Cakaj's meticulously researched account takes the reader into the heart of one of Africa's most feared organizations, capturing the mundane brutality of life in the LRA."

(Michela Wrong, author of *Borderlines* and *It's Our Turn to Eat*)

"Cakaj renders interview subject George Omona's story of joining the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda with a somber and assured tone. . . . The book captures the fierceness of infighting within the group and the powerful hold exerted on it by founder Joseph Kony."

(*Publishers Weekly*)

"When the Walking Defeats You is that rare achievement: an account of a rebel movement as seen from the inside. Cakaj's meticulously researched account takes the reader into the heart of one of Africa's most feared organizations, capturing the mundane brutality of life in the LRA."

(Michela Wrong, author of *Borderlines* and *It's Our Turn to Eat*)

"What makes this book exceptional are the sections voiced by 'George' (names are changed). Cakaj's real-life protagonist spent three years in the bush with the LRA, much of it serving as Kony's own bodyguard. He is a doubly useful informant, at once an insider and an outsider, unlike his fellow fighters, he was an educated young townie who joined voluntarily, not a peasant-child from a rural Acholi village, abducted at gunpoint and then forced to kill. . . . George's unflinching narrative of his experiences—including the murder of unarmed civilians—reads like a particularly dark crime procedural: an account of how to stay alive, and even find a measure of belonging, at the heart of a paranoid self-propelled death cult."

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

"A heartbreaking story, unmasking the everyday complexities of a most gruesome and sorrowing war. Absolutely remarkable!"

(Sverker Finnström, author of *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*)

"As I read this book, I read my own experiences and what I went through. It is a story that all people should know about: how men, women, and children suffer and survive conflict."

(Evelyn Amony, former LRA captive and author of *I am Evelyn Amony*)

"A remarkable first-hand account of life in the LRA, providing a compelling and convincing perspective on what it was like to be a combatant."

(Tim Allen, co-editor of *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*)

"This is a unique and compelling account that effectively intertwines the biographical account of George Omona (fictional name)—a young man who voluntarily joined and fought for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Eastern Congo between 2007 and 2010 before

escaping—with the wider narrative of an ongoing conflict. . . . An important addition to the literature on the LRA and rebel groups more broadly.”

(LSE Review of Books)

“Cakaj skillfully takes the reader inside the harrowing world of the LRA. Interspersed with stunning photography and reflections of persons who survived LRA attacks, a multi-layered story comes to life, further unfolding the complexities of such a devastating war.”

(Erin Baines, University of British Columbia)

“A deep and intimate portrait of the daily life of a child soldier. His book deserves to take its place next to books like Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone* and Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* in the sad catalog of stories about children at war.”

(Andrew Rice, author of *The Teeth May Smile but the Heart Does Not Forget*)

“Gripping and gleaming with insight. Cakaj leads the reader into the very heart of one of Africa’s least-understood but most enduring rebel movements.”

(Matthew Green, author of *The Wizard of the Nile*)

“A gripping portrayal of a rebel fighter’s harrowing journey in central Africa. Without pulling punches, Cakaj provides a human face to the notorious but often caricatured Lord’s Resistance Army. An insightful tour-de-force by an author whose deep knowledge about this group shines through on almost every page.”

(Ronald R. Atkinson, author of *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*)

“Of all the books written about the LRA, this is the one that the politicians and diplomats should be reading. Cakaj puts us in the boots of the kids, pawns that nobody on the world stage can be bothered to save, left walking to this day.”

(Jane Bussmann, author of *The Worst Date Ever, or how it took a Comedy Writer to Expose Africa’s Secret War*)

“Brilliantly weaves the dramatic and often horrifying experience of one man into a gripping story of two decades of the LRA war. A product of vast knowledge of the conflict, *When the Walking Defeats You* is sure to become a classic in the literature on conflict in Africa.”

(Adam Branch, author of *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*)

About the Author

Ledio Cakaj is an independent researcher who has worked for more than a decade in the Balkans and East and Central Africa and has spent many years studying the Lord’s Resistance Army for organizations including the World Bank, the Enough Project, Small Arms Survey, and Resolve.

Users Review

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Peter Hudson:

The book *When the Walking Defeats You: One Man's Journey as Joseph Kony's Bodyguard* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Why must we leave a good thing like a book *When*

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