Scapegoats for social harmony.

The challenges of reintegrating former abducted girls in Northern Uganda.

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Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Tronsen Booth
Abstract

After more than two decades of an immensely cruel war the Acholi people of Northern Uganda is now trying to save ‘the bits and pieces’ of their society. There is a vast need for rebuild and repair of basically all social structures. Among the most challenging and painful, is the need to repair the human bonds and to reintegrate the former abducted girls from the The Lord’s Resistance Army. This thesis seeks to understand the reconciliation that takes place and tries to illuminate some of the challenges the returned girls as well as the receiving society are facing. My field work shows that they are perceived as hindrance for revitalizing a positive Acholi identity. How and why are the returned girls stigmatized and rejected? Together with their ‘bush born’ children, they are associated with the dangers that threaten society. These girls symbolize the war experience and negative aspects of life, and the problems of restoring social harmony that is so desperately needed in Acholiland. With their bush experience and fragile belonging, these girls are the most socially expendable and serves as scapegoats. They are accused of being possessed by the evil spirits of cen that bring misfortune to the whole Acholi society. Therefore, the girls need to be purified. But the effect of purification doesn’t last, and the scapegoating continues. The thesis explores why this is happening. As the Acholi people is far from a homogeneous religious group with a shared belief and meaning system, I look into the various meanings of cen.
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth

Source: Allen and Schomerus (2006), originally obtained from UN OCHA
**Acholi dictionary**

ajwaka - pl. ajwaki – Acholi traditional spirit medium
ayweya – ancestor spirits of the first settlers, also a term for misfortune caused by these spirits
carolok - proverbs
cen – revengeful evil spirits
chilo - dirt
culu kwor - compensation
ga marac - ‘bad things’
’gang’ or ’shuli‘ - early term for Acholi people
jok - pl. jogi - spirit
kac - is a shrine for animals killed through hunt
kaka - clan, lineage, relative
kal – aristocratic lineage
kiir – an abomination of the moral order causing serious misfortune
kulu – the river dwelling of a jok - considered wild and dangerous
lapi – ‘a just cause’
lakwena – messenger
loar - messenger
lum – literally ‘grass’ but also used for ‘the bush’
lwoko pig wang – traditional cleansing ritual (Washing away tears)
mato oput - traditional reconciliation ritual (Drinking the bitter root)
moo ya - shea nut oil
moyo kum - traditional cleansing ritual – (cleansing the body)
nebi – a Christian spirit medium
nyono ton gweno – traditional cleansing ritual (Stepping on eggs)
ododo - folk tales
rwot kalam - pl. rwodi kalam – chief ‘of the pen’, appointed by colonial government
rwot mo - pl. rwodi moo – anointed chief of lineage - traditional chief
tim – bush - uninhabited forest, bush is also used for the location of LRA
ting ting – young girls in LRA – housekeepers and babysitters and ‘wives to be’
tipu – ancestor spirits
tum - sacrifice
tumu kiir - a sacrifice to appease the gods for the kiir - abomination that has occurred.
wang oo – traditional family camp fire – the family Hearth
Acronyms

HSMF - Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (Alice Lakwena)
LRA – Lord’s Resistance Army (Joseph Kony)
NRA/M - National Resistance Army/Movement (Yoweri K. Museveni)
UNLA - Uganda National Liberation Army – (Milton Obote)
UPDA - Uganda People’s Defense Army (Odong Latek)
UPDF - Uganda People’s Defense Force – (Yoweri K. Museveni)

Declaration

I certify that the thesis is solely my own work except from where I have clearly and directly referred to the work of others. I take full responsibility for all statements and suggestions, translations and reiteration of written texts as well as translation of oral material. The Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written agreement.

Acknowledgement

I ought to thank quite a few people for the help to complete this study. First of all, I will address my gratitude to every single person in Northern Uganda – that during field work, both in 2004 and in 2016, was willing to share their knowledge and put up with all my questions. I would like to address a special thanks to all the returned girls from the LRA. I know that we are many researchers, students and journalists that visit the area and ask intimate personal questions to collect information from what we consider the war effected population in Northern Uganda. And then we leave. I know that many of you wondering about what is happening to your story. And I will like to take the opportunity to say that I really do believe that the more knowledge there is on a subject the bigger chance there is to could make a change. With knowledge I mean insight to lived life that is only to be found through individuals first hand experiences. Some of these voices are too often silenced or ignored – these voices often belong to women, children and other vulnerable groups of society. Again, my greatest gratitude goes to all my interlocutors in Northern Uganda, that includes women and men that have returned from the captivity of the LRA, receiving communities and
families, clan Chiefs, household elders, religious leaders, staff and leadership of humanitarian organizations working with post-conflict issues and more.

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# TABLE FOR CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................. 3
Acholi dictionary ............................................................................................................................... 6
Acronyms .......................................................................................................................................... 7
Declaration ....................................................................................................................................... 7
Acknowledgement ............................................................................................................................ 7

**PART I** ........................................................................................................................................ 9

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 13
  1.1 Topic and research questions ................................................................................................. 13
  1.2 The structure of this thesis ..................................................................................................... 14
  1.3 Disputes about stigmatization ............................................................................................... 16

## 2.0 THE RECENT CONFLICT IN NORTHER UGANDA .......................................................... 19
  2.1 An introduction to the recent conflict .................................................................................... 19
  2.2 The former abducted girls from LRA and the receiving community .................................... 21

## 3.0 ABOUT FIELDWORK, LITERATURE AND THEORY .................................................. 25
  3.1 Fieldwork in Northern Uganda autumn 2016 ....................................................................... 25
  3.2 Literature on conflict and post-conflict in Acholiland ......................................................... 27
  3.3 Literature on Acholi tradition and religion ............................................................................ 27
  3.4 Theory .................................................................................................................................. 28

## 4.0 POLITICAL HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF ACHOLI IDENTITY .............. 31
  4.1 A clarification of the term Acholi ........................................................................................... 31
  4.2 The farming Bantu and the nomadic Nilotes ......................................................................... 32
  4.3 The British colonists ............................................................................................................. 33
  4.4 The ‘warlike’ Acholi .............................................................................................................. 34
  4.5 The influence of the Churches ............................................................................................... 34
  4.6 The ‘chiefs of the pen’ and new religious specialists ............................................................ 35

## 5.0 TIME OF INDEPENDENCE AND ETHNIC BATTLES FOR POWER ................ 37
  5.1 Independence and struggle for state power ............................................................................ 37
  5.2 Obote’s Acholi frontline ........................................................................................................ 38
  5.3 Retaliation for "the skulls of Luwero" ..................................................................................... 39
  5.4 Several attempts to purify the Acholi ..................................................................................... 40

## 6.0 ACHOLI COSMOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY .................................. 43
  6.1 The chiefs and religious leaders ............................................................................................. 44
  6.2 The council of elders and the jogi ......................................................................................... 45
  6.3 The translator and interpreter ............................................................................................... 46
  6.4 The concept of Jok and the various jogi ............................................................................... 47
  6.5 The spirit mediums .............................................................................................................. 50
  6.6 Spiritual punishment and pollution ...................................................................................... 51

## 7.0 TRADITIONAL BELIEF AMONG A YOUNG GENERATION OF ACHOLI ................ 57
  7.1 War, childhood and exposure to traditional belief ................................................................. 57
  7.2 Age, time and circumstances ............................................................................................... 58
  7.3 The camps and an eroding culture ....................................................................................... 59
  7.4 The Wang oo ....................................................................................................................... 61
  7.5 More Acholi voices .............................................................................................................. 62
8.0 THE SPIRITS AND THE PROPHET IN THE LRA .............................................. 63

8.1 Religious motivation or pure functionalism ................................................. 63
8.2 Joseph Kony’s philosophy of victimhood .................................................... 64
8.3 An all-encompassing spiritual order ............................................................. 66
8.4 The new pure Acholi identity .................................................................. 68
8.5 The impurity of the Churches ....................................................................... 69
8.6 The spirits leave Kony ................................................................................. 70
8.7 A syncretic belief system from ‘the bush’ .................................................... 72

9.0 REINTEGRATION AND RELIGIOUS RITUALS ........................................... 75

9.1 Purification and reconciliation rituals .......................................................... 75
9.2 The ritual’s instrumental means .................................................................. 77
9.3 The ritual’s efficiency ................................................................................. 78

PART II ............................................................................................................. 79

10.0 ETHNIC IDENTITY AS A PROCESS .......................................................... 81

10.1 A brief summary ....................................................................................... 81
10.2 Ethnic identity as a process ....................................................................... 83
10.3 A non ‘tribal’ ethnic identity ....................................................................... 85
10.4 Shared identity in contrast to the non-Acholi ............................................. 86

11.0 PURIFICATION OF IDENTITY FROM WITHIN .......................................... 87

11.1 Projection and ‘Othering’ ......................................................................... 87
11.2 The Scapegoat .......................................................................................... 90
11.3 Scapegoats in times of social crises .......................................................... 92
11.4 The expendables ....................................................................................... 93
11.5 Women as the gates and the guards for pollution ..................................... 95
11.6 Dirt a matter out of place .......................................................................... 97

12.0 MEANING AND BELONGING ................................................................. 99

12.1 Shared system of meaning and order ......................................................... 99
12.2 Theodicy and anomie .............................................................................. 101
12.3 Good versus Evil ...................................................................................... 102
12.4 Shared religious experiences .................................................................... 103
12.5 Final words .............................................................................................. 105

References ...................................................................................................... 107

Appendix ......................................................................................................... 115

End Notes ....................................................................................................... 117
PART I
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Aftermath of war is always a critical time for a society. The Aftermath of a civil war is even more difficult with pressing need of restoring social harmony and to heal social bonds. Acholiland in Northern Uganda is even harder contested. On top of everything else, they need to find a way to reintegrate former child soldiers and abducted girls that have committed terrible atrocities on their own people and closest family. In my master thesis in the study of religion, I have decided to write about the return and reintegration of abducted girls from the rebel force known as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in post-conflict Northern Uganda.

1.1 Topic and research questions

The focus will be on how the Acholi society is dealing with the returned ‘rebel’ girls and the social stigmatization that these girls are facing. To try to reach a deeper understanding of how and why the girls are stigmatized I will examine and try to understand the social reactions to the returning girls. More precisely, I will study how religion influences behavior, opinion and treatment of the returning girls, and also look at how religion affects the girls’ self-perception. There is particularly one aspect of traditional cosmology that often appeared in conversations I had during my field work, and that is cen - evil revengeful spirits. Since the term occurred in conversations with - as well as about - former abducted girls, – I believe that it will shed light on this subject. Cen is the term used for designating the spirit of a dead person seeking revenge for a wrongful death. The returning girls and their children are often accused of being possessed by or carriers of, cen by the local population. Cen is considered extremely evil and dangerous, and can cause illness, infertility, misfortune and even death in the possessed girls family and clan. In Acholiland there are believed to be plenty of cen as there are innumerable wrongful deaths after decades of brutal war.

Cen and the possession of cen will be an important part of this study. But the Acholi are not necessarily a homogeneous group of people. Books and articles often refer to a generalized ‘Acholi belief’ – but I will suggest that religious and cosmological beliefs among the Acholi vary, often depending on access to religious and traditional knowledge. Young Acholi with childhood memories from years living under terrible conditions in internal refugee camps, lack the basic traditional knowledge of Acholi cosmology and ancestral cult. Their Acholi identity is instead built on their shared experience from the refugee camps.
together with remnants of old Acholi traditions. Likewise, many of the returning girls have spent their adolescence in LRA camps and lack knowledge of their traditional Acholi roots. Ancestral worship, for example, was not accepted within the LRA. Joseph Kony, the Acholi rebel leader of this insurgent group - and self-proclaimed Christian prophet - laid strict frames for worship. The official belief system within LRA can be described as a form of syncretism between Catholicism, Anglican Charismatic/Born Again Christianity and traditional Acholi spirituality. This syncretistic system of belief and practice was the fruit of Kony’s own interpretation and self-composed spirituality, that also included elements from Islam. Like a returned girl said to me; in the bush we sang like Born Again, we prayed on our knees like Muslims, we used the cross as Catholics and we used shea butter oil as in traditional rituals.¹

My study indicates that cen accusations are frequently used in connection with the former abducted LRA girls. Thus, cen and being possessed by cen will be central to this study. I ask: is the accusation of cen possession serious? Do the Acholi people believe in cen today? Is the accusation of cen based on fear or an empty tradition? Why are the former abducted girls special targeted?

To answer these question there is a need for knowledge about Acholi political history and the creation of Acholi identity. I believe that it is vital to understand the process of revitalization of Acholi identity and the rejection of the returned girls. I believe the rejection and the stigmatizing of the returned girls can be seen as a process of purification – that often leads to projection and scapegoating.

1.2 The structure of this thesis

When writing about the trauma of war and their attempts to rebuild their society and their cultural identity, it is easy to become fascinated with Acholi history. The history of the Acholi can be divided into distinct periods (precolonial, colonial, after independence, during the LRA war and in post-conflict time) corresponding to important changes in the religious and cultural environment. And each era adds to the creation of Acholi identity. But my thesis is not historical, but I try to understand the Acholi’s post-war drama by seeing my interlocutors in a historical light.

The thesis starts with an introduction to the recent war and the current situation in post-conflict Acholiland. This chapter also includes a presentation of the returned girls as well as the receiving local community² (ch.2). This introduction will hopefully explain the need for this study. I use the term ‘returned girl’ to refer to the former abducted or recruited girls who
have returned from the ‘bush’ and the LRA, and who now wish to be reintegrated into the local community of families and clans. The term girls will also be used extensively in combination with returnee. This refers to the returned girls who are basically women today.

The presentation of Acholiland and the former abducted girls will be followed up by an introduction to my fieldwork in Northern Uganda autumn 2016 as well as to used literature and theory. (ch.3)

Then the British colonial time will be highlighted with political and Christian influence and their split and rule strategies that started all the subsequent conflicts in Uganda (ch.4). I will show how the British stereotypization of the Acholi has created a foundation for further discrimination as well as a negative self-perception. This is evident in the history after independence and in the struggles for state power (ch.5). In this chapter I will also illuminate rebellion with a religious approach attempts to purify the Acholi people. What we see today is not a rebellion, but there are purification processes going on, which can also be seen as a revitalization of Acholi identity, pride and dignity.

In chapter 6 I will give an account for pre-colonial Acholi traditions, political structures and religious environment (ch.6). Then I will explore traditional belief among young people who were not abducted (ch.7). What do young people believe today – or rather, what do they not believe? With the aim to try to find out what religious and moral ideas, norms and values the returning girls meet on their return. Acholi life experiences today, depends very much on age – as life has changed dramatically during the last 30 years. Many have spent half to most of their life in displacement camps with little traditional influence, others with the LRA where Acholi tradition has been rather suppressed and even condemned. Thus, the exposure to the former traditional belief and meaning system varies. And to add the fact that the average age of the Acholi population is only 14 years old.3

I will continue with an exploration of the spiritual environment of the LRA (ch.8). This is not an easy task, as firsthand information is scares and uncertain. This will at its best be a reconstruction and a suggestion based on interviews with returned LRA members, both with my own interlocutors as well as other scholars.

When the former abducted girls return back home, there is a series of purification and reconciliation rituals required for them to participate in. These rituals will be explained as well as the rituals instrumental means will be explored. (ch.9) My aim is to try to understand how Acholi people experience these rituals differently according to their personal war experiences and pre-exposure to traditional belief.
Then in the last chapter I will look at the accumulated knowledge from a theoretical perspective (ch.10). Here I will investigate how a violent history of suppression, marginalization and discrimination, wars and revanchism, has negatively influenced the Acholi both ascribed and self-ascribed identity. Further I will look into how a present process of revitalization of Acholi identify and restoration of social harmony have influenced the reintegration of the former abducted girls into the Acholi society. This will hopefully give some answers to my research questions.

1.3 Disputes about stigmatization

Many scholarly reports show that LRA returnees are facing challenges, and returned girls seem to have more difficulties than returned boys. As for example gender scientists Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay reported in 2003; “returnee girls are often stigmatized and threatened when they attempt to reintegrate”. A field research Dyan Mazurana did together with Kristopher Carlson shows that 64 percent of the interview returned girls reported stigma, 41 percent reported being physically threatened, and 10 percent reported being physically attacked and beaten. Mothers with children born in captivity were reported to face the most challenges on return, including “high levels of rejection by former husbands, families, extended families, and communities, and high levels of stigma, threat, and abuse to themselves and their children.” To minimize stigma, abuse, and potential re-abduction, the returned girls with their children tended to choose to live by themselves in new communities or urban centers within the northern part of Uganda.

However, a report from 2009, written by several influential scholars and policy makers, suggests that the stigmatization of returned girls from LRA are exaggerated, that these girls are too often reduced to passive victims without agency: “Women and girls are neither passive victims nor regular fighters, but something in between. They are sexually abused, but almost exclusively within the confines of a ‘forced marriage’ to a rebel commander. Meanwhile, rape of civilians outside of these forced relationships is rare.” I believe that this assessment is correct. The report also states that “in contrast to conventional beliefs, we find that only a minority of females exhibit serious psychosocial reintegration difficulties, whether psychological distress or persistent community and family rejection.” This is something I want to investigate further with a bit different approach. Based on my field work in the autumn of 2016, I will argue that former abducted girls in particular, are exposed to severe stigmatization on their return. And this is exactly because they are seen as
something more than passive victims. In my view it is this additional agency which creates a substantive challenge in the reintegration process.

Reintegration of former LRA girls is part of the much larger process of restoring Acholi unison and social harmony. This process relies on the revitalization of Acholi ethnic identity, which has suffered for decades. I will suggest that the returning girls are seen as an impediment to this post-conflict rebuilding and reparation process. These girls are difficult to reintegrate, they are considered uneasy to handle, and they and their children, are also an economic burden. In other words, they are an anomaly and a threat to a peaceful way forward. But even more important, I will claim that these girls and their children are socially excluded because they serve as symbols of ‘Acholi violence’. To purify Acholi society, the girls and their ‘bush’ children are social expendable and easily targeted as scapegoats and effectively excluded from the community. In the following pages I will try to illustrate my point with the reference to the accusation of the spiritual pollution of cen, and I will suggest that cen possession is used as a reason to exclude the girls from the ongoing revitalization process of Acholi identity. As agents of cen they must be rejected at this crucial and urgent moment in the attempt to restore social harmony. It’s about collective survival.
2.0 THE RECENT CONFLICT IN NORTHER UGANDA

In order to get a better understanding for the need of this study, I will give an introduction to the latest conflict, its actors and its victims, which is not necessary a straight forward story. The aim is to create a back drop to better understand the situation for the former abducted girls as well as shed light on the post-conflict social and political context. Post-conflict Acholiland is in great need of social stability and social repair on all levels. This is important to take into consideration when analyzing the returned LRA girls and understand the reasons why they are stigmatized.

2.1 An introduction to the recent conflict

Acholiland in Northern Uganda – a post-conflict society which is currently in a process of reparation and reconciliation after decades of war – is the local context of this thesis. Acholi society is more or less devastated after half a century of warfare preceded by more than half a century under British colonial rule. Internal military conflicts over state power, especially between southern and northern tribes of Uganda, have characterized the country since the liberation in 1962. Every president from Milton Obote, via Idi Amin and Tito Okello to Yoweri K. Museveni have all seized power as rebel leaders and through a ‘coup d'état’. Even though the last president has received international endorsement in form of the ‘African success story’ for his efficiency in fighting HIV/AIDS and poverty, he rules the country by military power like his predecessors. The country is characterized by missing or weak democratic processes in a political environment of ethnic revanchism, violence and armed solutions. The opposition forces that emerged after Museveni’s rise to power, like the Holy Spirits Mobile Forces led by Alice Auma Lakwena and the Lord’s Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony, are no exceptions to the rule of violence. The LRA and the HSMF have a religious approach to the situation, and Joseph Kony says that his aim is to rule Uganda after the Bibles ‘Ten Commandments’. However, the LRA has lifted brutality to new heights. The last war between the LRA and the Museveni government has caused tremendous damage to the Acholi society and left wounds that are hard to heal. It is a grim history of atrocities, massacres, mutilations, rapes, abductions, child soldiers and displacement. Atrocities have been committed by both the LRA and the Government Army, the Uganda People Defense Force (UPDF). But again, the LRA is especially notorious for extremely violent behavior.
What makes the LRA conflict particularly complex is that this rebel force has made their own people – the Acholi, their main targets. Between 30,000 to 60,000 children and youth have been abducted into the ranks of the LRA where they served as soldiers, porters and soldier ‘wives’.

Between 1996 and 2002, 1.8 million – about 90% of the Acholi population, was moved – and in the end forced, into so called ‘protected camps’ by Uganda’s government. The displacement had hugely damaging consequences for the Acholi society in all respects: death rates reached up to 1000 people per week due to illnesses like Cholera, Ebola, HIV/AIDS – as well as domestic violence, alcohol abuse and struggles with the government army, and UPDF soldiers are accused of extensive sexual abuse and rape, even kidnappings, of local girls. The government forces also failed to protect the camp dwellers from attacks by the LRA. The displacement was also an economical disaster for the Acholi. Threats and curfews made it difficult to farm their land and created an unfortunate culture of dependence on outside help. Additionally, families were separated in the camps. This affected traditional family structures and generational interactions. Due to curfews and separations of families, the traditionally important camp fire – the wang oo, where the elderly generation educated the young about life, values, norms, traditions and religious belief has been seriously weakened or vanished altogether. In the absence of traditional authority structures Acholi elders and clan chiefs lost their positions and respect. Traditional leadership turned unclear and vague as social structures basically crumbled.

The LRA is still in operation today, but no longer in Uganda - and hasn’t been for the last 10 years. There is no reliable information about exactly how many rebels are left in ‘the bush’, but there was in 2015 estimated about 200 combatants. The conflict has moved across the border to Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan, but for the Acholi in Northern Uganda the wounds - both physically and mentally, individually and collectively, still persist. Many abducted children are still missing. The war is over but now the Acholi are facing the enormous challenge of rebuilding and repair of basically everything, including family and clan structures and social harmony. The children that are returning from captivity are a source of happiness, but also a source of deep concern.

The discourse on justice is prominent in post-conflict Acholiland. There is basically two opposing views, both deeply rooted in two radically different ethical values of forgiveness versus retribution. The discourse involves a wide range of actors, from Christian churches, to traditional cultural leaders. In addition, there are many national and international
humanitarian organizations promoting forgiveness through church sermonizes and traditional Acholi rituals, while justice through legal procedures is recommended by the International Criminal Court and other international humanitarian agencies. The situation is particularly complex as it is often hard to distinguish between perpetrators and victims - as very many are both. Thus, the reintegration process of returned young people from the LRA is a vast challenge. The returnees are often both feared and rejected. And it seems that returned girls are facing more difficulties than the returned boys. It’s also a question of about what’s most important, individual needs – and rights, or collective harmony.

The Acholi society is terrible injured, and there is an urgent need for finding a way to simultaneously restore social harmony and Acholi collective identity and at the same time provide care for victims of the war on an individual basis.

2.2 The former abducted girls from LRA and the receiving community

Out of the estimated number of abducted children in LRA, about 25% were girls. Average age at abduction was between 9 to 15. Most often these girls were used as ‘commanders’ wives’ – forced into sexual slavery and motherhood. LRA had a preference for young unexperienced girls since they most likely were virgins and free of sexually transmitted diseases. Educated girls were also a preference, as they could be used in intelligence work. Girls also received weapons training and some participated in combats, and many girls were forced to kill and participate in violent acts, not only in combat. Forcing them to commit atrocities was used as a strategy to bring fear and assure loyalty to the group. They could for example be forced to kill a friend accused of breaking the rules or suspected to try. Or they could be ordered to kill a family or clan member to make sure they would be unable to flee because they had no safe place to return to.

There was also a hierarchy among the girls, within LRA. A commander could be awarded several wives and there were often a prevailing hierarchy among the co-wives. The first wives were often in charge, while other wives could be favored for one reason or another. Then there was the position of ting ting, that is young girls that belonged to the commanders as ‘wives to be’ as soon as they reach puberty. These girls were mostly housekeepers, babysitters and servants for the senior wives. In other words, in addition to a harsh and punitive social climate in general, there was also a female environment of rivalry and abuse. The LRA home bases – with wives and children, were always on the move, except for a few steady military bases over a longer period of time – as in Southern Sudan. These bases were
constantly in alert, always prepared to escape if an enemy should get to close or Kony predicted an attack from outside. Nevertheless, in spite of hard conditions and a violent environment, many returned girls have claimed that in some periods it felt like normal family life. Such statements don’t stick well with the receiving Acholi community. It makes them skeptical as it spread doubt about their victimhood. Several interlocutors from the receiving community shared complains with me. Some could seem a bit pathetic, as for instance when they complained that the returned girls have no skills in traditional housekeeping. ‘They can’t cook’ and ‘they can’t farm’. But these skills are important in Acholi tradition, and vital for a good wife. It’s a vast insult, but also a big concern. Through my conversations with returned girls I found that there is very likely a difference in gender roles between the bush and the local home. In the ‘bush’ there was little time for agriculture and long term planning. And since they always were on the move – often spontaneously, there was extensive co-operation between girls and boys that would help each other in building and breaking camp which also included many household duties.

Many scholarly articles and reports have written on the subject of stigmatization of former abducted girls and rightfully point out the stigma of sexuality. They describe how the girls are seen as sexual unworthy: they are considered as ‘used goods’ and therefore have difficulties in finding new life-partners. If they do enter a new relationship, they are often abused and revictimized as their new boyfriends have difficulties in handling their past. Surprisingly, among my interlocutors, both among returned and the receiving community, sexuality came up, but not as the prime stigma. The girls who return from the bush with children are stigmatized, but mostly I would say, because of their children. These children who were born in the ‘bush’ are seldom fully accepted, neither by their family or the clan.

Even though sexuality was a part of their stigma, the receivers seem to be more occupied with the returnee’s behavioral pattern, and told me that they were rude, ‘manlike’ and easily aggravated. As author Wojciech Jagielski notes; “Feeling rejected, unwanted, and unloved, the children from the bush quite often responded with anger and violence”. And some even complained that they were spoiled. Interlocutors; in contrast to the local girls, who lived in poverty in internal displaced camps – which have been named everything from concentration camps to ‘death camps’ - the returned LRA girls had received good clothes, good food and other assets that they gained from looting Acholi and Sudanese villages. Some villagers claimed that they had been better off than many local girls who were stuck in the camps where they too experienced abuse, rape and even abduction by the
Government forces. And as some local girls expressed: the LRA girls get attention on return, they’re given vocational training and are even receiving reward in form of a ‘start package’ from the Government Amnesty program or from humanitarian organizations. 23 ‘What are we getting?’, they complained. This makes a pretty complicated picture and it gets worse. One of my interlocutors said that “these returnees are the reason why we were trampled together in the camps and suffered so much these last twenty years”. 24

And perhaps more importantly, the returned girls are often blamed for being carriers of the evil and contaminating spirits of cen – especially through their ‘bush born’ children. The concept of cen has a major impact on the local population’s treatment of the girls. The solution is to perform traditional purification rituals that can appease the revengeful spirits of a wrongful death – at least for a while. But the ritual effect doesn’t seem to last in the long run - as many of the girls continues to be blamed after the rituals. And sometimes these rituals do more harm than good: the aim of the ritual is to release the girl from evil spirits, but simultaneously and unavoidably it will mark the girl as possessed by evil. There is for example the rituals that are performed by local ajwaki, 25 which often demand the the killing of an animal, often performed in excessively brutal ways – like stabbing or beating a goat to death. Sometimes these killings must be performed by the returnees themselves. Undeniably, many rituals are highly respected among many Acholi and also by outsiders as they seem sufficient means to promote social harmony. But to be accused of being possessed by evil spirits is a viscous stigma that doesn’t easily go away even after cleansing sermonizes. The young population in Acholiland has surprisingly little knowledge about in-depth Acholi spirituality and cosmology. The lack of knowledge is due to decades of war, displacement and disrupted social structures. And what good does a ritual cleansing do if more than half the population doesn’t really understand it or care about its religious meaning?

The problems of reintegrating the LRA girls are massive, and several local, national and international humanitarian organizations are involved. As mentioned above, a dominant discourse often led by various Christian Churches is about forgiveness. But this is a complex process for all parties, and not a simple procedure. Forgiveness presupposes regret, remorse, guilt, and repentance - and often involves at least some kind of confession and placement of guilt or shame. In other words; for the returned girls to ask for forgiveness also means that they admit that they are ‘guilty as charged’. This may be how the local community sees them, but seen from the international human rights’ perspective. These girls are victims of abduction, slavery and manipulation, and also of lack of protection by their own government.
On this background I will argue that the abducted LRA girls are facing a horrendous amount of challenges and mixed reactions on their return. Many returned girls are severely stigmatized and excluded by their family and the Acholi society. What this study tries to illuminate is why this stigmatization is taking place. Therefore, it is important to understand the world view and experiences of the receiving community. To briefly mention the Acholi’s position in the wider Ugandan context: The Acholi population has a long history of marginalization and oppression by outsiders. They have through decades been classified and stigmatized as unsophisticated, backwards and warlike. I will claim that the revitalization of Acholi identity is one of the most crucial processes that goes on to regain peace and social harmony – for the long run. And for the returned girls – unfortunately they have become a burden and a threat to this process of restoring positive Acholi values, norms and identity - to the restoration of Acholi pride and dignity. These girls are unfortunately everything an Acholi girl shouldn’t be. Thus, they have become the scapegoats and serve as instruments for the purification of Acholi society.
3.0 ABOUT FIELDWORK, LITERATURE AND THEORY

The aim of my project is to look closer at the former abducted girls from LRA in Northern Uganda, socially situated position with a focus on stigmatization. I will search the reasons for why these girls are stigmatized in form of accusations of being possessed by the evil spirits of *cen*. I will look at this in the context of a post-conflict environment where everything is about restoration of social harmony with living and dead and to restore Acholi dignity.

The research is based on two months’ fieldwork with interviews and participant observation in Northern Uganda in 2016, combined with a meta-study of relevant material presented in a large amount of interdisciplinary scholarly articles and reports on post-war Acholi society. Research and reports with special focus on traditional Acholi religion is kind of scares and far in between. Thus I will try to untangle some of the knowledge that researchers have been able to find, to accumulate and compare in order to create an image of traditional Acholi belief. Traditional knowledge is not easily accessed as it is a tradition vanishing in modern times as well as it faded during difficult years in displacement camps. Secondly; traditional knowledge is basically still an oral tradition where little has been written down. The living sources are becoming few and their knowledge needs to be translated. Though, the Acholi history is more documented than many of their neighbor ethnic groups. I will return to this.

Personally, I have my basis in gender and religious studies with social anthropology to support. In other words, with a gender and religious perspective I will try to understand if the accusation of *cen* possession is based on a genuine fear of these evil ghosts or an empty tradition.

3.1 Fieldwork in Northern Uganda autumn 2016

Autumn 2016 I visited Acholiland in Northern Uganda for two months collecting information through semi-structured in-depth interviews with individual interlocutors as well as group discussions and participant observation. Interlocutors were former abducted girls and women, mothers with children born in captivity, a few returned boys as well as returned former LRA commanders, members of the local Acholi population\textsuperscript{26} – both urban and rural, clan chiefs (rwodi), family elders, scholars, ajwaki and religious leaders – both traditional and Christians. Additionally, I interviewed and had many conversations with local and international
humanitarian organizations as well as a few Government offices.

Gulu is the biggest city in the Northern Uganda and became my base. I rented a house in a typical urban environment in order to get in touch with local people as well as the many humanitarian organizations that are located in this city. The contact with various NGOs was established both by e-mail before I left and during my stay. These contacts gave me the opportunity to visit both urban and rural areas within the districts that are known as Acholiland. I like to add that I have visited Northern Uganda previously in autumn 2004, when I was reporting on the conflict for Bistandsaktuelt, a magazine published by the Norwegian Agency of Development (NORAD) and for Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). These reports included stories of former abducted girls and boys from the rebel army LRA – in other words; the subject that I’m studying today. I’m also familiar with Uganda through work with Save the Children in 1995 and 1996. Anyhow, I noticed this time, that my previous visits gave me an advantage in the form of pre-knowledge, but it also made it easier to build trust – as I became one who is genuine interested and ‘someone who returns’.

English is Uganda’s official language, thus most speak English. But in the rural areas, in particular, there is an advantage to know Acholi, the local language. I was though, dependent on translators. Even though I felt confident with my translators, important knowledge and communication may very well be lost in translation and interpretation. Another weakness which should be mentioned is the limited amount of time I had for field work. There is a definitely need for a more comprehensive study as well as a wider and broader quantitative examination of general religious beliefs, practices and experiences among the Acholi population. That said – the material I gathered will be sufficient for the present study.

One advice that I received during my field work was especially valuable for my research. The leader of the Acholi Cultural Institution Ker Kal Kwaro, Ambrose Ohla, suggested for me that when I spoke with the traditional leaders, the rwodi – I should instead of asking them about religion ask them about traditional practice, norms and values. The term religion doesn’t necessary mean much to them, he explained. And that was crucial for this study – to learn more about religious practice, norms, values and cosmological belief in the context of a post-conflict situation where everything is about restoring moral codes, identity and social harmony.
3.2 Literature on conflict and post-conflict in Acholiland

There exists a lot of literature on the LRA and the war in Northern Uganda. Likewise, there is much literature on the post-conflict peace and reconciliation processes and former abducted LRA returnees, much of which will be used in this study.\(^{27}\) I will also look at literature on gender based violence in conflict or post-conflict. The term ‘social harmony’ for example, a central term in this paper, derives from Holly Porters impressive work on sexual gender based violence in post-conflict Acholi society.\(^{28}\) There are also several good in-depth reports produced by NGOs. Especially many NGO reports are focused on the justice debate around forgiveness or retribution of returned LRA-members - an area were scholars are divided. In fact, this is an area in precarious need of more knowledge about Acholi traditional cosmological views as it is an essential part of the reconciliation process of rituals and cleansing ceremonies.

3.3 Literature on Acholi tradition and religion

Again, when it comes to background literature on the conflict in Northern Uganda - there is plenty. To find written material on Acholi traditional religion – practice, norms, values and cosmology is more of a challenge.

Acholi traditional culture is very much based on oral traditions passed on around the *Wang oo*, the family campfire – the family hearth. But there are of course some written sources to be found, and some of these have been an important impact on this study and broadened my insight into Acholi tradition and cosmology. To briefly mention a few; social anthropologist Heike Behrend’s books and articles about Alice Lakwena and spirit possession in Northern Uganda\(^{29}\); social anthropologist Barbara Meier’s articles about rituals and spirits of the dead\(^{30}\); development anthropologist Tim Allen’s (et.al) books and many articles that often include religious knowledge\(^{31}\); political scientist Erin Baines has many articles and reports that shed light on religion\(^{32}\), Bård Mæland’s (et.al) book about religion and reintegration of former female child soldiers\(^{33}\); political scientist Kristof Titeca ‘s study on religion within the LRA\(^{34}\), Christina M. Mpyangu’s study on ritual and reintegration of former abducted girls\(^{35}\); and political scientist Paul Jackson’s articles about religious influence on the conflict and peace building in Acholiland should also be mentioned\(^{36}\).

Finally, I will emphasize that it is becoming urgent to collect traditional oral knowledge. The young generation of Acholi – who basically grew up under devastating
conditions in internal refugee camps – have little knowledge about their cultural tradition. To illustrate; the average age of the population in Acholiland is only 14 years old, according to a UNHCR report in 2010. This lack of traditional knowledge among the young instills a question about their capacity for dealing with traditional processes, rituals and handling of traditional justice – not because I doubt the value of these traditions, the question is will it be sufficient when more than half the population is not familiar with these traditions?

3.4 Theory

Like gender scientist Luce Irigaray states in her book *To speak is never neutral*, “Each scientific field seems to have its own vision of the world, its own goals, its own experimental protocols, its own techniques, its own syntax. Each appears isolated, cut off from all the others”. The present study is definitely a field of intersectionality. It is about religion, gender, politics, identity, modernity, authority and more, –and therefore brings in theory from various fields. Inspired and maybe encouraged by Irigaray I will use interdisciplinary theory developed within the field of religion, gender studies, social and cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology and politics to understand post-conflict reintegration challenges in Northern Uganda.

Analytical tools will be relevant theories on social, cultural and ritual values and practices. The theories will be introduced throughout the text, but I will list the most important ones here. The process of identity as laid out by the Norwegian social anthropologists Fredrik Barth, sociologist Stanley Cohen and psychologist Hélène Joffe; ritual purification as explained by social anthropologist and gender scientist Mary Douglas and gender scientists Phyllis Palmer, scapegoating theories by sociological philosopher Rene Gerard, philosopher Richard Kearney; psychoanalyst Sylvia Brinton Perera, and social anthropologist Tom Douglas; about being expandable by criminologist Ezzat A. Fattah as well as theories of meaning and belonging by sociologist Meredith B McGuire and Peter L. Berger.

The Acholi society has gone through immeasurable amounts of brutality the last 30 years and more, and there is an immense need to make sense of it all. There is a vast enterprise of reunification on a family-, community-, clan- and even on a national level.

The Acholi culture is based on traditional patriarchal structures where collective interests are more valued than individual needs and rights. Thus, a high priority in Acholi society is to restore social harmony – even if that sometimes will be at the expense of smaller
or marginalized groups or individuals with special needs.

Additionally, I will claim that there is an underlying urge among Acholi people to revitalize Acholi identity and dignity – this need is closely linked to the north-south ethnic conflict where Acholi’s frequently are blamed by the southerners for having cultivated the brutal elements of LRA themselves reasoned on the Acholi’s aggressive nature.

In other words, there are many post-conflict challenges that go beyond material needs. These challenges demand a different approach where knowledge of religion, norms, values and practices as well as an understanding of socially structures are essential.

As E.E. Evan-Pritchard stated about religious belief systems with magic and supernatural powers, it had to be understood within a social context and seen in its social function. Witchcraft and oracles played a great role in solving disputes among the Azande for example.\(^44\) This can be transpassed to the Acholi society where the social contexts and social functions cannot be understood without knowledge of religious belief. I look at religion and social environment as intertwined concepts which depend on each other.

For this study I hope that a contextualization in form of a ‘tick description’ as anthropologist Clifford Geertz\(^45\) describes it, will lead me to a better understanding of why a small vulnerable group as the former abducted girls from LRA are special targeted for social exclusion.

Theories of human scapegoating, blaming mechanisms, victimization of socially expendables and ritual cleansing will be of particular interest for this study. I have a hypothesis that the former abducted girls may be considered as- more or less – classical scapegoats. Not that they are excluded only on the background of being spiritually and sexual unclean because of having lived among the enemy, the LRA. They are also excluded for another reason, namely to restore Acholi identity and social harmony of the larger Acholi community. These girls are socially excluded and ‘sent away’ with all their shameful unspoken events that took place during the cruel war – because they are considered as ‘proof of Acholi cruelty’. These girls, and the ‘girl mothers’ in particular, serve as symbols of ‘Acholi violence’. The sad fact is that very many Acholi girls – outside LRA as well, have experienced violence, sexual abuse, rape and even kidnappings – both by LRA and UPDA soldiers as well as local boys and men.\(^46\) But these experiences are not to be talked about as it will devaluate them as women\(^47\) and reduce their chances for marriage. As for the returned girls, they represent the totally opposite of what a modest traditional, religious, Christian and good Acholi girl should be.
The Acholi as an ethnic group, is in a crucial stage of restoration –including restoration of an identity to be proud of. The former abducted girls don’t really fit the ideal of an Acholi woman. They are in fact an easy and obvious target for scapegoating. These girls have a fragile belonging; they have children fathered by criminals; they have blood on their hands; they have been sexually used and abused; they have behavioral and mental problems; they are an economic burden as they are not supported by a husband and most likely never will be and they claim family land for themselves and for their ‘bush born’ children… the list continues. An influential Acholi bishop said to me that these returned girls are ‘victims of circumstances’ that have got ‘their humanity’ destroyed in the bush. They will never fit in to the society again, but we can help them to survive. In other words, these returned girls are carrying the burden of the war on their shoulders and are an obvious burden for the post-conflict society. And they bring their children with them who also have needs and with time will demand their social rights.

With the theoretical tools listed above, I hope to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of stigmatization and exclusion of returned girls from the LRA and hope to contribute with some suggestions that will lead to a better social reintegration. In addition, I also hope some of my findings can be used in further studies on the subject.
4.0 POLITICAL HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF ACHOLI IDENTITY

In this chapter I will give a historical backdrop to explain how Acholi ethnic identity is created, formed and influenced by historical events. It builds upon a theory that ethnic identity is a dynamic process, ascribed and self-ascribed - a theory I will return to in a later chapter. There is a growing desire among the Acholi population to restore or rather revitalize their Acholi ethnic identity. This revitalization process, which is going on today has grave consequences for the former abducted girls and how they are received by the community on their return. Knowledge about Acholi identity processes will be valuable when I later try to understand why the girls are rejected and stigmatized.

Most conflicts take place between groups of differ in ethnicity, nationality, economics, politics or religion. This is the case for Northern Uganda. The Acholi people view themselves as a different ethnic group than southerners of Uganda as well as other northern groups - and vice versa. But for the Acholi the situation is even more complicated. The LRA, an Acholi insurgency group and an opponent to the southern Government of Museveni made their own people their main target. In other words, the Acholi people were in a limbo – as the Acholi identity still is today. This I will try to show.

In this chapter I will present part of the history that has influenced the formation of Acholi identity. I will show that tradition and religion together with marginalization and common opponents are very unifying elements in identity building. But ascribed identity is also vital for self-perception and can cause serious harm.

In this chapter I will present part of the history that has united the Acholi and influenced the forming of Acholi identity. I will show that tradition and religion together with marginalization and common opponents are very unifying elements in identity building – as well as the forming of a communitas. But ascribed identity is also vital for self-perception and can cause serious harm.

4.1 A clarification of the term Acholi

First I will clarify the term Acholi. Uganda in Eastern Africa is today considered to hold more or less 55 ethnic groups. Acholi in the northern part is the seventh largest group with approximately 1 145 000 people. There are different views among scholars about the legitimacy of the Acholi identity. Many scientists take distance from emphasizing ethnic
distinctions in Uganda, which they claim is a construction of the former British colonial powers.⁵⁰ I will present a condensed version of the discussion as it gives a good insight into identity in process.

According to social anthropologist Heike Behrend there was no Acholi ethnic identity in precolonial times. When the British divided the northern part of Uganda into districts, they created at the same time ethnic groups that never had existed before.⁵¹ Social anthropologist Tim Allen agrees that the term Acholi was a late-nineteenth century British introduction – and a term probably derived from the local word for black ‘chol’.⁵² The Acholi poet Okot p’Bitek in turn claims that the British invented the Acholi ‘tribe’ late in the 1920s.⁵³ Social scientist Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot agree that the term 'Acholi' did not exist before the colonial era. But Acholi is an ethnonym. They were earlier referred to as 'gangi' or 'shuli'.⁵⁴ Anthropologist Ronald R. Atkinson⁵⁵ traces Acholi identity back to 1860 a theory backed up by social anthropologist Sverker Finnström who claims that the colonists just named an already existing group with collective belonging to Acholiland.⁵⁶ And last, social scientists Lawrence Cline adds that even though there is a certain amount of truth to the British invention of the Acholi term, it doesn’t prevent the Acholi people to see themselves as an ethnic group in modern times.⁵⁷

With this background – additionally supported by ethnicity and identity theory claiming that ethnicity is dynamic, strategic and situational,⁵⁸ I will say that since the Acholi today see themselves as an ethnic group and since they are also recognized by other Ugandan ethnic groups, Acholi is a legitimate term to use for their ethnic identity.

4.2 The farming Bantu and the nomadic Nilotes

The Acholi people is considered to be descendants of Nilotic semi-nomads⁵⁹ entering the Kingdom of Buganda during a comprehensive migrations starting about 2000 years ago.⁶⁰ Buganda became populated by 70% ethnic Bantu who originally came from west Africa, and 25% ethnic Nilotes from the northern part of the continent. The Bantu settled mostly in the southern part of the Kingdom while the Nilotes settled mainly in the north. The Bantus were mostly farmers and artisans while the Nilotes were mainly semi-nomadic pastoral farmers. The northern part was dominated by Nilotic clan structures in contrast to the state formations of the Bantu in the south. The Bantu formed the first political structures with centralized power.⁶¹
There are many ethnic groups in the north, which can basically be separated into two main lines: the Ateker and the Luo. The Lou is the ancestors of the Acholi and the Alur people of the middle north. Internal conflicts have occurred throughout history particularly between these descendant lines, mainly in form of tribal feuds, rivalry and cattle raids. Though, they still have in common that they are all from the north side of Lake Kyoga commonly seen in contrast to the southern side of the lake – the home of the Bantu – president Museveni’s ethnic group.

Fig. 1. Bantu and Nilotic migrations into Uganda overlaid on a map of the present-day geography of Africa. The map is an oversimplification.62

4.3 The British colonists

In the 1860s British explorers in search for the source of the river Nile, put East Africa and the kingdom of Buganda in the spotlight for British colonizers. Christian missionaries from the Anglican Church found their way to the region in 1877, Catholic French missionaries followed shortly after in 1879. In 1894 a large area of eastern Africa was claimed as a British protectorate.63 The kingdom of Buganda had a strategic location, ideal climate, fertile soil and a large potential for economic development.64 Buganda and the surrounding area that was renamed to Uganda was described by Winston Churchill65 in 1907 as a “a fairy-tale”.66 When the British colonists created Uganda they simply melted together ethnic groups regardless of their political structures, cultures and traditions. This became “a major stumbling block to the establishment of a stable political entity” in postcolonial time.67 The violent European expansion with the manipulation of preexisting differences and colonial administrative divide- and-conquer tactics are reflected in Uganda's postcolonial conflicts. This ruling strategy fragmented the country in various ethnic, economic and religious divisions - mainly
with the distinction between north and south Uganda. The British protectorate lasted until independence October 9, 1962.

4.4 The ‘warlike’ Acholi

The variations in cultures and traditions as well as in political structures, economy and religion between the northerners and southerners, was deliberately used by the British as an instrument for split and rule. Derogatory stereotypization of the northerners and the Acholi tribe in particular, as a ‘warlike’ and ‘unruly’ people, as a ‘martial tribe’ in contrast to their higher educated bantu neighbors in the South – exist even today - as a legacy from colonial times. Anthropoligor Sverker Finnström states that it was a ‘colonial truism’ that a soldier was from the North and a government worker was from the South. This ascription of ethnic identity also colored the self-ascription of the Acholi. In the transition to independence the Acholi were used to - and also proud of, seeing themselves as “the nation's military backbone”, an identity that was easily accepted and sustained by the new Ugandan Government of Obote. The southerners of Uganda were clearly favorized by the colonists. They had greater access to education, better jobs, better opportunities and thus were better off economically. The semi-nomadic, undeveloped and warlike’ men of the North were to a large extent enrolled in the British army (the King’s African Rifles). They were sent to the frontlines around the world, and many did not return. Today there is even a nickname for a soldier or more correctly; for a government military opponent; that is no more no less than the term ‘Acholi’.

4.5 The influence of the Churches

The colonists also had a strong influence on the religious environment in Uganda, which was divided between the British Anglican and the French Catholic churches for religious dominance. The Catholic Church ended up becoming dominant in the north. The Anglican Church, with solid support from the British colonial rule, won the majority of the population in Southern Uganda. This division corresponded to political and economic differences as well. The Anglican Church had a significant political position in the south where most senior politicians were and still are today, Anglicans, including Museveni. The Anglicans appropriated also most of the top positions in the public sector in Uganda.
In Acholiland during colonial time a dramatic religious transformation took place, from traditional ancestral veneration and spirit possession to Christian faith and prayers. The Christian missionaries in their attempt to promote the concept of one God, demonized the traditional belief system including the various spirits, jogi, ancestral veneration and the local ajwaki, the traditional spirit mediums that in the earlier days were highly valued. But even though the Acholi converted to Christianity, Christianity did not replace Acholi religion. Belief in the spirit world persisted and actually greatly shaped Christian practices. Strong elements of both traditional belief and Christianity was incorporated into a syncretic worldview that involved both rituals of spirit possession and Holy water. Christian healers where possessed by holy spirits and distinguished them self from the ‘pagan evil spirits’. It seems that the Acholi population incorporated various mixtures of traditional and Christian belief. This was and is largely accepted by most religious leaders and congregations. The Catholic Church was considered to be most liberal as it officially adopted a strategy of acculturation where Christian rites are made to fit local traditions. The Anglican Church of Uganda also expressed willingness to ‘incorporate what is positive’ but were critical of what they regarded as alien to the Christian faith. The Pentecostal congregations in contrast, did not accept traditional belief and practice. Even though there was a form of syncretism, there is little doubt that the Churches had a leading role.

4.6 The ‘chiefs of the pen’ and new religious specialists

The British didn’t only split the north and the south Uganda, they also created tension and conflicts among the Acholi them self. With their split-and-rule strategy they appointed new chiefs who were familiar with British norms and values, having been educated at missionary schools, to assist or replace traditional chiefs – the rwodi moo. The new chiefs were referred to as the ‘chiefs of the pen’ - rwodi kalam. This led of course to an undermining of the traditional chief’s authority. And I will claim, it also contributed to a serious declination of Acholi traditions – culturally and religiously.

The new ‘chiefs of the pen’, were closely connected to the established Christian churches through the missionary schools, as well as their educational background brought them closer to the southern bureaucracy and government offices. These new chiefs, the rwodi kalam as well as the remaining rwodi moo, became more and more associated with government officials, with regulations and tax collection. This increasingly compromised or reduced them as traditional ritual specialists. As Allen explains, this was one reason why
there was a proliferation of alternative both rituals and ‘religious specialists’ in the years before and after independence.\textsuperscript{77} New forms of powerful spiritual mediators - healers, diviners and witch doctors, arose as alternative forms of the traditional \textit{ajwaki}. These new \textit{ajwaki} did not represent the traditional patrilineal ancestral system, but associated themselves with Christianity. Through linking them self with the formal religion, they asserting their “moral probity” simultaneously as they emphasized alternative approaches to spirituality, associated with critical and reforming movements.\textsuperscript{78} They often drew on or replicated aspects of the Pentecostal Christianity, according to Allen. Both rebel leaders, Joseph Kony and Alice Lakwena arose from such specialists.\textsuperscript{79} They were both were strongly antagonistic towards ancestral veneration, including ironically; \textit{ajwaki} and witchcraft.

To sum up, there existed and still exist significant economic, cultural, political and religious divisions between the North and the South of Uganda, between Nilotes and Bantu descendants, between the Acholi and the Baganda/Banyakole in particular. There is also a generational rift in Acholiland, which was more or less deliberately created by the British Colonial rulers.\textsuperscript{80} This structural marginalization and discrimination of the Acholi people continued into the post-colonial era where it contributed to political instability and more violence.
5.0 TIME OF INDEPENDENCE AND ETHNIC BATTLES FOR POWER

In order to understand why the former abducted girls are stigmatized as well as why *cen* is identified as the reason why Acholi society reject them, it is necessary to know the historical context. In this chapter I will give a brief historical overview from time of independence up to the recent war. This is an era characterized by a continued struggle for state power. This will hopefully give an idea how the ascribed identity as ‘backward’ and ‘warlike’ from the colonial period followed the Acholi as a brand mark. These labels affected their choice of opportunities as well as a further ascribed and self-ascribed identity. It will illuminate how stereotyped identity actually could be a unifying force among the Acholi themselves. This will be of value for further understanding of why I consider a successful revitalization of Acholi identity as crucial for the future peace and reconciliation.

The LRA can certainly be said to live up to the Acholi’s ‘ethno-military identity’ as a warlike people. These soldiers are guilty of brutal actions against their own families and villages, regardless of whether it was voluntary or not. The problem is that the LRA is commonly viewed by the Ugandan government and southerners as representative of the Acholi people. As an UPDF general expressed: "If anything, it is the local Acholi soldiers causing the problems. It's the cultural background of the people here; they are very violent. It's genetic." President Museveni himself spoke of the Acholi in a public speech as “being like grasshoppers in a bottle in which they will eat each other before they find their way out”.

It is said that Museveni disclaims responsibility for having been an active participant in the conflict. He claims that the conflict in the North is an Acholi matter. It's all about Acholi against Acholi, not a north-south conflict.

5.1 Independence and struggle for state power

Uganda's detachment from the British was relatively undramatic compare to the times that followed. Uganda's post-colonial history is an era characterized by violent military conflicts where traditional authority was dramatically weakened. A spiral of political power struggles increased the rift between the north and south, and made violence a part of political conflicts. All sitting Governments from Obote to Museveni have seized power and ruled the country with military force. Violence has been directed against both military opposition as well as civilian supporters of the opposition - or towards random civilians for personal gain and
satisfaction. Government armies as well as rebel forces are accused of being responsible for large Human Right violations including looting, beating, kidnapping and rape. The Ugandan army under president Museveni’s command is no exception.

Uganda gained its independence from the British Colonial Rule in 1962. Milton Obote from the Lango district in the north, was appointed as Uganda's prime minister. His army consisted primarily of Lango and Acholi security forces. It was an ethnic fragmented country Obote inherited from the British. Obote strategically formed an alliance with the Buganda’s king Kabaka Mutesa II and his political party the Kabaka Yekka with the aim of building ethnic bridges. But when the alliance collapsed the ‘divorce’ led to a massive wave of violence. King Mutesa fled into exile. The conflict between Obote and Mutesa is by many seen as the start of an ethnic power struggle between Bantu south and non-Bantu north.  

In 1966, Obote lost support in connection with the Uganda's involvement in the war in Congo. Together with his hand-picked general Idi Amin Dada, Obote closed down the entire parliamentary system and continued ruling the country as a 'strongman'. After repeated murder attempts, Obote lost confidence and trust in Amin, and recruited several officers and soldiers, many from the Acholi tribe, to compensate for Amin's recruiting from his own ethnic group in the north-west of the Nile.

In January 1971 Amin seized power in a military coup. He is notorious for being a particularly brutal dictator. The first thing he ordered was the purification of the army in form of a mass execution of Acholi and Lango troops. Pro-Obote officers were systematically executed. The result was the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. Many of the Acholi 'elite' who survived fled into exile. The Acholi and the Lango were particularly vulnerable during the Amin rule. They were regarded as his enemies because they had been Obote’s supporters – thus, opponents.

In 1979, with help from Tanzania, Obote regained state power, and Amin fled the country. Once again the Acholi became important officers and soldiers in the government army. 30-40% of 35,000 soldiers were Acholi. The percentage of Acholi officers were even higher. The tide had turned and Amin soldiers from north-west Uganda became targets for bloody retaliation by the Acholi.

5.2 Obote’s Acholi frontline

Shortly after Obote’s return to power, a new civil war broke out in 1981. This time the war stood between Uganda’s government army, the Uganda National Liberation Army’ (UNLA),
which consisted basically of Acholi and Lango troops, and Museveni’s opposition force the National Resistance Army (NRA) with soldiers mainly from the south. The core of Museveni’s NRA soldiers came from the Luwero Triangle. In 1983 Obote launched a very violent offensive referred to as ‘Operation Bonanza’, against the Luwero district. Over a period of three years 300 000 people were killed in Luwero, mostly civilians. ‘Operation Bonanza’s atrocities had massive consequences: it intensified the hatred and brought the war’s ethnic dimension to the forefront. From now on it was a war between the north and the south, and it legitimized an ethnic revanchism directed towards the Acholi, since Acholi soldiers were sent to the front in Obote’s military operations. “The sculls of Luwero” or the “ghosts of Luwero” are still expressions used today, that points at this vast atrocity ‘committed by the Acholi’.

At the same time there was a growing discontent among Acholi soldiers in UNLA as they believed the Lango soldiers were favored by Obote. The Lango soldiers had better opportunities to climb the career ladder, while the Acholi soldiers were sent to the war front. Interethnic conflicts in Obote’s military rank occurred after he ordered the arrest of several Acholi officers. Acholi brigadier Bazilio Olara Okello mobilized troops within the UNLA that was against Obote and marched towards Kampala, and in July 1985 he seized the state power in a coup. Obote went into exile in Kenya. Historian Godfrey Mwakikagile claims that Obote lost power because he lacked the ability to handle the ethnic tensions between the Lango and the Acholi troops. The UNLA general Tito Okello became the country's new president – for a short period of time.

5.3 Retaliation for "the skulls of Luwero"

January 1986, Museveni seized state power – in a familiar way in Uganda at this point - by a military coup. He was the country's first leader from the south. UNLAs officers went into exile and the soldiers fled home to the northern district. Relatively calm months followed, and the majority of UNLA troops were demobilized and disarmed voluntarily - but far from all. In the aftermath a new wave of violence emerged - a time characterized by both internal and external political collapse. Many soldiers came home to unemployment as well as disrespect because they had lost the battle. Gangs of bandits consisting of former UNLA soldiers thrived, and also recruited local youths. These clusters of thugs were terrorizing their own villages with violence, looting and threats. Local traditional authority structures were again challenged – this time by their own young men. Religious and traditional leaders tried to
promote the need of returning to traditional life. This involved religious purifying rituals and ceremonies to appease the ancestral spirits, vital for restoring social harmony, according to the traditional leaders. This was also a clear attempt to rebuild a sense of belonging and a sense of 'Acholiness'.

During this period president Museveni was strengthening his military presence in the north. Soldiers from his army, the National Resistance Army are accused of having committed a range of violations against the Acholi civil population, including murder, rape, looting, kidnapping and vandalism. This violence was justified as a retaliation for "the skulls of Luwero". The demobilized UNLA soldiers (mostly Acholi) were forced to do manual labor in government established concentration camps. Furthermore, in May 1986, the former UNLA soldiers were ordered to a NRA military base. With Amin’s massacres of the Acholi in mind, this call was met with great skepticism. As one informant said to Lawrence Cline: "The order was just like in Amin's days. This time we are not going to die like chickens. Let us go to the Sudan and join our brothers, and fight to save the Acholi". Some previous UNLA officers and soldiers fled to southern Sudan and reorganized into the guerrilla force called the Uganda People Defense Army (UPDA) under the command of the Acholi officer Odong Latek. But the UNLA’s Acholi elements in Luwero “had placed a stain on the reputation of the Acholi people which required purification”, according to the new upcoming rebel leader Alice Auma Lakwena.

5.4 Several attempts to purify the Acholi

UPDA started their offensives against the NRA in August 1986 with solid support from the local population in Acholiland. But the newly created rebel group was loosely knit and an internal feud led to splits into several factions. One of these factions is today's LRA. LRA's connection to UPDA demonstrates “the existence of an unbroken link between the LRA and those non-purified former UNLA soldiers, the so-called 'internal strangers' in Acholi society. But before I turn to the creation of the LRA, there is one particular opposition movement that has to be introduced because it added a new dimension to Uganda’s power struggle.

During this extremely challenging times in the late 1980s, which were characterized by internal and external conflicts on many levels, there was also a religious upheaval. New forms of spirituality occurred, and a new kind of intermediary figure, ajwaki, emerged – and quit many. But the most influential one, which changed the history of the Acholi, was started...
by a female prophet, Alice Auma Lakwena who seduced and led the Acholi into a religious spiritual battlefield. Alice Lakwena’s religious group was also a military opposition movement, known as The Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF), had as a main goal to wage war against evil. Alice Lakwena was a former spirit medium who claimed she was guided by numerous spirits to fight Museveni and his government. She also waged war against internal enemies among the Acholi, hunting for impure soldiers and witches. She especially targeted the local ajwaki which she considered a pagan spiritual medium, in contrast to her own Christian spiritual powers and message. Her army recruited a large number of former UNLA soldiers, many young men that had turned into social misfits.

Alice Lakwena’s religious mission can be interpreted as an attempt to reintegrate, rehabilitate and discipline former returning soldiers who otherwise was terrorizing the Acholi region. On their height HSMF consisted of 7,000 to 10,000 soldiers. The extra ordinary thing about HSMF was their lack of guns – they fought with rocks and sticks, with prayers, religious rituals and hymns. They marched through bullet rain with the firm belief that the pure would survive and those who didn’t were impure. Lakwena’s religious message was clearly a syncretism between Christianity and traditional belief. But for her, I believe she looked at herself as a pure Christian. Alice Lakwena’s religious and military army actually did win many battles against the government forces (NRA), but they also suffered great human losses. In October 1987 they were overpowered outside Kampala, and Alice Lakwena fled to Kenya where she died a few years later. The surviving soldiers of her HSMF army fled in small groups to the north. Those who managed to come all the way home and refused the offer of amnesty and joined the government army, settled with new opposition groups. One of them was led by Alice Lakwena’s father Severino Lukoya who tried to continue his daughter’s battle. Others joined other rebel groups, that were organized by factions of the UPDA – like the Lord’s Resistance Army.

In 1987 Joseph Kony, a former Catholic altar boy became a ‘spiritual mobilizer’ in the UPDA’s ‘black battalion’. He was inspired by Alice Lakwena’s religious fight, both against Museveni for state power as well as to purify the Acholi people form sin and evil. In the early years LRA seemed to use a version of ‘Holy Spirit tactics’ identical to that of Lakwena. Many of Kony’s supporters were senior officers or soldiers. In the beginning Joseph Kony had support among the Acholi population. This changed with the increased use of violence and when he turned against them. Kony blamed the Acholi, particular the elders, for betraying him and accused them of collaborating with the government. He retaliated their
betrayal with brutal methods of punishment like cutting lips and limbs as well as abducting their children.¹¹⁰

Both Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony continued the violence that has followed the struggle for state power in Uganda from the beginning. In addition, both of them were leaders of movements that forced the Acholi away from their ancestors and created a gap between Acholi tradition and the present. Therefor I will claim, that they both contributed to speeding up a process towards ‘cultural death’ of traditional Acholi beliefs and meaning system, which seriously jeopardized Acholi identity.
6.0 ACHOLI COSMOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

This chapter is first of all an introduction to Acholi traditional society and cosmological view which constitute the cultural foundation of social structures and religious practices that remain today - although faded and somehow weak – for many. This will provide a background for a contextual interpretation of Acholi reconciliation strategies, and allow us to understand why they prefer cleansing rather than punishment for returned LRA members, and why formerly abducted girls are treated as scapegoats. Many religious purification rituals that are offered to former abducted girls – and boys, on their arrival home derive from old traditions, even though some rituals are taken out of context, some might argue. To understand why traditional rituals have been revitalized in post-conflict time we need to have a deeper knowledge about Acholi cosmology and especially about the concept of cen and spiritual revenge.

Acholi traditional belief – from pre-colonial times and pre-Christianity can be placed in the category of animistic belief systems. They believed – and many still do – in a spiritual world with a supreme creator, but where other spirits are more prominent and important. Veneration of ancestors are central. To satisfy the ancestors through rituals and sacrifices - tum - are critically important to receive their protection and guidance. In this chapter I will introduce some of the spirits – with a special emphasis on those that are significant for the thesis topic. The concept of cen and spiritual and moral pollution in form of kiir will be addressed and will hopefully deepen our understanding for what’s causing both trauma and stigma in Acholiland. I will later argue for that the stigma of cen is as much a product of a post-conflict struggle for cultural survival as it derives from a strong belief in traditional spiritual vengeance.

Secondly, this chapter will give a brief outline on Acholi traditional society structures with focus on power and authority. It will demonstrate that Acholi power structures are closely interweaved with religious belief and practice. The purpose is to establish an understanding and knowledge about traditionalists legitimistic claim of religious and political authority. This traditional authority has been, as we’ve seen, heavily challenged during the history. And there has also been several attempts to bring the Acholi people back to their roots. Today as well, there is a process of revitalization of traditions that has got a boost through the promotion of traditional rituals for cleansing and reconciliation of returned LRA members. This brings new hopes for many traditionalists that sees a possibility for the
return and survival of Acholi culture. A culture devastated after decades with suppression, discrimination, warfare and now modernization.

6.1 The chiefs and religious leaders

In pre-colonial times Acholi society was organized in rather loosely knit chiefdoms with lineages and clans. Every chiefdom was headed by an anointed chief – a *rwot*, who was descended from an aristocratic lineage which formed the core that was surrounded by varies other commoner lineages and clans. Chieftainship by succession to the eldest son was the norm, but he could be replaced if the clan felt that they were not properly caretaken. The clans were defined as patrilineal extended families. Each household was appointing an elder to represent them in ‘the council of elders’ which role was to provide guidance to the chiefdom chief. The key roles of the *rwot* and ‘the council of elders’ were to uphold moral order and to adjudicate in internal tribal disputes. The *rwot* himself also had important spiritual roles and duties. Like a ‘Sacred King’ he was responsible – together with the clan priest, for the welfare of man, nature, fertility and for rain. The *rwot* was often considered “an hereditary rain-maker”. But in spite, the power of the *rwot* was still constantly up for question.

According to F. K. Girling - one of the important contributors to knowledge of early Acholi society, the Acholi were at the time under a kind of dual authority, divided between the *rwot* and the priests – the *ajwaki*, who together performed rituals to guarantee the fertility and well-being of their people.

The *ajwaki* – the chiefdoms religious leaders, on their hand, had responsibility for the *abilia* – the chiefdom and the clan shrines. Each of the about 30 chiefdoms had its own set of rituals and shrines that formed the ritual centers. The *abilia* of the chiefdoms represented the dwelling of the chiefdoms *jogi* - spirits embodied primarily in phenomena of nature and wilderness. These dwellings were often located on a hill, in a forest or on the bank of a river. The *abilia* of the clan represented the dwelling of the *tipu* - ancestor spirits of the clan – also called the ‘ancestral soul’ or ‘shadow’. These aba were located within the compound of the family elder. There were also the *ayweya* shrines that were housing the powerful ancestor *jogi* of the first settlers. These shrines were located like the chiefdom shrines, on mountains or other prominent spots like certain trees, water sources or rocks. It is unclear to me if an *ayweya* shrine is more than a chiefdom shrine.

The ancestor spirits in all forms were the guardians of moral order that ensured that the society’s rules were obeyed. There existed an important symbiosis between the
descendant’s veneration and sacrifices and the ancestor’s protection in reward. The rwodi with their supernatural power of making rain had the duty to arrange an annual rituals at the abila and the ayweya shrines. Those considered ‘of pure heart’ - gathered at the abila to take part in sacrificial rituals and purification of the chiefdom – including purification of witchcraft and sorcery. The ajwaki were functioning as mediums for the spirits. Thus, it can be said that they became the ‘earthly guardians’ of nature and moral order. They could on behalf of the ancestors dispense or predict punishments, diseases, droughts and epidemics when people violated moral order or had become ‘of impure heart’. Misfortune and disease caused by the ancestor spirits were always attributed to violation of moral order. If a chiefdom was struck by a catastrophe – the rwot, the ajwaka and ‘the council of elders’ formulated a list of prohibitions for chiefdom members to follow strictly. Prohibitions could be like no quarrel, no wage of war, no performance of witchcraft, no sexual activities. This was to appease the ancestor spirits. Obedience to these prohibitions allowed moral order to reconstitute, and the catastrophe would cease.

Further, the chiefdom ajwaka was the one responsible for both anointing and installing the chiefdom rwot. Consequently, it is possible to interpret the chiefdom as a cult of the jogi and the chief as an initiate in this cult. With other words it can be said that the authority – both political and morally - very much laid in the position of the religious leaders as well as with the spirit world. Even though, the rwodi had combined roles and authority within legal, political and religious areas as well as he also was attributed supernatural powers - never the less, the ajwaka - very likely held as much power and influence implicitly and sometimes explicitly as the rwot.

I will return to the ajwaka – the spirit medium - after presenting a few of the spirits, as there are different ajwaki for different types of jogi as well as the ajwaki changed with the introduction of Christianity.

6.2 The council of elders and the jogi

To take it further than Girling; the Acholi was under more than a dual authority – it can be argued that there existed a rather multifaceted authority within complex power structures. Additional to the chief and the ajwaki – ‘the council of elders’ had big influence in Acholi society. Behrend points out that disputes between the rwot who claimed political power, and the elders of the clans, were endemic in Acholi. And again and in the end, the chief was in a pretty vulnerable position in the way that he could be replaced by decision of ‘the council of
The elders were the ones considered naturally closest to the spirit world, especially to the ancestor spirits, and were also the ones making sacrifices at the clan shrines. And as we know, the jogi and the tipu were attributed the responsibilities of moral and social order that involved control by retributions whenever the order was disturbed, particularly at the family level. Annoyed spirits had the power to cast curses in the form of death, diseases, infertility, drought and madness etc. This illustrates another level of authority - the jogi themselves, as mentioned above. This power shouldn’t be ignored as they are no less than real for many Acholi people. According to Behrend; from a local perspective, the spirits were and still are, the real agents of power. Even the latest war is considered by very many to be led by the spirit world through Joseph Kony. I will come back to this.

6.3 The translator and interpreter

Additionally, there is also another easily overlooked position that is important to mention in regard to authority. The clerk or the translator of the spirit séances - who carried the responsibility for communication and interpretation of the spirits messages – through the medium - to the living. As Behrend express it with reference to Foucault; “part of the nature of power is that, precisely where it is strongest, it is hidden. Its ability to prevail corresponds to its ability to conceal the mechanisms of its effects. Mystery is essential to its functioning”. Spirit possession challenges the ‘western’ world’s fundamental ideas about a distinctions between the self and ‘the other’ as well as the distinction between reality and fiction. In Acholi traditional spirit possession, the medium’s own consciousness disappeared completely while the spirit was speaking and acting through them. The medium could not recall the speech of the spirit afterwards. Thus, a clerk and a translator was needed. In other words, both the spirit and the medium depended on the translator – that would offer people a summary, his own version and interpretation of the speech. Behrend points out that his power was hardly noticed, but in reality they held a position of extra ordinary power with great influence.

Today though, as far as I’ve understood, the mediums are mostly translating the messages themselves. But I wanted to add the clerk to possible authority figures to show that there is a lot of room for religious interpretation that could benefit personal and institutional interests – on a political, a moral and even on an economic level. It also points out how religion is a main stage for authority and therefore a potential stage for power struggle.
6.4 The concept of Jok and the various jogi

One of the central terms of Acholi cosmology is the concept of jok - that is commonly translated into the English term; spirit, force or power. In Nilotic languages – like of the Dinka, Nuer, Langi and Acholi - jok refers to ancestral spirit, power, High God, clan divinity as well as diseases that take the form of epidemics. With other words a clear definition is not easy. The boundaries that normally separate politics and religion in ‘western’ culture are in the concept of jok, dissolved. The concept of jok includes both, but at the same time it goes beyond. The Acholi spirit world were – and still are to a certain degree, involved in everything between life and death, as well as before and after. Different spirits were involved in every aspect of Acholi life. I will in the following introduce a few of the most important categories of jogi in Acholi cosmology, but it should be mentioned that there are many more that creates this complex picture.

First of all– with reference to traditional Acholi religious belief – there is, according to many scholars, a distant cosmological creator – referred to as Jok (in contrast to jok). This Jok is not directly addressed nor does it receive veneration. According to other scholars, it has never existed at supreme god at all. Regardless, with Christian missionaries during early colonial times, the concept of ‘one God’ was introduced in Acholiland. At first the missionaries tried to use the term Jok for the Christian God – but with no success. Then they gave the Christian God the Acholi name Rubanga – and at the same time transferred the term Jok for the meaning of the devil. Over time the Acholi adapted to the idea of a Higher God whom they called Rubanga – or Lubanga – or Allah - the all-encompassing transcendent spirit to whom everybody and everything ultimately relates. But even though - the concept of jok and the multifarious Acholi spirit world still persisted. It was maybe even more – at least for a long time – present and alive than the new Christian concept of Rubanga. It was still the jogi – in plural, who were considered the important guardians of social harmony and moral order – that was, and somehow still is – the most essential value for maintenance of the Acholi society. The concept of social harmony and moral order - as a common project between the spirit and the human world – as well as an stage for conflict and struggle – is very central in this study.

The various jogi in Acholi traditional religious belief, usually live in tim – the wilderness - near rivers, lakes or in mountains. Tim is distinguished from the village and the world inhabited by humans. It symbolizes the alien and the dangerous in contrast to the human world. The power of the jogi in the tim is ambivalent and can be used for both good
and evil. There is a wide range of spirits that are responsible for the collective welfare of man and nature — and for war. In the following I will introduce a few of them. But again it's not limited to these few categories — as well as the concept of the jogi are much more complicated than expressed in this paper. But I hope it’ll give a wider understanding for how all-encompassing and important the spirit world was for the Acholi people, and still is today.

The Chiefdom jok

The chiefdom jok is settled on the high end of the hierarchy. These jogi are using their ajwaki for solely beneficial purposes — to care take the society, and never to harm and never for witchcraft. Even though, in times of war, the rwot can use the power of the jogi to kill as well as to heal. But it is not seen as a contradiction as long as the war is lapi — ‘a just cause’. There is a polarity of healing and killing connected in the concept of the Chiefdom jok.

The tipu — the ancestors

The clan jogi - the tipu, are the ancestor spirits, who like the jogi of the chiefdom have the responsibility to watch over the social collective sphere and moral order of their clan. Their powers are limited to their group of patrilineal descent. Veneration of the tipu is central in traditional belief. Rituals and sacrifices are critically important to receive ancestral protection and guidance as well as to appeased them if moral order is violated or disrupted — to avoid retributions.

The free foreign jogi

The free foreign jogi — derives from outside, and uses mediums by their own choice - for both good and evil — to heal or to destroy. These foreign ethnic jogi appeared in the beginning of the colonial period. It was primarily women who became possessed by these new alien spirits. It started during a time with big upheavals and devastating experiences for the Acholi population including slave and ivory trade, various epidemics, draught and tremendous loss of cattle topped with colonial power and suppression, death of Acholi soldiers in British conflicts in the World wars. And we’ll see it again later in the upheavals under internal ethnic struggles for State power. As Behrend suggests; danger from external powers and increased internal tension found expression in the appearance of these foreign spirits. The spirits provided a means to meet these treats. The cult of free alien spirits opened up an opportunity
to appropriate the foreignness often associated with danger. For example, many commodities of ‘Western’ origin were integrated in the Acholi society with these spirits. It was the spirits who demanded beer to be drunk, food to be eaten with knife and fork, rumba to be danced to music from the transistor radios. The free foreign jogi became cults of afflictive possession. They separated themselves from the cult of the chiefdom jogi by offering healing for single individuals in contrast to guaranteeing the welfare of the whole community. As Binsbergen in Behrend puts it; the cults of the free jogi are seen by many as ‘cults of egoism’. Possession by a clan jok for example, can usually be traced to violation of moral order, while the free jogi usually takes possession of random women that becomes a victim and more or less at the mercy of the spirit’s whims. The jok can be chased away, if not - the only alternative is to accept the spirit as a part of her person – this way she gains a degree of power over it. She becomes a medium – an ajwaka - of this free foreign spirit. Another difference between the free foreign jogi and the chiefdom and clan jogi are their appearance. While chiefdom and clan spirits take possession of their medium in a relatively gentle manner, the free spirits are usually violent. This demonstrate their greater power, according to an ajwaka in Behrend. And again, while the chiefdom and clan spirits are exclusively for good and the well-being of the community, the free jogi are ambivalent, considered amoral and can be used for evil, for example for witchcraft. These free foreign jogi cults – bound to an ajwaka, were constantly increasing during the colonial times and continued to increase in postcolonial time. Alice Auma Lakwena and Joseph Kony are well known as mediums for several foreign spirits.

The free native wild jogi
The upcoming of free jogi in colonial times was accompanied by a change of paradigm in the discourse and practice of the spirits, a change from native to an exotic code. The exotic code arose in the confrontation with external strangers. But along with foreign spirits, there arose other free jogi as well, who were still to be found within the native code. These free indigenous jogi also formed centers of affliction and could be used for good and evil. For example; when the elders struggles to address cen and in turn the Rwot fails as well, the elders can call upon an ajwaka for free native jogi for assistance as a last resort. With powerful rituals they will interpret whether or not a person has ayweya - a collection of bad things, or are carriers of cen, and if so, where it derives from. Through their mediums the spirits have ability to heal afflicted individuals. There are also many examples of communication with these spirits for solely harmful purposes based in jealousy and revenge.
The free Christian jogi

Additionally, to the concept of free jogi – there is the free Christian jogi – the free holy spirits – ‘tipu maleng’ - ‘pure ancestors’, \(^{159}\) that can be interpreted as a cosmological syncretism between the traditional religion and Christianity. These spirits flourished during colonial times. The Christian mediums called themselves nebi\(^{160}\) or nabi, that means prophet in the old testament - to mark the distinction from the pagan spirit mediums – the ajwaki. The spirits were often named the spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Mary etc. The cults of nebi or the cults of these Christian jogi were hostile to the cults of ajwaki or of free foreign jogi – that were considered being in service of the devil. In contrast to the pagan ajwaki, that used witchcraft both for healing and for harm, even to kill, the Christian nebi would only heal and purify with witchcraft without bewitching the witch.\(^{161}\) Though, there were several attacks on clan and chiefdom abila by these new cults. The rebel leader Alice Lakwena were by many considered a converted Christian nebi from a former traditional ajwaka – and her rebel army, the HSMF, was responsible for destructions of many ancestor shrines. Alice also used her spirits for both healing and killing – the same did Joseph Kony. Kony and the LRA\(^{162}\) are also known for strategically targeting Acholi religious shrines. Some will consider Kony a nebi, others an ajwaka, a self-proclaimed lakwena – a messenger, a prophet – others again; a madman or a plain criminal. But one thing to note; most people I talked to, be it former abducted people, local people in rural or urban areas, religious leaders, NGO employees - you name it, they basically all expressed that they believed Kony was led by spirits and thus not responsible for his actions.

### 6.5 The spirit mediums

The purpose of this paragraph is to substantiate the mediumship of the various jogi. Spirits could and can take possession in both involuntary humans, animals and other elements like rivers, rocks and rain. A jok can also be inherited. To be healed from possession of a spirit – to become free of jok, the jok must be exorcized. Alternatively, the possessed has to learn to live with the jok. The jok becomes domesticated, and the possessed becomes a medium for the jok.\(^{163}\)

As mentioned, there is a range of different mediums as well as different spirits. This includes the ajwaki for the chiefdom and clan jogi – which power are used exclusively for good and the well-being of the community. These mediums forward the jogi’s messages that
can involve both praise, guidance and punishments for disobedience. The *ajwaki* are together with the spirits, upholders of moral order.

The *ajwaki* for the free foreign *jogi* are used for good and bad and often for individual purposes rather than upholding collective social harmony.

The *ajwaki* for the free native *jogi* – also called witches, sorcerers and night dancers, can be used for healing – but they are often blamed for damaging witchcraft and sorcery.\(^{164}\) It is important to note that in early Acholi society they did not have a dualistic worldview of good powers in contrast to powers of evil. There was no Satan – or God, and no principle of evil as a cause for all human sin. For Acholi people there was *jok* - employed for good or evil. The responsibility for the mediums actions were usually ascribed entirely to the agency of the spirits.\(^{165}\) Regardless – the *ajwaki* for the free native *jogi* were still accused for using their power for their own benefit and for accumulation of authority and wealth. In contrast to precolonial time, where free spirits were few and witchcraft and sorcery were successfully controlled by the clan and chiefdom priests\(^ {166}\) this was a time characterized by the penetration of Christianity and foreign power. A time where afflictive spirit possession, witchcraft and sorcery rapidly increased.\(^ {167}\) And so did witch-hunts. Witches was considered to have ability to cast curses over people and this led to a comprehensive witch-hunt in the region. Witch-hunts could involve ‘serious warnings’ or in extreme cases lynching and even death.\(^ {168}\) In the 1920-30s witch-hunts was substantial and it was quite common for women to be accused for witchcraft and sorcery and even faced execution by their husband’s kin.\(^ {169}\)

Then at last\(^ {170}\), there is the medium of the free Christian *jogi* – the *nebi* - that developed under colonial time and further into independence. The *nebi* was fighting evil derived from both human and spiritual affliction. Similar to most of the free *jogi* cults, they were also used for good and bad and were often more beneficial for individuals than the collective society. The important with the *nebi* is that they strongly distinguished them self from former ajwaki that they considered evil. To proclaim to be a *nebi* was a form of moral legitimization of being close connected to the Christian God.

### 6.6 Spiritual punishment and pollution

The possession of *cen* and the consequences of *kiir*, are by the Acholi people considered as spiritual punishments. Both *cen* and *kiir* threaten social harmony as well as individual health and happiness. Both are considered very dangerous.
The concept of *cen*

The concept of *cen* is complex – “somewhat amorphous” as Cline puts it.171 *Cen* is commonly considered to be evil revengeful spirits of deceased victims of violence or of deceased persons without a proper burial, that will manifest in various ways and confront with their wrongdoers. *Cen* seeks to afflict the wrongdoers by entering their body or mind producing terrible visions and nightmares that may result in mental illness and amoral behavior, sickness and even death. Women are in general believed to be more susceptible to *cen* than men.172

To note; the exact meaning of the term *cen* varies. *Cen* can be a reference to these spirits themselves, to the spirits of vengeance and to the result or effect of the vengeance. *Cen* has been described in English as “ghostly vengeance” by p’Bitek, “unhappy spirits of the dead” by Finnström, “polluting spirits” by Allen, while Crazzolara defines *cen* as “a departed spirit, vengefully disposed”.173 The psychiatrist Ovuga and Abbo in their study on post-traumatic stress disorder174 in Acholiland express that “*Cen* is a psychotic disorder that develops when the spirit of a dead person that died from a violent and brutal killing possesses the killer or other members of the community”.175 The vengeance of these angry spirits is considered very dangerous since it can afflict the close relatives of the wrongdoer’s and clan members as well. The concept of *cen* illustrates how one person’s action always has ramifications for the entire family and clan, who in turn has collective responsibility for the offence. In additionally, *cen* can be inherited from a parent or a grandparent – or it might not even manifest in the wrongdoer themselves at all, but in future generations. This is one reason why ‘elders’ are concerned about the offspring of the former rebels.176 The solution is ritual: “If cen is not ritualized, it may follow the family lineage of the killer.”177

The spirits of the Acholi soldiers that died in the Second World War in Burma are feared to bring *cen* on their kin due to the lack of satisfactory burial and appeasement of the spirit.178 The victims of Luwero,179 a vast massacre in 1983, during the war between UPDA and NRA in 1983 are also believed to bring *cen*. Many Acholi soldiers took part in these atrocities. These soldiers are still today blamed for the misery, misfortune and diseases the Acholi have experienced the last two-three decades.180 The spreading of *cen* in the last war between the UPDF and LRA is considered to be the most prominent cosmological treat to the Acholi population.181 Over the last decades social and moral rules have been routinely and frequently violated and contact with death, violence and bloodshed have resulted in social pollution. Murder or mistreatment of dead bodies is believed to cause dangerous *cen* vengeance – according to Acholi cosmology.182 In other words, those who have killed or been
forced to kill during the war; and also those who have witnessed atrocities – or even those who are related to effected people - are vulnerable to relentless haunting by the ghosts of the dead. Or like Alcinda Honwana says it; “Individuals who have been exposed to war, who killed or saw people being killed, are regarded as polluted. [They are] contaminated by the spirits of the dead and are potential contaminators of the social body”. Howanas documentation of the phenomenon of spirit possession in Mozambique and Angola have many parallels with cen in Northern Uganda. As in Angola, individual sufferers of cen are often ostracized by their families for fear that cen will spread. Thus, cen constitutes a big challenge in the ongoing process of rebuilding Acholi society.

The spiritual dimension of cen is little understood by non-Acholi, according to the Roco Wat Report. To understand Acholi cosmology is essential in order to develop functional post-conflict reconciliation and reintegration mechanisms. “The majority of Acholi people continue to hold sophisticated cultural beliefs in the spirit world which greatly shape their perceptions of justice and reconciliation.” There is a need to understand cen not only in its traditional perception but in the present context of cen today – among all ages. There is a need to look into the use of the term as well as the consequences of the use. What I learned through my fieldwork is that it seems that many young Acholi who have grown up in IDP-camps as well as young returnees from LRA, lack knowledge about the deeper meaning of traditional belief including cen. But the lack of knowledge doesn’t seem to prevent cen from being used as a factor for stigmatization.

Kiir – a transgression of the moral order

Cen is linked with the concept of kiir, and can be described as the consequence of an act of kiir. Kiir is an Acholi term for a taboo or an abomination that is considered a transgression of the moral order. Kiir is believed to cause serious misfortune, including disease, spiritual haunting and death. In Acholi cosmology kiir is a concept central to the moral order that is governing social roles and relationships. The concept can best be understood as a kind of curse, which can be enacted through both spoken words and actions. Some claim that kiir can be any action that is committed with anger or hatred. According to the Justice and Reconciliation Project report; kiir is a well-known concept among the Acholi population. Most people are able to list several taboos:
the burning and destruction of property, the breaking of vows, fighting at the well or other sources of water, having sex in the bush, rape, incest, murder, walking over corpses, mishandling corpses (or neglecting to give the deceased a proper burial), throwing food, money or feces in anger, beating one’s genitals, domestic quarrels between husbands and wives, defecating in food, and eating ash.\(^\text{189}\)

The early ethnographer and linguist Pasquale J. Crazzolara (1938) defined \textit{kiir} as an: “infringement of intimate social customs, mainly family, which require atonement. in order to prevent ill luck of some kind.”\(^\text{190}\) Okot p’Bitek added that \textit{kiir} can be considered a desperate act of a person “in an intolerable social position”. Thus, \textit{kiir} can at first seem to be of a personal and individual matter. But this person would endanger both the lineage and even the clan and lead to collective punishment and misfortune.\(^\text{191}\) In the clan system of Acholiland an individual abomination or curse jeopardizes the well-being of the entire community, living and dead.\(^\text{192}\) If \textit{kiir} is not addressed and ritually cleansed it can lead to infertility, sickness or death within both the family and the clan. There is also a belief that the misfortune often befalls the children of both the perpetrator and the victims.\(^\text{193}\) It is the children who suffer the most for the sins of their elders, according to interviewees in the JRP report.\(^\text{194}\)

\textbf{Ayweya and consequences of \textit{kiir}}

The consequence of \textit{kiir} is spiritual punishment of human beings through \textit{ayweya} (or \textit{cen}).\(^\text{195}\) All though the concept of \textit{ayweya} is described variously, and the term has more than one meaning, punishment through \textit{ayweya} is definitely considered to be dangerous. \textit{Ayweya} seem to be used both about the punishment from the spirit world as well as for one of two types of ancestral spirits, according to social anthropologist Barbra Meier.\(^\text{196}\) The \textit{tipu} are the spirits of closer relatives, the \textit{ayweya} are considered more powerful and ambiguous spirits of the first Acholi settlers. The \textit{ayweya} belongs to the highest level of the social domain.\(^\text{197}\) Both \textit{tipu} and \textit{ayweya} spirits are venerated through sacrifices and are considered to protect and to be supportive in times of need. But they can also turn against their living descendants if the exchange relation between them is disturbed. People will be made aware of the imbalance by diseases - \textit{gemo}, infertility and other calamities.\(^\text{198}\) Many victims of \textit{ayweya} suffer from nightmares, frightening visions and relentless anxiety.\(^\text{199}\)

For the record, the term \textit{ayweya} are also often used as a distinction between the home and the wild, the cultural and the natural, the human and the non-human.\(^\text{200} \text{201}\)

To make a clarification of \textit{kiir} and its consequence; the location of the act is very important when the Acholi distinguish between prohibited and acceptable sexual behavior.
Sexual acts ‘in the bush’ or near water sources are considered particularly dangerous. It is considered a *kiir* that most likely will be answered with or through *ayweya*. Then it is more important to deal with the committed *kiir* through cleansing rituals than to hold the perpetrator of rape accountable for his crime. According to Porter; women and girls who had been raped ‘in the bush’, in a garden, or near a well – whether by rebels, soldiers or non-combatants – fear cosmological consequences. Additionally, sexual activities that happened within LRA took place in the ambiguous area of ‘the bush’ and are all considered a grave *kiir*.202

The punishment of *kiir* depends on the type of abomination. Like the acts of forced marriage or forced sexuality, particularly in places considered sacred, are very serious offence. Acholi elders claim that the high rate of death and suffering among the people in the camps was caused by angry spirits unhappy for the evil acts happening in the area.203 It is also said that the spirits are displeased with the lack of veneration during the war when the maintenance of the *abila* declined considerable.204

*Kiir* and disrespect for the spirits has disrupted the cosmological balance between the living and the spirit world. And the anger – of the *jogi* and the ghosts of the dead, can only be appeased by specific cleansing rituals.

The cleansing of moral pollution

In order to rectify the impact of *kiir*, to heal the society of misfortune and to restore social harmony it is essential that customized cleansing rituals are performed. Specific ceremonies exist for each act of *kiir*.205 Many rituals required *tumu* *kiir* - animal sacrifice where a goat or chicken will be slaughtered in the presence of the perpetrator and if possible, the victim of the *kiir*.206 As “the elders inhabit social strata cosmologically closer to the ancestors” they often act as mediators entrusted with the appeasement of the spirit world.207 They have the authority and the knowledge to lead the cleansing and reconciliation rituals. But the dreadful conditions in the displacement camps where 90% of the Acholi population lived, didn’t create environment for addressing *kiir*. People and families were scattered all over, making it difficult to create a forum for issues of *kiir* to be settled. Also, the artifacts needed for the rituals weren’t there. As Finnström noted; daily survival came before costly feasts and sacrifices.208 Regardless, 97% of respondents in the JRP report argued that there was a need for cleansing ceremonies to be performed by the elders. To handle violent or assaulting acts of *kiir* through the court system for example, wouldn’t necessarily prove effective.209 To appease
angry spirits and revengeful ghosts there is a need for cleansing. As Finnström says; a religious ceremony to ‘chase away’ cen is not only about individual healing, but also “a process of socialization in which the victim is incorporated and reconciled with the community of both living and dead.” 210

The ritual for handling cen usually involves an ajwaka who communicates with the spirits of the dead and consults the person affected by cen, their relatives, neighbors and elders. As often the process entails admission of guilt or responsibility, compensation, ritual animal sacrifice, dancing, drumming, and communal eating. It is a social process that is aimed to appease cen and thus bring peace to the affected person. But first of all, the ritual reestablishes the social relations between the clans of the wrongdoer and the wronged, and the living and the dead, and thus restoring social harmony. 211 To handle kiir sufficiently is important for both the collective as well as for the individual.

Kiir with its consequences can be regarded as a rational social concept which enforces the communal social and moral order and promotes good behavior. But even more importantly it provides an explanation and a form of meaning in a miserable and sometime unbearable life situation – in a time of anomic. 212 As the JPR report cites; “In situations of extreme social crisis, human beings draw upon beliefs in their social and spirit worlds in order to master what little they can in their own lives”. 213 Engaging in rituals to heal the relationship with the spirits make them able to employ strategies of control “instead of feeling powerless to the course of sorrowful events.” 214 I believe this is true, but during the war, inside the camps, in the bush – these healing and spiritual safeguarding traditions were very much disrupted. Years went by, a new generation grew up, the families were scattered, traditional authority were more or less displaced – and traditional knowledge got lost. There is a reason to believe that traditional religious practices were not so prominent during this time as we maybe would like to think.
7.0 TRADITIONAL BELIEF AMONG A YOUNG GENERATION OF ACHOLI

In this chapter I will illuminate the lack of traditional and cultural institutions in internal displaced camps during and post war. Family bonds and social structures were badly damaged due to terrible conditions in the camps. This had devastating consequences on all levels including an acceleration of ‘cultural demise’ and a crumbling traditional religious environment. The purpose is to give an idea about young Acholi’s relationship to traditional belief and practice. It will shed light on a generation that has spent most of its childhood and adolescent under absent or disrupted family structures. Thus, what is the probability for young people to have an in-depth understanding of Acholi cosmology including ancestral protection and veneration? This leads to the next question: will young people find reconciliation efforts in the form of traditional cleansing rituals meaningful? And finally, do young people really have a clear comprehension of the concept of vengeful cen? When the term cen is used in association with returnees – is it an expression of real fear or empty tradition?

7.1 War, childhood and exposure to traditional belief

At this point we have already some knowledge about traditional Acholi religion and authority structures as well as political and Christian influence on traditional belief, values and practices. But to get a more complete picture of religious belief in the Acholi society today we need to know more about the influence of war. This was a period equivalent long as some young Acholi’s whole lifespan. The war lasted for more than 20 years, 1986 to about 2006. But LRA continued their terror in the neighboring countries. There were attacks and massacres on a big scale the first few years after they pulled out Acholiland. And so, the war continued for abducted Acholi’s and their families. Abducted people are still returning today ten years after what’s commonly considered the end of the war. There are people that have been living with the LRA up to 30 years. There are people born in LRA that returns today. In addition, there are all the people that spent their childhood and adolescent under difficult and less traditional environment in the refugee camps – that makes a major part of the ‘receiving’ community. The average age of the population is only 14 years old.

A generalization of Acholi religious belief system is difficult if not impossible, because the status of traditional knowledge and authority structures have been disrupted. There are strong generational differences based on life experience determined by exposure to
the traditional belief and meaning systems. Former abducted members of the rebel group LRA are also individually differently influenced, depending on experience before and after abduction and on how long they spent under indoctrination of Joseph Kony. Within the receiving community there are also different approaches to traditional belief and rituals. There are strong religious congregations that have quite different views on what is tolerated regarding syncretic world views. The Catholic Church can be considered pretty inclusive and open to co-operation with traditional leader’s attempt at reconciliation through traditional rituals - and the Anglican Church as well. But Pentecostal congregations like ‘Born Again’ consider these rituals both unnecessary and also demonic.\textsuperscript{216} The main point is that the Acholi society today is not a religious homogeneous group.\textsuperscript{217}

7.2 Age, time and circumstances

One of my main aims in this thesis is to try to show the implication of the returned girls (and boys) and young Acholi’s lack of knowledge of traditional Acholi culture and religion. They have not been as much exposed as many would like to believe, to traditional belief during their childhood – neither is the young population of the receiving community. Acholi above 35 years old today are born before 1982 - a few years before the two interconnected wars that started with Alice Lakwena in 1986 and continued with Joseph Kony in 1987. Before the establishment of the refugee camps in 1996 they grew up under relatively normal traditional family settings. Though, they experienced turbulent times where the Acholi people were captured in the struggles for state power between Obote and Museveni and later the LRA war. Additionally, the years before the war was a pretty religiously heated and chaotic time when priests, prophets and messengers were competing for the truth and their congregations. But we can assume that growing up in this environment they would somehow be exposed to their families’ traditional belief and meanings systems including ancestral veneration and the world of the spirits. But again, this age group spent their youth in refugee camps - or with the LRA. The girls I focus on were abducted primarily between the age of 13 to 16 according to some studies and other studies suggests all the way down to 8 years old.\textsuperscript{218} For the record, there are also older girls and women abducted. Some of the 35 and above today might have spent their childhood in their traditional family households, as the finale reinforcement into camps took place in 2002. In other words; a 35-year-old Acholi will have some childhood experience with traditional ways of life and belief system, even though the influence during their youth might be vague.
Acholi who are 25 years old today, were born in 1992. They have most likely spent their mid- and late childhood in camps. Those who were abducted was abducted from the camps. In other words; I will suggest that a 25-year-old Acholi has had significantly less exposure to traditional life and meaning system than the 30 and the 35 and above. Also, a 25-year-old might have been born in the bush with LRA.

Acholi who are 20 years of age today, were born in 1997. Meaning, that some of them were born in the camps - or in the bush with LRA. We can assume that not many of these girls have been abducted as most girls have been at least above 9 years old at the point of abduction. A 20-year-old today were 9 years old when LRA left Uganda. If they have had anytime at all in a traditional environment it would be as small children under 5 years of age. In other words; I will suggest that this age group has little experience of traditional life in a normal household. Their upbringing has been in a fractured family and under disrupted social structures in the camps where the Wang oo – the family hearth was absent. Or they were raised in the environment of LRA.

Acholi who are 15 years old today, were born in 2002, in the camps - or in the LRA. None of these girls have been abducted. In other words; these 15-year-olds have been very little exposed to traditional life - at least until they emptied the camps from 2008 up to 2012 and people started to move back home. And I believe it is legitimate to say that the life they returned to was not the same as the elders remembered it.

In the following I will explain the reason for why I believe traditional belief were much lost in the camps. They are referred to as the death-camps – it might be legitimate to call them ‘cultural death camps’. I will also look into religion within LRA and end with a brief description of what the returnees are exposed to in the new Acholi post-war society.

### 7.3 The camps and an eroding culture

Temporary displacement to towns started sporadically, as early as 1989. From 1996, displacement became a more permanent condition for a large part of the Acholi population. The Government of Uganda’s established “protected villages” as a way to provide better security, and camp settlements were assigned a government military (UPDF) unit for protection. Nevertheless, the camps are also criticized for being a strategy of keeping track on LRA collaborators. By 2002 the government camp policy changed from semi-voluntarily to enforced. At the conflict’s peak in 2005, there were 1.84 million internal displaced Acholi living in 251 camps across 11 districts in Northern Uganda. These “protected villages”
were overcrowded and soon turned into dangerous health jeopardizing ‘prisons’. Due to a fluctuating security situation, it was difficult to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance to almost two million internal displaced people. Due to illnesses like Cholera, Ebola, HIV/AIDS as well as domestic violence, alcohol abuse and struggles with the government army, the death rate reach up to 1000 people per week in the height of the war. The government forces also failed to protect the Acholi population from the LRA. The UPDF soldiers are today extensively accused of sexual abuse and rape, even kidnappings, of local girls. The conditions in the camps were horrendous. Chris Dolan, political scientist and the Director of the Refugee Law Project in Kampala describes the camps as ‘Social torture’ in his book by the same title.\(^{224}\) The retired Bishop of Kitgum Macleod Baker Ochola II, highly respected and broadly admired for his work for peace in Acholiland, stated that the camp policy amounted to genocide.\(^{225}\) Journalists described them as ‘concentration camps’ as well as ‘death camps’. These government camps were extremely damaging for the Acholi society in all respects. Both economic and social structures basically crumbled as the curfew on mobility and the lack of security made them unable to farm their land.

The camps were administered in a ‘self-ruling’ system put in place by the international humanitarian agencies, in collaboration with the district authorities. The camp leadership consisted of a ‘camp commandant’ at the top, with camp zone leaders and camp ward leaders at lower levels. The camp leaders managed contact with the implementing humanitarian agencies. This undermined Acholi traditional authority structures based on clan leaders and elders.\(^{226}\) The traditional leaders and Elders became ‘ordinary persons’ who had to line up for food like the other camp residents. Their cattle had been raided and hardly anyone held any money. They were not even able to negotiate bride-wealth payments.\(^{227}\) This loss of status generated disrespect for traditional authority and increased the generation gap between the elders and the youth. As for example; when traditional rituals were performed by the elders they were often regarded by the younger generation as an “archaic, barbaric and outdated mode of conflict management”.\(^{228}\) The relation between the youth and the elders was also fragile due to family separation in the camps and the lack of Wang oo, the family camp fire.

The traditional important camp fire – Wang oo – the family hearth - where the elder generation educated the young about life - values, norms, culture and traditional cosmological belief, were absent in the camps. In addition, the opinions of elders were not necessarily relevant to the camp situation and the youth’s problems at the time. These young people had been exposed to different life experiences than their parents and grandparents. Although,
traditional institutions did not stop functioning entirely, as clan leaders were occasionally invited by the camp manager to help resolve certain disputes - they played no significant role.229 As Annan and Blattman reported in 2006;

The relationship between youth and elders is strained. War and displacement can also bring cultural loss, which is more difficult to measure in terms of impact. One of the issues that emerged from interviews is the changing nature of the relationship between elders and youth; in the past the hierarchy and roles were much clearer.230

7.4 The *Wang oo*

The *Wang oo* is often mentioned with nostalgia today by Acholi. The term denotes both the central fire where people gathered and the activities that took place around it. *Wang oo* is by many considered as one of the most important institutions of Acholi culture and regarded as the informal school of the Acholi. Here vital elements of Acholi cultural heritage were passed on from one generation to the next.231 It was around the *Wang oo* the elders were teaching the young about the history of the clan and chiefdom. It was expected that the young could list the names of clan leaders through many generations. Knowledge about *kiir*, rituals and expected behavior was passed on often through *carolok* and *ododo* - proverbs and folk tales. At other times, conflicts were openly discussed and resolved at the *Wang oo*.232 The culture of *Wang oo* died out with the camps, according to an elder in Namokora camp in 2007 - for security reasons, disrupted family settings, curfews and harsh social environment. 233 Educational activities and cultural practices in the camps were seriously limited. The children were exposed to behavior patterns not approved by the Acholi traditional culture – but there was no place to address it due to the lack of *Wang oo*.234 To quote a few camp residents interviewed by IRIN in 2007;235

Children have known only one life - the life of violence and war. Jennifer Acayo

The games are only about violence, about the war, abduction and death. Not about family life - cooking, hunting and digging - like it used to be. Okot Oryang

Many children have been exposed to too much violence. Many of them like fighting at school and resist instructions from teachers. Nam Basil Odingcom

Our hope is that peace comes back so we resume our normal lives and are able to educate our children again. Erizewo Ongom

They all emphasized that the children lacked adequate parental guidance in the congested camps. 77-year-old Acholi Jackson Ocaya who hadn’t attended an evening campfire in 20 years expressed his special concerns for the absent of the *Wang oo* because it promoted social values
that are important to the Acholi people. *Wang oo* was ‘the seat of wisdom’ where parents and elders taught youngsters good behavior, traditional norms and gender roles. He says;

> In the past, we used to gather children around the fire, to educate them about proper behavior and bond with them...The war has shattered all that. Children who have grown up today have no reason to attend the fire and in the process our customs and traditions have been eroded.

Jackson Ocaya

### 7.5 More Acholi voices

In the UNHCR/AVSI report 2010, former Acholi camp residents describe camp and their return back home. 75-year-old Ayoo Ghetto finds it important to be back home after years in camp so she can tend to her ancestors. The camp life was terrible with diseases and food shortages. Most people had next to nothing because they had left all their belongings at their homesteads. At home you have relatives, but in the camps people were gathered irrespective of whether they were relatives or not. Sylvester, an elder landowner who lived in what became a large camp, could tell;

> I’ve sat here and watched as my people have changed in ways that I didn’t expect... People used to dance to say goodbye to those who died, but at a certain point this all-but stopped. People just began dancing to this new dancehall music. I suppose it was because people were confined, and also because they didn’t know if they would die soon, so they stopped practicing these things. They say now that they are too modernized to do such things.

Oroma, a mother and stepmother in her 30’s expressed gratitude to be back home as here “older people can teach the children about traditional values, and children are more obedient and respectful.” All interviewees are pointing at cultural changes. Prolonged displacement has had inevitably damaging effect on Acholi culture and Acholi dignity in several ways. As UNHCR report notes; “The confined existence of camp life put pressure on nearly every aspect of Acholi culture”. Losing land is very harmful to Acholi self-respect, as land is entangled with one’s ancestors and livelihoods. The dependency on relief was considered a humiliation as the Acholi could not ‘dig for themselves’. Traditional cultural values and practices were disrupted and speeded up an authority change were the rwodi and the Elders lost status. Additionally, the Government blamed the Acholi themselves for their suffering due to their violent culture and nature that were backfiring in form of their children’s rebellion.

This information I will argue, is supporting the concern/assumption about young Acholi’s lack of in-depth traditional knowledge. From this point we will move further into the LRA to try to locate - especially traces of Acholi traditional belief and meaning system.
8.0 THE SPIRITS AND THE PROPHET IN THE LRA

This chapter will hopefully bring us closer to an understanding of the cultural and religious environment within the LRA. This is definitely a field that needs more study. Due to lack of available information, as Kony is still in the bush, this will be a suggested reconstruction of a belief system based on my own and other scholars interviews with returned LRA members. But I will add, the statements from the many returnees derive from different times of the war, different places and LRA units and they are collected by different scholars – nevertheless, they are very much in line with each other – both in details and about the LRA’s transformation. This indicates that we have reliable information even though not close to a full overview. The purpose of mapping out a LRA belief system in this study is to establish a better knowledge about former LRA soldier’s personal beliefs. To know more about the returnee’s religious frame of references – and their relation to religious traditions can be valuable. Those who have returned home to Acholi society after having been away for many years will meet a quit different and intense religious environment. Christianity in varies forms - including Christianity with strong elements of traditional belief as well as Christianity that totally rejects traditional belief and practice - is a very visible part of Acholi society today. And very many of these religious institutions are offering assistance to returnees in reconciliation and reintegration processes. There is an false assumption that the returnees have the same belief and meaning system as the general Acholi population. I will suggest that there are similarities to a certain degree, but there are also many differences. What is very interesting to find out is whether they believe in the concept of vengeful cen which is the concept most referred to when the need for reconciliation is brought up.

8.1 Religious motivation or pure functionalism

There is a persistent misconception that the LRA is a Christian fundamentalist group. This is much based on the LRA rhetoric about their wish to overthrow the Ugandan government and replace it with a government based upon the Bibles Ten Commandments. This is a phrase repeated in close to every foreign newspaper article about this war. That the LRA soldiers are a bunch of ‘religious lunatics’ has become commonplace. Or as the USA Amnesty points out, outsiders often describe LRA as an irrational force whose leaders must be mentally disturbed. Descriptions like this do not take into account the wider political, social and
economic context. According to Ellis and Ter Haar; religion is a determining element in the social and political world in African countries where political practice is clearly situated within a religious environment. Use of magic as an everyday tool in contemporary politics and conflict in Africa is common, according to Paul Jackson. For example; witchcraft may serve strategic functions in contemporary African warfare, so do other traditional beliefs and practices.

Kristof Titeca’s study on religion within the LRA is based on in-depth interviews with ex-rebels - primarily ex-commanders and former religious functionaries. He analyses how the religious beliefs and practices are constructed into a spiritual order which served rational and functional purposes. It shows how the spiritual order served both internal and external functions; as guaranteeing group cohesion and discipline and motivation among the soldiers as well as intimidating the enemy and the civil population. According to Titeca; it is not about whether beliefs in a spiritual order is true or not, it is rather about its functional effects. The spiritual order in the LRA served clearly pragmatic functions and helped to structure the lives of the new abductees into the movement, making the military organization more effective. According to USA Amnesty LRA was a highly organized and disciplined force. This does not mean that the spiritual order was limited to pure functionalism. That would be as misleading as portraying spirituality and religion as the main motive behind the movement’s actions. Titeca claims that LRA was firmly embedded into the local belief systems, even though they have reshaped into a new spiritual order.

The aim with this my study is not primarily to go in depth into Kony’s purpose of using spirituality in his warfare –although this is definitely important. I am more interested in the form of spirituality that existed in the LRA when the returned Acholi girls still were a part of the movement. Are there traces of traditional Acholi religious elements in the LRA’s belief system? I am searching for information by looking at how strong traditional Acholi beliefs are among returned former abducted LRA members – and add to the knowledge we have about the role and the function of traditional belief among young Acholi in general.

8.2 Joseph Kony’s philosophy of victimhood

Joseph Kony was born in 1961 in Odek in Gulu district. His father was a Catholic catechist and his mother belonged to the Anglican Church. Kony was a Catholic altar boy until 15 years old. At this point he dropped out of school. When he was 26 years old in 1987, he served as a ‘spiritual mobilizer’ in the UPDA’s ‘black battalion’. During this time he was
inspired by his cousin Alice Auma Lakwena and her religiously based combat against Museveni for state power and her attempts to cleans the Acholi people for sin and evil. Kony established his own rebel movement with himself at the top of the hierarchy as a self-proclaimed lakwena – a messenger, a prophet. The insurgent group was known under different names, until they settled with ‘the Lord’s Resistance Army’. The LRA was considered to be the successor of the Alice’ HSMF after her defeat in 1987. However, Alice never approved Kony and his self-claimed spirituality.253

Joseph Kony’s new spiritual and military order was based on “a philosophy of victimhood” with a designed cosmology that provided an internal management mechanism based on terror, according to Jackson.254 The notion of victimhood was mostly based on historical grievances and a cycle of socio-economically and politically exclusion from the state, as presented in an earlier chapter. Thus, it is necessary to root the analysis in Acholi cosmology and identity, to be able to understand the creation of the LRA. The LRA shared Acholi understanding of the world based on exclusion from the state. Or as Jackson put it; LRA’s ideology, to the extent they had or have one; was anti-modern, anti-developmental and anti-state. The core of Kony’s philosophy was ‘an anti-development religious worldview’ based on exclusion and self-punishment.255 Jackson argues that Kony played on the self-identification of the Acholi as a loser group and according Jackson, Kony invented a quasi-religion based on the idea that the Acholi were victims not only of Museveni’s political vindictiveness but also of stronger cosmological forces.256

Kony’s ideas were very much based upon Alice’s belief that the Acholi were in danger of being wiped out both by state and spirits, thus the need for a radical transformation of the Acholi from within. It could be labeled as a ‘moral crusade’ where the subsequent violence was legitimimized as a sacramental act. This conflict could be viewed as a form of healing and purification. But even though Kony had some support among the Acholi population in the beginning of the war, he was never close to the popularity of Alice. Alice offered the Acholi people a way forward through redemption and through rejection of modernity and retreat to spirituality – through traditional cosmology with added Biblical elements. Not to underestimate the violent aspects of it. But Kony felt betrayed by his people – particularly the elders. It is possible to say that this ‘Acholi indifference’ as he probably saw it, led to a form of paranoia and desperation where he turned violent against his own people. Kony was rather unsuccessful in gaining support on the ground and eventually he lost the minimal support as well.257 But in the bush, there was no choice for he abductees or even the former volunteers.
Joseph Kony was both a charismatic and an intimidating figure, according to my interlocutors. He was feared, admired and even loved. I was told by returned girls that Kony could be very kind to suddenly turn mean. Kony exercised a strong psychological control over his soldiers.

### 8.3 An all-encompassing spiritual order

Kony claimed at a point to be possessed by about fourteen local and foreign spirits. These spirits laid down the rules of the organization and gave military and moral orders through Kony. These rules and regulations had to be strictly respected as obedience would give them immunity in the battlefield. Those who died, whether civilians, government troops or LRA soldiers, were accused of disobedience of spiritual rules, and death was explained as a spiritual punishment. As a returnee reported in 1996, Kony had been threatening to destroy Lacor Hospital near Gulu, because wounded people "were cared for there, instead of dying". This explanation of death is in line with Alice Lakwena’s belief system. Those who died in the battlefield were no longer pure and had violated one of the 20 proscribed Holy Spirit Safety Precautions. It also has similarities with the concept of *kiir*. In other words, punishment within LRA was not considered as carried out by the commanders - it was rather an act of the spirits. The spirits – which I assume can be called *jogi*, were omniscient - all-seeing. And the ultimate punishment for ‘impurity’ was death. There was a vast number of spiritual rules. These rules were continuously changing. It made it almost impossible to avoid violations of them and created a sense of guilt which enhanced ‘the process of culpabilisation’. Thus, as Titca argues; it is not surprising that abductees did not escape at the first opportunity, or even that some refused to be released during peace negotiations. They did it out of fear of spiritual revenge.

That the spirits were the true agents of the rebellion – and not Kony, was a widespread belief among the local Acholi population as well. Very many of my interlocutors – basically returnees, but also people in rural and urban areas, surprisingly expressed that they didn’t hold Kony responsible for the war – it was the ‘spirits’ or the ‘evil spirits’ that worked through him. They saw Joseph Kony as a messenger – a *loar* or a *lakwena* - who had no choice but to obey the spirits. This belief was stronger in the early part of the war, but it is still widespread today. This indicates a common strong belief in the spiritual world. This is found in most parts of Africa where the contents of the cosmology vary from area to area and...
within areas. Varieties can be based on tribe, but also generations or other social
stratifications that differentiate the population’s experience with religious belief and practices.

The many spiritual rules and practices played a crucial role in the abductees ‘growing
into’ the rebel group. From the moment the abductees entered the LRA, they went through
initiation rituals where they were anointed with Acholi traditional moo ya – shea nut oil, on
their chest in a sign of the Christian cross. Moo ya would make it easier for the spirits to find
them if they escaped, was the explanation.267 In Acholi tradition, moo ya is used to anoint the
‘rwodi moo’ before important rituals.268 They were ordered to abide strict rules related to
food, sexuality and their relation with natural elements like holy trees, rivers and anthills.
Many rules and frequent rituals helped the abductees to find their place in the organization,
and after a while many saw the LRA as ‘family’ which gave a sense of cohesion and safety.
and some personal control over their lives. To perform rituals gave some feeling of personal
control over their lives. Rituals before battle for example, that consisted of splashing the
fighters and their guns with holy water mixed with herbs and shea nut oil, was to ensure
safety and success. When they dipped their guns – boys three times and girls four times and
they said the words; “God you are stronger than anything in the world, therefore the power
belongs to you”.269 They were also ritually loaded with malaika, Swahili for angel, that
would protect them against the enemy’s bullets.270 When they walked into battle they were
singing Polo Polo - ‘Heaven should come to rescue us in our lives, and we shall never leave
the way to heaven.’271 And the soldiers were not allowed to hide. Kony said; “God is
standing in front of you, behind you and above you, so why take cover? If you do take cover,
you will be punished”.272

The ritual effect was enhanced by the fact that many rules and rituals were rooted in
the local belief systems – both traditional and Christian. It was familiar – though often
transformed, and gave an important legitimate frame and a source of reassurance which
somehow helped to give meaning to their activities. References were also made to Islamic
traditions, like Friday being a day of prayer, and prohibition on eating pork. Kony also added
his own versions of annual celebrations like Juma Oris Day on April 7 and Whistle Day on
December 1.273 In fact, Kony’s reference to the Ten Commandments was not only pointing to
the biblical rules according to Behrend. This was as much else a reminiscent of Alice’s Holy
Spirit Safety Precautions – which derives from the traditional catalogue of prohibition made
by the rwodi, the ajwaki and the council of the elders in time of crises.274
In short, LRA introduced a belief and meaning system that was recognizable and could play an important role in integrating individual members into the movement. But not only was it identifiable for the insiders, the LRA soldiers, it was also recognizable to the general population in Northern Uganda.

8.4 The new pure Acholi identity

Even though it had many recognizable elements, the LRA’s belief system could be considered a radically ‘new order’ which provided the members with a new identity, new values and a new meaning system. Kony referred to his new order as ‘the Acholi Manyen’ – ‘the new Acholi’ or ‘the new Acholi Community’, an expression from Alice Lakwena. According to Dolan; The ‘New Acholi’ could be described as a mythologized ‘Old’ Acholi, cleansed of the corruption of westernizing influences, though built on Christian messages about creating a new society. Kony had portrayed the LRA as ‘the only chosen people of God who are fighting using the assistance from the Holy Spirit’. Kony’s aim – likewise Alice’, was to save the Acholi ‘tribe’ by cleansing it of bad people, witches, witchcraft and pagan spirit mediums – the ajwaki. In this sense, the LRA was a radical heir of Alice Lakwena’s HSMF. The LRA was from the very beginning targeting everything they considered ‘impure’ Acholi elements - including the ajwaki, the ancestor shrines and clan elders. In this ‘structure of rejection’ Kony’s spiritual order provided a logic of its own, which legitimized violent actions against the ‘impure’ outside world. Even abduction of Acholi children was defendable as it was a way to rescue the children from these ‘impure non-believers’. Non-believers were in general a legitimate target to destroy and kill – similar to biblical prophets who could curse sinners in order to save a small minority considered to be the pure at heart. Or like Ledio Cakaj reports for The Enough Project; it was “a quasi-Biblical mission to purify Uganda’s Gomorrah”. Religion provided a much-needed ideology for LRA to justify their violent actions. “Battlefield conducts and actions are regarded as condoned by God and the spirits. Abductions and violence are legitimized in religious terms.” Kony’s rituals and rules established a shared meaning system which served to emphasize and legitimize the boundaries between ritual ‘pure’ insiders and ‘impure’ outsiders. And Kony did more than building boundaries, he ripped the children away from their roots – and turned them against their own family and clan. As Allen and Schomerus point out, “As religious practice demonstrates everywhere, regular collective performance of rites affects what people come to think is true, and this is particularly so for children”.

68
Kony and his ‘Acholi Manyen’ were fighting a form of wider spiritual struggle against the external ‘impure’ world. Even the government army, the UPDA, was according to Kony using spirituality and witchdoctors in combat. “The whole UPDF is controlled by Satan, and all their witchdoctors belong to the devil. These witchdoctors are very powerful! They can use the nature and animals. Often goats, birds or dogs are used by the UPDF, and even rain!”\textsuperscript{288} These accusations were of course denied by the UPDF. But individual UPDF soldiers have expressed their own fear for LRA’s spiritual powers, and stories of witchcraft flourish among the soldiers – on both sides. And like Titeca points out, it doesn’t really matter whether these stories are ‘true’ or not. What matter is the effect they produce. Witnesses, both within and outside the LRA, gave the impression that it was believed completely, according to Titeca.\textsuperscript{289} This spiritual environment – with powerful witchdoctors able to kill, demanded respect for the spiritual rules in order to survive and the only person to guide them through this “spiritual minefield” was Kony.\textsuperscript{290} And Kony proclaimed he could read their minds.\textsuperscript{291} One of my interlocutors used the words; he became like a protective ‘mindreading’ father figure.\textsuperscript{292} “The spiritual order of the LRA [...] led to a complex system of control over its members”.\textsuperscript{293}

8.5 The impurity of the Churches

The Catholic Church was no exception to what Kony considered ‘impure’ elements. He declared that the Catholic Church had diverted too much from the ‘pure’ religion and had become too much involved with the ajwaki. Kony considered the Catholic Church full of sin. He also accused the church of organizing prayers against his movement. Several attacks and threats have been placed on churches and congregations. Many have been killed. The Archbishop of Gulu Dioceses, John-Baptist Odama, was threaten on his life during peace negotiations in 2002.\textsuperscript{294} In 2003 there were several attacks on Catholic missions including; a killing of a Catholic priest; attack of a group of nuns and an attack on a Catholic mission resulted in 19 people killed.\textsuperscript{295} And according to Roman Catholic leaders the same year; Kony had ordered his fighters to destroy Catholic missions, kill priests and missionaries, and beat up nuns.\textsuperscript{296} There is also a record of LRA attacks on Churches and congregations in the late part of the war.\textsuperscript{297}
8.6 The spirits leave Kony

Over the years there was a shift in the character of the movement as well as a clear transformation in the spiritual order within LRA. As one of my interlocutors, a close life guard to Kony for many years, expressed; In the very early years we all felt the spirits, we could all be possessed, but this changed in the early 90ths – then it was only Kony who was possessed by the spirits. Or like in the special hard times of the Governments ‘Operation Iron Fist’ in 2002 where the prohibition of drinking local peoples water and moo ya was removed. Another time, a spiritual limitation of use of bullets were revoked. There were many changes during this time that can be viewed as a form of organizational pragmatics with clear benefits for the movement, and for Kony in particular. The importance of the spiritual order diminished after the LRA became better organized and integrated into larger military structures.

There was a sort of a consensus among the returnees – as well as among the local population, that the multiple spirits that visited Kony frequently in the earlier days of the war started to visit less in Sudan. The belief in Kony’s supernatural powers clearly faded among LRA soldiers, according to Cakaj. For example, after 2008 defected soldiers rarely referred to fear of Kony’s spirit powers as a reason for staying with the LRA. Already by the end of 1999 “Kony underwent a transformation from a leader with mystical powers to a military commander with religious convictions”.

He had at this point gathered most of his fighters and told them that the spirits he had channeled had left him. Kony seem to try to transfer the fear based on mysticism to fear based on his military prestige. He had expresses to his soldiers that he was not a general because of his praying but because of his killing. This led to anxiety among the soldiers who had feared but trusted his mystical powers. Kony responded that the spirits still came to him, but only in his dreams. A commander, assumedly LRA’s director of religion; Jenaro Bongomin, was assigned to write down Kony’s dreams and interpret them, like a sort of a modern day oracle.

According to my interlocutors in 2016 even praying sessions were not so mandatory any more during the last years – it depended also very much on the commander in charge for the unit. Before Operation Iron Fist in 2002, all battalions had their own religious functionaries called controllers, afterwards there were simply not enough controllers for all battalions. Consequently, commanders were allowed to take over some of the functions of the controllers and spiritual rituals became less significant for many battalions. In other words,
some units still followed the structural prayer-routine, other units hardly ever prayed, according to my interlocutors.

Many returnees confirm that it was a gradual change in the emphasis on spirituality. Strict spiritual rules disappeared little by little. As Titeca reports in 2006; returnees were at this point much less informed about the spiritual order, and did not longer know rituals which were considered central before 2002.\textsuperscript{304} The religious environment with its ritual practices faded and so did the religious belief. As Diken and Lausten express; “It is rituals that create beliefs and not the other way round”\textsuperscript{305}

To compare a few returnee statements from 2002, 2003 and 2008\textsuperscript{306}: Returnees reported about their first meeting with Kony that they were “to prepare for the arrival of the 'holy messenger' whom God had sent to deliver them from suffering, torture and hunger. They were warned not to ask him any questions or look him in the eye.”\textsuperscript{307} A returnee who had stayed with LRA for several years, mostly in Kony’s headquarters in southern Sudan stated in 2003:

He [Kony] is not a Muslim, or a Christian, he is his own religion. He can sit and then talk from very far away and give orders. And then he can look at you and tell you he knows what you are thinking. Everybody is afraid of him. But we all admired him. He promised us that he will take over the government and that we would be able to live in big houses and drive cars.\textsuperscript{308}

Another returnee in 2003 described a meeting with Kony; “I saw Kony once and we all knew that his spirit is very powerful and we feared his power”.\textsuperscript{309} A returnee in 2008 told that most low level fighters stay with the LRA in “fear of being killed by their commanders if caught trying to escape or of being killed or mistreated by Ugandan soldiers”.\textsuperscript{310}

Actually the majority of the returnees and a large part of the population in Northern Uganda claim that the spirits have left Kony. Some ex-commander’s in Titeca even claim that the spirits stopped visiting Kony as early as 1999 at Jebel Lem in Sudan. As Paul Jackson expresses; “cosmology may have been designed to hide the real underlying reasons for conflict [...] whether the cosmology is true or false is irrelevant if the foot soldiers actually believe it.”\textsuperscript{311} Many returnees gave Kony’s loss of spiritual power as one of the major reasons of their defection.\textsuperscript{312} It can be viewed as when the spirits left Kony – and everybody else integrated into the LRA belief system, the members were losing grip on their meaning system. As Peter L. Berger argues; meaning is fundamental to the sense of order, without meaning, there is chaos.\textsuperscript{313} I will return to this and Durkheim’s concept of anomie in form of crises in the moral order of a social group in chapter 12.\textsuperscript{314}
8.7 A syncretic belief system from ‘the bush’

LRA is publicly known as a Christian extremist rebel group, but as we learned earlier the LRA cannot be classified as orthodox Christian as their visions include many elements of traditional Acholi ritual practices as well as elements from Islam. Like one of my interlocutors, a formal abducted girl expressed; in the bush we sang like Born Again, we prayed on our knees like Muslims, we praised the cross as Catholics and we used shea nut oil as in traditional rituals. LRA members have all performed Catholic rituals such as praying to God with a rosary, purification with holy water and traditional oil, they have bowed towards Mecca and they have all faced the fear of the all-seeing vengeful spirits. According to Botha:

Kony manage to use Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs to serve his own agenda. It will therefore be a mistake to refer to religion [...] it is rather the manipulation of religious principles to justify an ideology. [Kony] actually advances a demonic spirituality crafted from an eclectic mix of Christianity, Islam and even witchcraft making his religious traditions nothing more than superficial.

But regardless of that “there is no theology in the conventional sense”319, Kony’s belief and meaning system has still had a vast impact on his soldiers. We know that they were exposed to different religious traditions – mostly Christian and traditional practice – and probably by far the most influential, Kony’s own version of syncretism. We’ve learned that they feared evil vengeful spirits, although not addressed as the traditional cen or ayweya as a consequence of kiir - but as the spirits Kony mediates. We also know that they believe in Kony as an omniscient messenger of powerful spirits. Kony himself claims that they are Holy Spirits from God – not clan jogi, not tipu - and again, not the spirits of cen – which do not work through mediums in this way in the first place. Perhaps his spirits were closest to the ‘free foreign jogi’. To refresh; the free foreign jogi which appeared in the beginning of the colonial period during a time with big upheavals. They usually took possession of a random person who became the spirit’s medium – an ajwaka. These spirits were usually violent to demonstrate their greater power. And while the chiefdom and clan spirits were exclusively for good and the well-being of the community, the free jogi was considered amoral and could be used for evil and for witchcraft. Free foreign jogi cults – bound to a medium, were constantly increasing during the colonial times and continued to increase in postcolonial time. Both HSMF and LRA share similarities with these cults. However, Kony would probably not accept a comparison like this. Kony denounces Acholi elders and their authority based on cosmological views, he has engaged in witch-hunting and killed many traditional ajwaki as
well as destroyed many sacred *abila* of the ancestors. He has even accused the Catholic Church for being too acceptant of traditional Acholi practices. Even though there are several traditional and Christian characteristics in LRA’s religious practice – Kony has definitely pulled away from the religious fellowships and meaning system of his people.

The LRA returnees have been exposed and forcefully assimilated into a vast spiritual world – though varied through time - with mystical practices and rituals, spiritual omniscience, revenge and rewards, as well as prayers to God. Thus, they have been socialized into a personal belief system based on a syncretism between the Christian God and a broader traditional cosmology – a syncretic belief system typically found in Northern Uganda. Since their references include traditional cosmology, it is not very likely that they will reject the belief in the ancestor spirits, which is still significant in contemporary Acholi culture, but they might have developed a mistrust and even a disrespect for them as they very likely have done for the traditional authority – the Acholi *rwodi* and elders. As noted, the LRA is an environment hostile to traditional culture institutions, and many of the returnees, including the abducted girls, have taken part in atrocities or vandalism directed towards these institutions.

Many LRA returnees – those who today are 35 years and younger, have most likely a rather vague understanding of the concept of vengeful spirits of *cen*. Or put differently; they may understand it in their own way – not the traditional Acholi way. They do learn about vengeful spirits – but they do not necessarily identify them with the spirit of the one they have seen being killed. Instead it seems to be the spirits that Kony mediates, which may even cause a greater treat, although he claims they are Holy spirits from God. Of course we need to take in to consideration that there were also adults abducted that probably brought along traditional belief to the ‘bush’.

Based on my conversations with returnees there was little spiritual comfort in their belief in ancestor protection. They referred more to God than to the *tipu*, when they were asked where they turned in the most devastating moments. Two girls told me that they had a dream about their grandmother and that they felt comforted. Fear was an all-encompassing factor in the bush. A group of returned girls I talked to who returned between 2013-2015, basically said that they feared most of all to die in an attack and punishment from military superiors. Spiritual fears were hardly mentioned, in contrast to earlier reports referred to above. But this is in line with the wide spread Northern Uganda belief that Kony’s spiritual powers faded from 1999 and onwards, which reduced the importance spirituality. Another interesting aspect the conversations I had with about 30 returned girls revealed that none of
them had much knowledge or expressed any emotions or interest in traditional Acholi religion including their ancestors. In fact, the question often evoked laughter or embarrassment as it did quite a few times among young non-abducted Acholi. As Titeca notes; the religious and spiritual practices in LRA did not imply a ‘retraditionalisation of society’. Nonetheless, my impression was that returnees still have more knowledge about traditional spirituality in general than young people from the camps, particularly those with the strongest roots in city centers.
9.0 REINTEGRATION AND RELIGIOUS RITUALS

This chapter will bring us back to the Acholi post-conflict society of today, where I will introduce a part of the religious environment the girls are meeting upon return from the captivity of the LRA. The emphasis will be on religious reintegration rituals and the effect it has on the reconciliation between the returned girls and the receiving community. The reconciliation processes are of a complex nature and can be considered one of the biggest challenges for restoration of social harmony in Acholiland – that itself is the ultimate purpose.

9.1 Purification and reconciliation rituals

There are as mentioned earlier quite a few purification and reconciliation rituals performed in the reintegration process of the returned LRA members. These are rituals that are looked upon “as a necessary act of healing, purification, crossing of boundaries, returning back to the village, reconciliation, or otherwise bringing the youth and the community in harmony with their ancestors”, according to Bård Mæland, professor in theology.

Some of the best known traditional rituals include nyono ton gweno – ‘stepping on the egg’. This is a welcome ceremony that promotes forgiveness and purification of evil or impurity – chilo - associated with warfare. This is a cleansing that is absolutely necessary before the returnees reenter their homesteads, according to the Acholi traditional belief.

To safeguard the home the returnee must be ritually clean in order to avoid any contamination.

Lwoko pig wang – ‘washing away tears’ – is an additional ritual to nyono ton gweno for those who have been mourned in the belief that they were dead.

There is also the ritual of moyo kum - cleansing of the body, that is performed to cleanse an individual of bad spirits. This ceremony involves an animal which is slaughtered and blessings from Acholi elders – a ritual that will cleanse the individual’s pain and appease the spirits. Moyo kum can also be used to address violations of the body. This cleansing ceremony can be performed for an individual or a group suffering from similar spiritual afflictions. The group approach has frequently been used for cleansing former abductees. Mato oput – ‘drinking the bitter root’ – is maybe the ritual that is best known to the outside world as it is linked with the discourse on Acholi traditional justice. It is a reconciliation rite - a ceremony for settling dispute between two parties - the victim’s clan and the perpetrator’s clan – after instances of killing. It is often mentioned as a locally appropriate
way to address killings and other crimes that occurred during the conflict. It involves mediation and negotiation led by traditional leaders and elders – and importantly, it involves compensation from the perpetrator’s clan to the victim’s clan. This compensation is known as *culu kwor*. *Culu kwor* is a symbolic recognition of the victim’s suffering and it is also meant as an economic support to be used on funeral rites and caring for widows and orphans.\(^\text{329}\) *Culu kwor* is also an important aspect of rituals that aim to appease the spirits of *cen*. For the returnees to escape the fate of *cen*, which they are accused to bring with them from the bush, they must be cleansed, pay *culu kwor* and be reconciled with the spirit of the dead that caused the *cen*.\(^\text{330}\)\(^\text{331}\)

Despite the level of attention, the *mato oput* ritual has received, I found that most returnees have not participated in *mato oput* ceremonies. Logistical constraints prevent it from being widely practiced. For one, identifying clear victims and perpetrators in one act of violence during the long period of war as required for the ceremony, is rare. Many returnees cannot identify who harmed them or whom they have harmed. Furthermore, few are able to carry out such a long and costly process. Traditional *rwodi* or elders will need support for their time and effort. There is often a need for remedies and animals - for sacrifice as well as to feed all the participants in the ceremonies. This amount of money is out of reach for most people. However, there have been organized communal rituals sponsored by different religious and non-religious organizations, but then again, many Acholi, including some of my interlocutors, claim that these rituals are not sufficient, or that they are not done the proper way.\(^\text{332}\) The rituals have to be performed the right way, at the right place and by the right people. Generational hierarchy is strongly emphasized in traditional ceremonies, as elders are believed to be the closest to the ancestor spirits. In order to have sufficient knowledge to conduct the ceremony properly, one must have substantial experience, exposure and knowledge of the traditional processes. Cleansing and reconciliation rituals are also often performed in a cooperation between Christian- and Acholi traditional leaders. There are also rituals performed by *ajwaki*. But many young people want to be more involved. As youths from Pader district in JRP’s report reasoned; “because [youth] are the future generation. The elders can die at any time, so when the youths are not involved, who will guide in future?\(^\text{333}\) The report shows that although elders may have a better understanding of the traditional ceremonies and the reasons why they are carried out, youth have strong opinions on the matter. Additionally, regarding *mato oput*, there is a strong opinion among Acholi and
scholars, that the nature of the crimes committed throughout this conflict, are just too grave and therefore unprecedented for the use of this ritual. 334

9.2 The ritual’s instrumental means

The rituals mentioned above have proved to be effective instruments means for welcoming individuals home and in restoring social harmony in Acholiland, according to Christine M. Mpyangu, professor in religion. 335 But she also states - in line with my own field notes, that even if the rituals are promising tools in the process of reintegration – the effect doesn’t last. 336 As Rinah, a returnee interviewed by Mpyangu said: the positive effect of the rituals declined with time. 337 She experienced that after a while the community members started to call her names - such as ‘rebel wife’ and ‘those who have brought angry spirits home’. Rituals - apart from prayer, couldn’t help her with name calling, her sick child or with hunger. In Rinah’s opinion there was more need for food than for rituals.

In other words; the religious rituals that the returned LRA girls are offered or sometime socially forced to participate in, have clear social functions, even if they don’t provide a solution to all their problems. Ritual acts creates a feeling of cohesion and may work as a as a mediatory channel - between the returned girl and the community. Mpyangu reports that nyono ton gweno seems to have widespread acceptance 338. The ritual is known even among people who do not personally believe in the spiritual aspect of Acholi tradition – and even among returnees who had – for one or another reason, not participated in any rituals. Many of my interlocutors among the returned girls said that they believed the rituals are important, but mostly because the Acholi community stresses its significance. Both the receiving community and the returnees understand the rituals significance for those who believe them, but also because they function as a unifying element for the community as a whole.

But the rituals alone are not enough to secure an efficient reintegration of the returned girls. As Mpyangu also concludes; “Rituals alone will not ensure the reintegration of the former abducted young women.” 339 And I will add: especially when a deeper understanding of the ritual is vague or maybe even lacking among many of the participants.
9.3 The ritual’s efficiency

I find it interesting that a form of consensus exists based on what ‘everybody else’ believe or find important – regardless if you believe it yourself or not. Very many said that they accept the rituals as necessary – for others. As Tom F Driver, professor in theology and culture states “We cannot well appreciate the power of ritual unless we see its usefulness to those in need.” Very well, but as Mpyangu notes; “the efficacy of a ritual has to do with one’s belief in the performed ritual.” It seems to me that many Acholi understand the social need for the rituals, but not all of them recognize the religious significance or the cosmological importance of it. But then again, if these rituals have beneficial effect on the reconciliation and reintegration process, maybe it doesn’t matter if the performance is based on genuine belief or empty tradition.

But I will claim that there are rituals that may have a reverse effect and may traumatize as well as stigmatize the returned girls even more. These rituals are referred to as *tumu buru* – performed when there is sickness which is believed to be caused by evil spirits, where evil is transferred from the sick person to an animal. Or the ritual *yubu kom* – cleansing of the body, that involves the transfer of *cen* from the person possessed to an animal. Both these rituals can involve for the person to spear a goat to chase away the evil spirits or for the person to step on the body or blood of the sheep, as a sign of transferring the evil spirits to the sacrificial sheep. As development scientist Job Akuni states; this ritual for ridding a person for *cen* is not a permanent solution, the spirit may strike again – to receive sacrifices. I will claim that these rituals where the girls are accused in public of being possessed by evil, where evil is symbolically inflicted on them in order to further be purified, contributes to reinforcement of fear and stigmatization. Additionally, if a returned girl doesn’t know much about *cen* – but she has terrible nightmares about her experiences in the bush, the purification ritual, which involves blood and killing of an animal can re-traumatize her.

I learned from my interlocutors that the receiving community knew about *cen*, and that it was commonly referred to in connection with the returned girls (and boys). But judging from my interviews *cen* accusations were not among the most pressing complaints about the returned girls. It was in fact quite far down on the list. But most of the returned girls had participated in some kind of purification rite in order to appease or haunt away evil spirits of the dead or evil wild spirits of the bush. The problem is that most people will remember the public accusation and accusations of *cen* after the rituals. As a girl asked me; they cleansed me for *cen*, why are they still finger pointing at me?
PART II
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gørl Trondsen Booth
10.0 ETHNIC IDENTITY AS A PROCESS

This chapter will bring us back to the Acholi post-conflict society of today, where I will.
In this chapter I will pick up the treads from the previous chapters. First I will look at the
accumulated knowledge from a theoretical perspective and investigate how a violent history
of suppression, marginalization and discrimination, wars and revanchism, has influenced the
Acholi identity. Next I will look at how the on-going process of revitalization of Acholi
identity and restoration of social harmony have influenced the reintegration of the former
abducted girls.

I will try to illuminate why the former abducted girls from the LRA are rejected, and I
will defend my assertion with the findings presented in the preceding chapters of this thesis.

10.1 A brief summary

The Acholi people of northern Uganda has a long history with victimization; from the Arabic
slave trade, to the marginalization, discrimination and stereotypization under the British
Colonial rule, which continued into the time of independence Ethnic stereotypes like
‘backwardness’, ‘primitiveness’, ‘ignorance’ and ‘warlike’ can still be found today. As
researcher James O. Latigo express; "even government officials have tended to legitimize
oppression in ethnic terms". The Ugandan government consider the Acholi ethnic group;
their ‘violent nature’ and ‘different level of socio-economic development and political
organisation’ to be the reason for the Northern Uganda conflict. A UPDF general summed
it up: "It's the cultural background of the people here; they are very violent. It's genetic." President Museveni himself disclaims responsibility for the conflict and portray it as an
Acholi matter.

The Acholi people has a history of strong bonds to the spiritual world. Since
precolonial times Acholi cosmological belief system has been a vital part of the Acholi
culture and authority structures. Traditional religion has basically been the major foundation
of the society, with social values and moral order put in system and held in control by the
ancestors through the chiefs, the elder and the religious leaders, the traditional ajwaki. In
other words, cosmology, religious practice, political power and authority – as well as family
and gender structures - have been closely interweaved in Acholi society. Religious leaders
together with the spirit world, have been central for the maintenance of moral order, thus social harmony.

These traditional social structures have been disrupted and changed throughout history. During the colonial period the authority of the chiefdom and clan jogi and their ajwaki tended to fade. First of all because they lost authority to the new rwodi kalam – chiefs ‘of the pen’ appointed by colonial administration. These new chiefs were educated within the British missionary education system, but ritually they were insignificant. Secondly, the free jogi and their respective mediums and cults gained increased influence as a response to increased oppression of the Acholi people as well as the suppression of the Acholi belief system. Thus, it might be argued that the chief and traditional religious leaders actually lost terrain not only to the rwodi kalam, but also to the mediums and cults of the free jogi; the new ajwaki, the witches and the nebi. The Christian Churches and the British imperialists supported the cult of the nebi in their destruction of the other devilish cults. An interesting aspect of this development is that the mediums of the different free jogi were primarily women. Thus, it might be interpreted as a female expression or even female rebellion of some sort. Most ajwaki of today are also female. This issue though, need more study.

Anyhow, the traditional authority structures in Acholiland have been seriously challenged by the British imperialists, Christian Churches, military forces in struggle for State power, new spiritual cults and I will like to add – modernity and feminism. I will claim that the marginalization and stigmatization of the Acholi ethnic group created Alice Auma Lakwena’s HSMF and Joseph Kony’s LRA.

Kony lost the support of his people very early in his campaign due to violence and his disrespect for Acholi traditions. Instead the Acholi became the target for his disappointment and anger. This conflict has basically ripped its way into the marrow of the society - its wounds were inflicted on families, clans as well as ancestral and spiritual bonds. Now, after Kony’s defeat peace is about finding back to shared values, a shared meaning system and shared identity. But to return to values of past times, is not easy because the war was not a homogeneous experience for the Acholi people, but differed greatly, for instance depending on age. Many young people have spent half their life in displacement camps with little influence from Acholi tradition, others with the LRA where Acholi tradition was suppressed and even condemned. Thus exposure to tradition and knowledge of Acholi beliefs and meaning system vary. There is no strong shared meaning system to fall back on. The elder generation insist on the importance of a communitas with collective veneration and protection.
from the *tipu*. For them this is the only way to bring back social harmony and peace to the Acholi people. But this demands a return to moral order and purification of the Acholi society from inside. This includes a purification of Acholi identity.

The process of restoring social harmony in Acholi society is an ongoing process which also has significant influence on the reintegration of the former abducted Acholi girls. The girls are targets of rejection and scapegoating in the process of purifying Acholi identity and restore Acholi moral codes.

**10.2 Ethnic identity as a process**

There are obvious disagreements and sometimes fundamental theoretical differences between anthropologists who study social identity. To distinguish between a ‘primordialist’ and ‘instrumentalist’ perspective is common. Fredrik Barth\(^{353}\) who are commonly considered to have an instrumentalist view considers ethnicity to be a dynamic process. Ethnicity is not something we are - it's a dynamic process that is created by one group in contrast to another - and it is therefore changeable. Ethnicity is an ascribed as well as a self-ascribed identity which is about how others perceive a person and how the person perceive him/herself - with reference to the cultural community. (Jenkins 1997)\(^{354}\) Ethnicity is also about how people organize themselves socially in contrast to other groups based on a mutual perception that they are culturally different. Subjectively chosen cultural markers signalize these differences. These ‘boundary markers’ can be anything from clothing, varies artifacts, music, jargon – and are likely to contribute to the stereotypization of themselves and the others. But it is not the cultural content that creates the ethnic boundaries, it is rather the process itself and the act and desire of communicating differences, that is relevant.\(^{355}\) The members of an ethnic group do not need to have something substantial in common, other than that they agree that they are ‘different’ from the same ‘Other’.\(^{356}\) Barth describes ethnic categories as “organizational vessels that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different sociocultural systems”.\(^{357}\) However, he also claims that ethnic identity is imperative, in the sense that it is potentially present in any interaction in an inter-ethnic situation. And he defines ethnic ascriptions as categorical ascriptions which classify “a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background”.\(^{358}\) This position is by some claimed to be more in line with a primordial perspective. As anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen points to; Barth is criticized, by for example anthropologist Abner Cohen, to be inconsistent to the instrumentalist view.\(^{359}\) To sum up, Barth sees ethnic categories as
constant in the sense that they may be called upon when the need arise, as in a competitive situation.  

Although Barth argued forcefully against cultural determinism he clearly differs from Cohen who accused him of promoting a static view on ethnicity. In Cohen’s distinctly instrumental view, “ethnic identities develop in response to functional organizational requirements”. Cohen delimits ethnicity to political processes where leaders of ethnic groups use ‘primordial’ symbols in their political strategy, in order to obtain support of potential followers. According to Cohen; “the sole raison d’etre of ethnicity and ethnic organisation lies in its political functioning”. In this view, ethnicity doesn’t need any historical or cultural explanation, but can be studied entirely on the basis of contemporary social conditions. But if this were true, it should be possible to persuade members of the Maasai ethnic category of Kenya to be Kikuyus, the largest ethnic Bantu speaking tribe. Since this would evidently not be possible, “ethnicity must have a non-instrumental, non-political element”.  

Whether Bart is a primordialist or not is a debatable. But the distinction between primordialist and instrumentalist views of ethnicity is useful as it highlights a crucial duality in collective identities. As Eriksen points out; “ethnic organisation must simultaneously serve political ends and satisfy psychological needs for belongingness and meaning.”.  

This dual understanding of ethnic identity is what I believe is suitable when I analyze identity processes in Acholiland. I believe ethnic identity has both a political and a non-instrumental element. There have been and still are strong political forces behind Acholi identity building from colonial through post-colonial times. It is evident in the split and rule strategy of the British colonists, in Christian proselytism as well as in the marginalization, stigmatization and displacement of the Acholi in more recent times. Historical, religious and political events have no doubt influenced both the ascription and self-ascription of Acholi ethnic identity. In addition, there is a psychological dimension to Acholi identity which must not be overlooked when we study common experiences, shared meaning system and a feeling of belonging. This latter will be further elaborated together with its challenges. Identity as a process and a source of meaning and belonging also bring lights to the understanding of identity construction and belonging within LRA.
10.3 A non ‘tribal’ ethnic identity

In the 1980s Tim Allen did extensive research on ethnicity and tribalism in a village context, among the Acholi and the Madi in Northern Uganda. Allen considers the Acholi and the Madi as “opposed as hostile ‘tribes’, but not as individuals or lineages”. His research describes another sort of ethnicity shared by these two groups – a form of ‘non ‘tribal’ ethnic identity’ that validates daily social interaction based on shared values. Most of the time ‘tribal’ identity seemed to be rather abstract and remote from the concerns of daily life. Allen observed that there were often close relationships between individuals across tribal boundaries, and sometimes people emphasized non-tribal notions of ethnicity and actually shifted from one tribe to another. This form of non-tribal identity was expressed in the idea of *kaka* – a word usually used for clan, lineage and relative – but as Allen points out, it is more an expression of qualitative relationships than genealogical. The *kaka* could cut across politicized and genealogical ‘tribal’ identities and gave social significance to group boundaries.

Allen also describes how the Acholi took pride in the fact that they had a recognized past. They were for instance pride from knowing the names of their predecessors in several generations back. In this could even be used as a way of proclaiming Acholiness as distinct from Madiness. And it was clear, according to Allan, that the Acholi identity was more potent than the identity of the Madi where history and traditions were not documented. The first history book in the Acholi language was written in 1949: *Lok pa Acoli Macon*, by Fr. Pellegrini. This documentation had significant influence on the way ‘tribal’ identity was conceived among the Acholi themselves, says Allan. He also points out that Alice Lakwena in her time, drew upon ideas found in Pellegrini, as well as the Bible, to build up an Acholi tribal appeal for unison.

Allen’s research shows that ethnic identity among the Acholi is about more than the in-group with shared values, it’s also about a feeling of belonging, and maybe loyalty to a shared history of values and meaning, that are very much developed in the socialization of children.

Even if most LRA members are Acholi, the construction of LRA identity is based on something new - a quasi-Acholi identity – or as Kony calls it; the *Manyen* – the new Acholi. This new constellation of identity is created on a forced belief system, which will create a feeling of belonging, but the ethnic Acholi identity created in childhood is imperative.
10.4 Shared identity in contrast to the non-Acholi

The theory that ethnic identity is a process gives a wider understanding of how Acholi identity is created through history - in meetings with an abusive ‘outside’ or ‘Other’. And with a strengthen effect that the more rejection and the more discrimination the Acholi were faced with the stronger boundaries were created between them and the outside world.

Allen’s research also implies that the creation of Acholi identity is not only the result of political strategy it is also about feelings of belonging and bond to shared family history.

My aim here is to show the importance of belonging, and that belonging is linked to ethnic identity, but also linked to family history. And this is crucial for the thesis. As I hope I’ve already accounted for: Acholi childhood is not as homogeneous experience as it used to be in the ‘old’ days. Children and youth of today have been exposed to a very different childhood environments and many of them have only a vague idea about traditional meanings and beliefs. What we know is that a traditional meaning and belief system plays an important part for the creation of a shared identity, and that this shared identity is part of the foundation for the feeling of belonging. Therefore, Acholi society is in urgent need of revitalizing Acholi identity.

In order to achieve this revitalization, there is many attempts from to rebuild the Acholi label. Acholi values and norms are revisited, Acholi meaning and belief systems are discussed. But it is not easy to find a shared platform among a group of people with many differences in social belonging, cultural knowledge and personal experience. And maybe most crucial, they all need to deal with the grave consequences of the war – the Acholi atrocities committed on the Acholi society – that are clearly portrayed by the returned girls who were raped and impregnated in the bush by LRA-Acholi men. The crime of rape was widespread within and in the bush outside the displacement camps as well. These experiences are not much talked about but we know that the perpetrators were both UPDA and LRA soldiers. It does not benefit the identity of a good and marriageable Acholi girl to admit to being a rape victim. There is a ‘deafening silence’, not because of disapproval or lack of interest, but due to feelings of shame towards the larger Acholi community. To restore Acholi dignity and revitalize Acholi identity – there is a need for purification.
11.0 PURIFICATION OF IDENTITY FROM WITHIN

There is one leading discourse in Acholiland linked to the process of reconciliation and justice that the Acholi trust traditional reconciliation mechanisms. These mechanisms involve quite a few traditional purification rituals to rid the society of evil and misfortune. These rituals, (referred to in chapter 9) are often the first form of interaction between the returnee and the receiving community. Through this ritual traditional leaders have got a form of renaissance and norms and values renewed influence in post-conflict Acholi society. But the concept of purity is more than religious rites, we are now familiar with purification through boundary making and the creation of the ‘Other’ (see chapter 10). As Joffe states: ”Identity is constructed [...] by excluding or ‘Othering’ those qualities that do not map onto the core values of the culture.” But this also applies to a mechanism that is going on within the boundaries – among ‘us’. Not all will fit into a pure image of the Acholi in-group.

This chapter will be about purity and identity within the borders and how identity can be forged, as Joffe claims; “largely by exclusion of those that the culture sees as associated with undesirable qualities”. To quote psychotherapist Adam Phillips: “If the aim of a system is to create an outside where you can put the things you don’t want, then we have to look at what that system disposes of—its rubbish—to understand it, to get a picture of how it sees itself and wants to be seen”. This echoes current theories about how culture defines the “other” discloses how the culture sees itself. This observation can also be extended to individuals. They have a tendency to introject what is seen as “good” and project outward “the bad”. Or as Joffe says: “People organize their representations in accordance to a sense of boundary between a pure inner space and a polluted, outside world.” With this in mind I will look at the Acholi material through different theories of rejecting mechanisms and ways of handling social pollution. This will include theories – some more in depth than others, about; projection, abjection, purification, objectification, ‘Othering’, blaming, expendability and scapegoating. In other words, I want to illuminate how and why the Acholi handle shameful war experiences by projecting them onto scapegoats.

11.1 Projection and ‘Othering’

Ethnicity and identity construction is not only discussed in the field of social anthropology or sociology; it is a huge subject within most scientific fields including gender, religion and
psychology. To free oneself from shame, guilt and emotional pain through rejection, projection or abjection, is a human trait linked to childhood development. The shame and guilt are often based on the society’s subscribed norms and values or rather what has to be rejected and projected to uphold them. Psychologist Hélène Joffe explains the concept of ‘Othering’ and projection on an individual as well as on a group level. These theories will bring more light to the identity process that goes on within the borders of the Acholi society, which tries to find both peace of mind and a shared belonging as an ethnic group.

The concept of the ‘Other’ is central to the theory of identity formation. It serves as a means to gain a positive sense of own identity through comparison with negatively valued groups is known to be common in modern and earlier societies alike. When an ‘Other’ is subordinated, a superior identity can be constructed. According to Joffe; “The process of strengthen the sense of own identity by locating undesirable qualities in others lie at the root of identity formation.”

If the ‘Other’s’ negative qualities form a constant feature of society, these threatening features become intensified in periods of potential threat and crisis. These ‘Others’ can be mildly threatening, or a challenge to the core values of the society and seen as the purveyors of chaos. Anxiety and the response to it are organizing principles in the construction of the ‘Other’. Potential danger or sense of crisis will raise the level of anxiety and intensify a process of identity protection. The “self” will continuously strive for protection from negative feelings by dumping unwanted material onto the ‘Other’.

As Mary Douglas points out;

The decorum and positive sense of identity of “us” is sustained through imbuing “Others” with devalued properties. Such representations can lead to the desire for the removal of this polluting force. The prototypical act that aims to rid a community of impure elements—those represented as the source of chaos—and thereby restore order and a positive sense of identity, utilizes scapegoats for the ritual transfer of evil from inside to outside the community.

The negative qualities of the LRA perpetrators are constantly used by outsiders and the government as an ascribed identity of the Acholi people as a whole. These accusations must therefore be removed or redirected. This is where the projection and the scapegoating starts. It can be said that the former abducted girls and their children are live ‘evidence’ and reminders of LRA and hence of ‘Acholi cruelty’. They are a threat to traditional and family values through their exceptional experience, atypical behavior and as spiritual polluters as carriers of cen. Thus, they are considered to be a challenge to the core values of the Acholi society and as the purveyors of chaos.
But like the former abducted girls, the receiving community is also carriers of weighty luggage of devastating experiences. Some experiences are comparable to the returnees, some not. The important here is that many of these experiences are not easily communicated. Though they might be projected.

Projection of bad feelings and anxiety is a psychological mechanism. Anxiety forms an organizing principle of human identity development. Some theories suggest that the primacy of the body’s drive to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain in the early structuring of the psyche, is a life force. The rejection, ‘spitting out’ (Freud) or ‘abjection’ (Kristeva) of destructive impulses are psychological mechanisms to protect a positive inner space. Positive experiences and feelings are introjected, and the anxiety and negative equivalents are projected outward. The aim is to separate bad from good in the hope that the bad will not invade and destroy the good. The projection of those parts of the self that the self does not want to own - are projected onto external objects – or ‘Others’. In this way the “Other” becomes the source of everything negative that the individual seeks to keep away. But these “bad qualities that the ‘Other’ is left to carry, threaten to “leak” back into the space of the self.” So instead of gaining safety and comfort from the projection or scapegoating of undesirable, polluting and contaminating qualities, the ‘self’ comes to experience the ‘Other’ as a threat. So when the returned girls are seen as the ‘Other’ they turn into something bad; a threat to the local community who carry all their shameful experiences of war. They become scapegoats from which the whole society must distance itself.

Exactly what it is that is so threatening or unacceptable about these girls is not clear, except that it is something that must be placed outside - which stands in opposition to what can comfortably be associated with the in-group and the core values of the society. These images are the product of history and of culture. Through objectification, abstract ideas involved are transforming into something more concrete and more easy to grasp. For example, the spirit world, evil and cen are objectified in the returning girls.

In the Acholi case, the objectification of the girls as carriers of cen is covering up for the projection of the crimes of war that many have experienced, but few want to talk about. These experiences are left with the returned girls, but lays in the shadow of spirit possession. This way the fear of getting projected pollution in return, like pollution of rape, sexual abuse, motherhood out of wed lock, or other kiir is reduced. In other words, the focus for the cause of rejection and scapegoating is directed towards a spiritual realm instead of remaining in the silence of shame and guilt. When the returned girls become carriers of all this ‘dirt’, they must
be excluded – with an official explanation of *cen* and spirit possession. To project negative qualities on to the ‘Other’ will increase and strengthen a positive self-identity – as excluding the girls will strengthen a positive Acholi identity which is very much needed. This is according to Joffe, very much a part of the human unconscious response to anxiety.  

The psychodynamics of the projection of blame for a crisis onto someone or something seem to be the root cause of ‘Othering’ within individual psyches as well as the social process of scapegoating, according to Joffe. In other words, the micro-social level of rejection is linked to and can explain the meso- and macro-social processes that involves a bigger part of society.  

**11.2 The Scapegoat**

Scapegoating is, as we know from anthropological data, an almost universal phenomenon, according to psychologist Sylvia B. Perera. “The scapegoat serves the community by returning evil to its archetypal source through sacrifice, carrying back to the gods a burden too great for human collective to bear”.  

The English term ‘scapegoat’ originates from a translation of the Bible; ‘the Day of Atonement’/Yom Kippur in Leviticus 16 by Tyndale in 1530. But as both Sylvia Perera and Mary Douglas points out; the accepted meaning of ‘scapegoat’ today differ from the original biblical meaning. Even though this will not be a discussion on where the scapegoat theory derives from, I will give a very brief explanation. In the Bible the scapegoat actually meant the goat that escaped from being killed as a sacrificial victim. The sins of the people of Israel were transferred to the scapegoat, which then was led away to a distant place. But there is nothing obvious punitive about it nor any stigma is attached to the Levitical rite. Thus our concept of scapegoat is far from the biblical meaning where the scapegoat is not attacked, shamed or harmed. The common usage of the term ‘to scapegoat’ has now become a verb meaning to persecute or to blame. It is “drawing upon Greek rituals to rid the city of scum, discarded elements, useless and dirty people”, according to Douglas. The only thing that the biblical and the ancient Greek myth have in common is that they both seem to have a shared aim, to rid the city of impurity.  

The Greek myth had actually little to do with goats, but with a ‘scape-person’ that tended to be a subversive or marginal person picked from among miserable unfortunates or non-Greek. The Greek rite has a punitive aspect. The ‘scape-person’ is a representative of the evil that is being expelled, he carries the blame and guilt with him. In other words, the term scapegoat today, has developed from both biblical
as well as Greek mythology, into a term which basically means blame and projection.

“Scapegoating, as it is currently practiced, means finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atoned (at-one) with the collective standards of behavior. It both allocates blame and serves to “inoculate against future misery and failure” by evicting the presumed cause of misfortune.”

The scapegoat of today is allowed to live but is pushed to the periphery of a group or a community, but not driven completely away,” because their function as a focus of blame may need to be repeated”. Casting blame is exactly what it is about; according to Douglas as well;

Taboo [or with the Acholi term kiir] - turns out not to be incomprehensible but an intelligible concern to protect society from behavior that will wreck it. [...] When miscreants are accused of spoiling the weather, killing with lightning, or causing storms at sea it [] is not a flaw in the reasoning process that should interest us, but something about casting blame.

When the returned girls are accused of carrying evil spirits that cast misfortune on the society, Douglas would probably say it is because they are a threat to community values. It boils down to how a society explains misfortune. Douglas claims that “for any misfortune there is a fixed repertoire of possible causes among which a plausible explanation is chosen, and a fixed repertoire of obligatory actions follow on the choice”. One type of explanation is moralistic; when a person has offended the ancestors, broken a taboo or has sinned there is a need for purification rituals.

According to Douglas the stronger the solidarity of a community is, the more readily will natural disasters be coded as signs of reprehensible behavior. Society must protect itself from danger, and blaming is a by-product. As Douglas says it: there is nothing like pollution for bringing home the duties to the community members. A common danger and the threat of a community-wide pollution is an effective weapon of mutual coercion. She asks “who can resist using it who cares for the survival of the community?”

Transferred to Acholi society, the threat of spiritual revenge encourages the society to unify in shared values. Traditional systems of meaning involve boundaries that separate what is pure and allowed inside and what belongs to the impure outside. A by-product of purification processes is blame. This is what the returned girls are experiencing - those who belong to Acholi society but who no longer fit on the inside.
11.3 Scapegoats in times of social crises

René Girard’s well-known theory on scapegoating and the scapegoat myth – is a theory both praised and criticized as he sees all myths as coded strategies of persecution. Every myth is an imaginary narrative of real victimization, he says. They do not – as structuralists like Levi-Strauss claim, only relate to structures of mind. And there are no exceptions. But he is criticized for inconsistency as he makes exception of some of the Biblical myths. However, I will not go deeper in to this critique as it is not very relevant for the thesis. But I will bring in some of Girard’s scapegoating theory that I believe will shed light on the process of the rejection that the former abducted girls in Acholiland are facing.

According to Girard’s theory:

all “human communities are based on the ritual sacrifice of an innocent victim. The consensus required for harmonious social coexistence between competitive humans is made possible by a collective act of projection. [...] victimized outsiders becomes the carrier of all the violence, guilt and aggression which is setting one neighbor against another. [...] It is this sacrificial mechanism which provides most communities with their sense of collective identity. But the price to be paid is the destruction of an innocent outsider; the immolation of the ‘Other’ on the altar of the ‘same’.  

The main purpose of scapegoating is to attribute responsibility for the social crises to a culprit (victim) and then to restore social order by destroying or expelling this alleged culprit from the society he/she has been polluting. Historical narratives of persecution show that expulsion of the so called ‘guilty ones’ arises in circumstances of acute social crises.

Girard enumerates four essential characteristics of scapegoating: 1. There is a social or cultural crises taking place. 2. There is a crime which is considered to be the cause of this crises. 3. There is a culprit accused, not necessarily because of his/her direct involvement in the crime directly, but because of some affinity or association with it. Girard call them “des signes victimaire”. 4. There is a violence that is frequently attributed a sacred character. Phenomena of racism, anti-Semitism, witch-hunting, apartheid and ostracization of non-conformist minorities can be used as illustration. Philosopher Richard Kearney who reviews Girard’s theory adds that “each of these phenomena involves an act of false consciousness whereby we pretend to believe in the myth of the ‘evil enemy’ who is poisoning the wells, corrupting the body politic, undermining security, destroying the economy, contamination the moral fabric”. This definitely fits the Acholi case with all the four essential characteristics of collective persecution. The crime which is considered to cause this crisis is war and spiritual afflictions. The culprit accused for these crimes is Joseph Kony and Museveni, but
more close to hand and available the LRA returnees and especially the LRA girls with both direct and indirect involvement in the crime. They would be Girard’s “des signes victimaires’. And lastly the violence that Girard mentions. which he attributes a sacred character, is similar to the stigmatization of the returned girls when they are accused of being possessed by evil spirits. Girard’s aim is to demystifying imaginary constructs and expose the motivations behind victimization. But Kearney criticizes him for “reducing myth to a purely ideological function of dissimulation and domination, Girard reads only half the story”. And Joffe agrees when she explains that to project negative qualities on to the ‘Other’ means to strengthen a positive self-identity, and is very much a part of the human unconscious response to anxiety.

It may be said that to resolve internal conflicts, to restore Acholi identity and social harmony, the Acholi population is making a common cause against an identifiable ‘enemy within’. The returned LRA girls are easy targets. But when they are accused of being possessed by cen this is not always motivated by real fear, although for some it is. For many Acholi cen is part of an empty tradition, and has no deeper meaning. Like Girard would say; they pretend to believe in the myth of the ‘evil enemy’. They demonizing a common enemy through a collective act of projection through the accusation of possession of contaminating and evil spirits of cen. But the idea that the Acholi community pretends to believe in the myth of cen is too derogatory and presupposes too much a deliberate act.

However, this collective act of rejection and scapegoating of the returned girls is not as a deliberate project, but as a method of purification which is a part of the reconstruction of Acholi identity. The rejection of the girls is a process of doing away with all the evil and shameful acts of the war that these girls remind them of the stereotypical Acholi image. To restore social harmony, they need to revitalize a positive Acholi identity and to build new boundaries between the pure and the impure – that is considered dangerous. The returned Acholi girls - impure in every way are the obvious victims for scapegoating. And with their fragile belonging they are pretty easy to sacrifice.

11.4 The expendables

How are the scapegoats picked out? According to criminologist Ezzat Fattah who writes about violent victimization groups that are particularly vulnerable to victimization, are for example ethnic and religious others, sexual minorities, prison inmates, people with mentally or physically handicaps – groups who are considered burdensome, unneeded, or worthless.
These people are considered, culturally, socially and politically to be expendable. Fattah calls them ‘culturally legitimate targets’. He claims that lesser forms of violence against this ‘Other’ are encouraged, condoned or simply ignored. And the reactions of the authorities and the general public show that violence against such groups happen frequently and is often welcomed as a way of ridding society of certain unwanted elements. There is no sympathy, no outcry of indignation and the few offenders who are occasionally caught are often treated with great leniency. This brings my mind to the witch-hunts which have been described as a ‘moral panic’. Moral panic happens when a person or group of persons is defined as a threat to the social fabric. This may shed some light on the Acholi people’s reaction to the returned girls who are seen as a threat to moral values. The girls’ bush experiences are enhanced by a notion of spiritual evilness makes a good foundation for the creation of anxiety. And this makes the girls vulnerable to a revictimization. They easily become what Fattah describes as socially expendable – someone who can be sacrificed for the survival of the society.

Some scholars go as far as to say that these returned girls are perceived as ‘legitimate targets’, and viewed as ‘social trash’ or ‘social refuse’. The returned Acholi girls are unmarried and considered a social burden. Except in the very first period when they receive an economic ‘start package’ from the government. These packages are often benefitting the whole family, but it is not much and it doesn’t last for long. Fattah points out that unproductivity is in particular an important criterion for determining who is socially expendable regardless if it is voluntary or not. But of course, the whole Acholi society is in a devastating economic situation, many Acholi would be considered unproductive. As a matter of fact, as I find a bit ironic, one of my interlocutors told that the label ‘returned LRA girl’ was a brand mark they couldn’t get rid of, because it generated many jobs for the local community through humanitarian projects targeting LRA girls. The Acholi community benefits from keeping them as victims.

Fattah’s theory of social expendability can contribute to explain various acts of violence and discrimination against less fortunate members of the society. And by so doing, the culture allows potential victimizers to attack and victimize these legitimised disposable.

Thus by labeling the returned Acholi girls as dangerous, subversives and as troublesome, society provides the necessary justifications and rationalization for their victimization. I will claim that the rituals of purification that the returned girls undergo may set the values and moral order of the Acholi society. The community members are thought
through traditional cosmology and belief that these girls are impure, contaminating and a spiritual dangerous to the whole society. The Acholi elders, the chiefs and the ancestors are responsible for maintaining this moral order, if they fail it could cause a disaster. In a way the purification rituals legitimize the disposability of these girls, and also show that the girls’ family and clan are responsible for the society’s survival. If something bad should happen, it could always be explained as an attack from angry spirits – that a returned daughter brought with her. This is an obvious threat causing uncertainty and anxiety that complicates the reintegration of the girls.

According to social-psychological theories a person who give the impression of being shy, weak and vulnerable has bigger risk of being considered as a victim than a person who seem to be aggressive, strong or powerful. Strobl also points to the importance of whether the victim is perceived as a member of the in-group of law-abiding people or not. Those who belong to a non-accepted out-group tend to be seen as offenders rather than as victims, he points out. “Scapegoats [...] are often singled out because of their independence and unwillingness or inability to conform to the customs and standards of the group”, he says. This echoes many complaints I heard about the returned girl’s behavior. People told me that the LRA-girls were not like traditional Acholi girls, they are manlike and rude is being said. Thus, they receive less sympathy than those who bend their neck in shame and maybe even ask for forgiveness. Thus, they become easy targets for scapegoating.

11.5 Women as the gates and the guards for pollution

This ‘bush-like’ behavior is not only associated with the returned girls, but also the returned boys. So why are the girls more targeted as scapegoats? The returned girls and boys have similar experiences from the bush and both groups have an ambiguous position as both victims and perpetrators. In fact, the boys in general have probably committed graver atrocities than the girls. But the returned girl’s behavior is nevertheless regarded as much more deviant, immoral and out of the traditional gender role system than the behavior of the returned boys. To mention; many of the returned boys are enrolled into the military where their bush experience is even appreciated.

According to Pitt-Rivers, “Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society” Honor and dignity are not only qualities of individuals, but of the group as a whole. The collective honor is upheld by its different individual members. The gender scientist Victoria Goddard in her comparative study of women’s social identity gives
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth

some example on how women in patriarchal societies function as protectors of the in-group identity. Women can be seen as both the gate to and the guardians of social and ritual pollution. Goddard gives an example from Sri Lanka where a woman got pregnant with a man of lower caste. The child became “a perpetual witness to her deep pollution and the mother [would] be forever associated with another [social] caste”.\textsuperscript{432} The polluted woman and her polluted child brought pollution on the group – the family and the whole caste. Consequently, ritual purity must be protected through its women.

As for the returned Acholi girls, they bring pollution to their families, their clan and the Acholi identity – especially through their bush born children. In the patrilineal society of Acholiland, as well as other places in the world, women are in many ways considered as outsiders, even if they are the reproducers of the groups future generations.\textsuperscript{433} If bride price is paid she and the child becomes a part of her husband’s kaka - home. If the bride price is not paid, or if the woman has reached old age, the woman may return to her father’s or brother’s lineage. With lack of bride wealth the child’s family identity may turn unclear.\textsuperscript{434} Goddard points out that “women are potentially dangerous as they are the margins of the group, being within and yet not of the group, being outsiders to the group, and yet crucial for its survival”.\textsuperscript{435}

One of Goddard’s main examples is a female fruit picker from a village outside Naples in Italy.\textsuperscript{436} She had told - in public, about how hard work on the fields that caused her miscarriage. This became a local scandal – in the in-group. She was harshly criticized and ostracized by her town, and the most active agents of the attack was her husband and other women. The common expression was that ‘certain things are best kept to ourselves’. Because it turned out that most of the fruit picking women had experienced miscarriages as a result of overwork. The other women felt that she had exposed something very private about themselves as a group and that this exposure presented them to the world as backward and ignorant. According to Goddard this shows how closely the group identity is associated with intimate female experiences related to reproduction.\textsuperscript{437}

This sounds familiar. The returned Acholi girls and their children are in light of this theory the polluters of their family and clan. They are also a scandal to the Acholi identity because they are carriers of many local Acholi girl’s painful and shameful experiences, that ‘are best to keep to ourselves’. The returned Acholi girls can sort of be compared to the fruit picker who told her story – to heal and mend things, but in this way actually reopened painful wounds that were shared by the entire society. The fruit picker was ostracized by her town
and family, as the returned Acholi girls. And the other local Naples women were in fact the main aggressors – as the local Acholi women are, according to most of my returned interlocutors.

Goddard suggest that woman are the carriers of group identity. Women are supposed to be defenders, actively or passively, of social rules, values and protect against outside forces.

11.6 Dirt a matter out of place

It is possible to add Mary Douglas’ theory, and other based upon it, about how human societies separate the world into categories of purity and danger. According to Douglas people organize their environment in order to separate ‘dirt’ and ‘danger’ from ‘purity’. ‘Dirt’ is essentially symbolic disorder in the eyes of the beholder, and is considered to be, with her famous phrase, ‘matter out of place’. To eliminate ‘dirt’ is not a negative act, but rather “a positive effort to organize the environment.” Phyllis Palmer adds; “dirt is [...] a principle means to arrange cultures”. Palmer states that ‘dirt’ is crucial to the organization of gender relations. In her study of American house wives she writes that “the concept of dirt is inextricably linked to the organization of sexuality, the family and domesticity [...] and sex, dirt, housework, and badness in women are linked in [people’s] unconsciousness”.

Symbolic representation of female impurity is first and foremost linked to women's structural position in the patriarchal social system, according to Douglas. This is often an ambiguous position, as explained above, where women are at the margins of the group. This ‘in between’ is the general sign of impurity. To protect the society, to maintain its purity, a cultural and symbolic order must be established. This requires a strict differentiation between categories – what’s on the inside and what’s on the outside. A symbolic order is created through a continuous cleansing process in the form of boundary marking, exclusion of everything that is threatening or do not belong. Ambiguities, anomalies, everything which does not fit the pattern will create chaos - and is categorized as impure. It’s the very boundary between impure and pure that keep order and make sense. When the established categories seem to collapse, collective impurity fantasies are mobilized. This is particularly the case, according to Douglas, in situations where social change happens quickly and unexpectedly, and where marginal groups enter the social arena in new roles.

The Norwegian social anthropologist Jorunn Solheim is commenting on Douglas book from 1966, 30 years later. She believes Douglas theory can be used in any society, at all
times. Every culture has its ideas of pollution, she writes. Though, Solheim calls for a greater emphasis on the female body as a carrier of symbolic meaning in addition to women’s social position. She claims that the female body is often to be found in symbolic boundary issues, and ‘female’ is often be perceived as identical with the dangerous and border-crossing powers that threatens the social order.  

 According to Douglas the the need for cleansing and elimination of impure is a rational reaction to ambiguity and anomalies and should be seen as an active attempt to bring order and safety to the social group. With the help of public - religious or secular – rituals the symbolic pattern of pure and impure is expressed as two distinct categories. In other words, through public rituals values and moral codes will be pointed out.  

 The returned Acholi girls are obviously in the category 'impure' because of their bush experience they have an ambiguous role as both victim and perpetrator; mother and rape victim, someone who suffers and is ‘wild at heart’. They are ‘matter out of place’; a prototype of anomaly. The returned girls are an evident source of pollution of the Acholi cultural and symbolic order. And as Tom F. Driver, express; “the ordering function of ritual seems necessary to ‘fix social life’ .. [and] also to restore order when it has been lost”. 


12.0 MEANING AND BELONGING

Social order as well as life experiences of good and bad, needs to be legitimized through a society’s meaning system that will ‘make sense’ of it all. This is how life can be bearable, without meaning there is chaos, anomie – there is nothing – and there is no foundation for a unity or a communitas. This will be the focus for my last chapter. A group unity or a shared communitas require knowledge in the sense of nomos, legitimized in meaning that will provide belonging and a feeling of oneness. This is an obvious challenge in Acholiland – especially considered their different life experiences and exposure to traditional belief and meaning system during the last more than 30 years. To reach a level of communitas, it is not sufficient to just learn the content of the group’s meaning system, the individual – preferable a child, need to internalize it, to make it their own. And for a child to internalize the meaning system it needs a sense of belonging to the group in which meaning system is grounded. This happens for the most part during the process of early socialization where family and the close social surrounding have most influence. As Meredith McGuire says; “A computer could teach a child an entire catechism, but that knowledge of itself would probably have very little significance in the child’s life.” For an Acholi child during the heights of war, there were no normal socialization. Family structures as most social structures and traditional religious influence were strongly disrupted.

12.1 Shared system of meaning and order

Religion represents an important tie between the individual and the larger social group - as a basis of unity and as an expression of shared meaning. Meaning refers to the interpretation of a situation or a life event in terms of a broader frame of reference. To attach meaning to an event is a human process, according to Peter L. Berger. And as Clifford Geertz adds; religion plays a major part in establishing meanings as it doesn’t only interprets reality religion also shapes it. Religion shapes and ‘makes sense’ of everyday life experiences and this way orients the individual’s and the group’s actions.

According to Berger; the meaning system is both explanatory and normative. In other words, it explains why things are the way they are and prescribes how things should be. The meaning system of the group “makes sense” of its social order; that is the existing and desired social arrangements of the group in form of authority and power, stratification system and
allocation of roles, its distribution of resources and so on. This way the meaning system becomes a strong legitimation for the group’s nomos.

Berger uses the term nomos – that basically means all the society’s ‘knowledge’ about how things are, and all of its values and ways of living.454 We might use the term the ‘considered essence’ of the society. For nomos to be transmittable from one generation to another, so that the new generations can ‘inhabit’ the same social worldview and meaning system, there need to be legitimating formulas to answer the questions that will arise from the new generations. Children want to know ‘why’ and their teachers must supply convincing answers. But socialization is never completed, adults as well ‘forget’ the legitimating answers. Legitimation takes often form of proverb, moral maxim and traditional wisdom further developed to myths, legends, or folk tales. Social order and social actions are explained and justified through this specialized bodies of ‘knowledge’. This knowledge needs to be repeated frequently. This is especially important during social crises when danger of ‘forgetting’ is most acute, Berger says.455

Legitimate knowledge that establish authority in a group are particular important to be aware of, according to Berger.456 Religion is one example. In matter of fact, religion is particular effective as it legitimizing authority through reference to a higher divine authority that often involves a certain amount of mystification. Thus, the social order is represented as more than a human convention.457 The group’s way of doing things is promoted as the ‘authentic tradition’. Anything that suggests that this is a purely human arrangement, is deliberately masked. Anything that contradict it in the group’s tale of its own history, will be de-emphasized.458

Miracles, magic, ritual, and symbols contribute to a pervasive sense of meaning, according to McGuire.459 Through ritual practices, such as sharing a ritual meal, the individual may subjectively experience social meaning - both bodily, emotionally and mentally. But importantly, meaning is not inherent in a situation or object, meaning is bestowed. The meaning system informs the individual of the values and norms of the larger group. In short; “a strong case can be made that meaning is a fundamental social requirement”460 that is incorporated into people’s ways of thinking about the world.
12.2 Theodicy and anomie

In situations like for example, death of a loved one, catastrophes and war there is an urgent need for meaning. "Desire to find meaning for such experiences appears virtually universal,” according to McGuire.\textsuperscript{461} Theodicy is a religious explanation that provide meaning for meaning-threatening experiences that threatens the society’s fundamental assumptions of order.\textsuperscript{462} Theodicies provide explanation that ensure that the experience is not meaningless - and rather a part of a larger order. Though, theodicies don’t necessary provide comfort in form of happiness or not even a promise of a change for the better, but still, comfort in the form of explanation for why it happened. It gives at least meaning to the suffering.\textsuperscript{463} An example from McGuire; a person suffering poverty and disease may be satisfied with the explanation that his misery is a result of sins committed by the ancestors. The interpretation offers little hope for improvement, but it does offer meaning. It answers the question; “Why do I suffer?”\textsuperscript{464}

For the Acholi, all the repeating misfortunes, death and painful experiences of war are explained through theodicies of spiritual anger and also ancestral punishment and regulation. This may provide meaning for some, but not for all. The shared meaning system in Acholi is weak. According to McGuire; when a meaning system is seriously weakened, the moral norms it supports are also undermined. If social life is to continue, it becomes necessary to establish a new basis of order and a new meaning system. A social group which life has been thoroughly disrupted by war and military conquest are likely to reorganize itself around a social movement which may provide new meanings - or it may offer “nativism” – a reaffirmation of old meanings and traditional ways of symbolizing the group’s ‘native’ identity, often based in religion.\textsuperscript{465} Religious legitimation is not only a tool for the dominant group it may also justify actions of subordinate groups.\textsuperscript{466} This is also a prone time for new prophets to emerge - that offers a new and ‘improved’ meaning system that addresses the existing crises in the moral order. This we’ve already seen in the 1980s with the self-proclaimed prophets like Joseph Kony and Alice Lakwena – and others, that got their support during a time characterized by social crises.\textsuperscript{467} This is not a prediction of a new uprising of rebel movements in Acholiland. It is rather an attempt to understand what we see today in form of a growth of religious congregations based on Christianity, but first of all to understand the strong attempt, especially among the older generations, for returning to traditional life. The most common basis of meaning is most likely syncretism, according to McGuire. All in all, it is about finding meaning and order in life.\textsuperscript{468}
Crises in a group’s meaning and order system is described in Durkheim’s concept of anomie - that literally means ‘without order’. Anomie refer to crises in the moral order of a social group.\footnote{469} Anomie is primarily a social situation that refers to the inability of the social group to provide order and normative regulation for individual members. And as meaning is fundamental to a sense of order, there will be chaos without it. Berger suggests that the opposite of ‘chaos’ is ‘sacred’. Religion is functioning as a protection from anomie and chaos. As he notes; “The sacred cosmos, which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man’s ultimate shield against the terror of anomy”.\footnote{470}

Massive disruptions like war and famine are obvious starting points of anomie, according to McGuire.\footnote{471} Also rapid social change can cause uncertainty in regard to meaning and order. Norms become open - old references are no longer valid and new ones have not yet been crystallized. And the very fact that it nomos is changeable and suddenly becomes a human convention rather than of religious transcendent essences - undermines the legitimation of the existing social order. Periods of dramatic social change seriously challenge the existing meaning system of the group.\footnote{472} And Acholiland is a prototype example of such a group and society.

12.3 Good versus Evil

Religion is an expression of social unity through religious rituals and symbols. By participating in group rituals, members renew their link with the group, and they learn and reaffirm shared meanings.\footnote{473} The group’s unity is expressed and enhanced by its shared meanings - and vice versa; the group’s meaning system depends on the group’s shared social base for its continued existence. This social base is called plausibility structures by Berger. Meaning; within these social structures of unity the meaning system continues to be plausible - as a common, taken-for-granted entity. The plausibility structures strengthen the individuals ability to believe, as the group gives them social support and reinforcement in their worldview.\footnote{474} When a religious group holds a worldview not supported by the larger society, they are more vulnerable and needs to strengthen the plausibility structures. A particular effective way to do this, according to McGuire, is through a dualistic interpretation of the world where reality consists of two irreducible modes – Good versus Evil.\footnote{475}

Religious dualism offers simultaneously an explanation for chaos as well as solutions to the chaos from a transcendent realm. Dualism enables believers to name the sources of their anxieties, fears, and problems as well as it implies a clear-cut course of action.\footnote{476} In
other words, the dualism is functioning as theodicy and provides the group members with explanation of meaning-threatened events in their lives. This gives meaning to everyday existence. Religious dualism creates order out of chaos. It also provides mechanisms for dealing with both external and internal challenges through healing, confession, purification and through strengthening the boundary between good and evil, truth and dishonesty, purity and pollution etc.\textsuperscript{477}

For the Acholi people, the plausibility structures are fragile and crumbled. There is not a clear shared belief or meaning system any more. There is no order, there is anomie. Thus, the traditional Acholi leaders, in an effort of creating unity and reconciliation among their war wounded people, offer to lead the Acholi back to ‘native’ values. For them this is the only way forward as they genuinely believe in the coexistence with and the protection from their ancestors. But a shared traditional Acholi nomos is almost lost. To strengthen ‘group knowledge’, shared meaning structures and a shared social order, the Acholi traditionalists and the Acholi elders bring the people together in religious ceremonies where rituals are performed to purify the Acholi society from evil and danger. Through a dualistic interpretation based on spiritual evil wrath and purification that serve as theodicy, the Acholi people are given an explanation for their suffering. It may not heal the wounds, but it gives meaning to life, death and misfortune. That it is explained in the realm of transcendence makes it easier to accept. To note, basically all Acholi do believe in God and a transcendent realm. Those who are less familiar with the traditional belief system, are reintroduced through these post-conflict reconciliation and purification rituals.

The rituals and ceremonies have in many ways given the Acholi elders a religious renaissance, at least a form an increased religious authority. The Acholi elders are again able to influence and bestow a new shared meaning system and a new social order that is strongly needed in times of anomie to avoid or reset chaos. Like McGuire might have said; they offer ‘nativism’ and reaffirmation of old values and a traditional way of symbolizing the group’s ‘native’ identity based in religion.\textsuperscript{478}

\section*{12.4 Shared religious experiences}

Religion is one way of expressing the unity of the ‘in-group’. Through shared religious experience – like mentioned traditional Acholi rituals, unity is produce, according to McGuire.\textsuperscript{479} Shared rituals and other religious practices, reminds the group of shared important events, relationships, and meanings that are central to the group’s very reason for
existence. The re-creation and transmission of this dynamic collective memory is a central feature of religion. The participation in religious rituals appears to reduce the sense of boundaries between the participants and at the same time maintain the boundary between the group and outsiders. As Christine M. Mpyangu notes; the ritual acts for purification and the ceremonies of reconciliation in Acholiland create an occasion for the returnees and the receiving community to be together with less reservation - to dance, to feast and to communicate. This provides a deep feeling of unity – or even a sense of communitas. As anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport describes Victor Turner’s term so adequately:

“To sing with others, to move as they move in the performance of a ritual, is not merely to symbolize union. It is in and of itself to reunite in the reproduction of a larger order. Unison does not merely symbolize that order but indicates it and its acceptance. The participants do not simply communicate to each other about that order but commune with each other within it. In sum, the state of communitas experienced in ritual is at once social and experiential. Indeed, the distinction between the social and experiential is surrendered, or even erased, in a general feeling of oneness with oneself, with the congregation, or with the cosmos.”

In the case of the Acholi, this could have benefitted a reconciliation between the returned girls and the receiving community, but a religious union doesn’t only protect its external boundaries as mentioned above, there will also be internal purification involved. And with purification there will be blame. Blame is the by-product of purification, as Mary Douglas said.

By stepping on the egg in the purification ritual nyono ton gweno, former abducted girls, grave victims of war and also often guilty of vast atrocities on their own families and clans, are being forgiven and welcomed home. The returned girls, previously believed by the receiving community to be impure, possessed and potentially dangerous from the bush, is through varies rituals purified to be allowed back inside. But as Mpyangu mention; the degree of inside is unclear. The returned girls can formally be invited back into the community, while distrust and uneasy feelings remain. In the moment of excitement of the rituals and feast, in happiness over the reunion with a loved one, it is easy to be led by the promise and a hope to return to what once was. But when reality and every day struggles set in, it is not that simple. Interviews with returned girls show that bitterness, animosity, distrust and jealousy still exists among the receiving community. These feelings often lead to stigmatization and abuse in various forms including violence. To illustrate a ‘home coming’ through the words of Father Remigio, a local priest, in Wojciech Jagielski 2012. The story is about returned LRA soldiers that decided to return to the ‘bush’ as they didn’t feel to belong at home.
Lots of children who have been through the guerrillas find it very hard to adapt to their new life. They feel safer among the guerrillas. Though what we recognize as good is called evil there, and evil – good, in the bush they have clearly defined limits, they know what is allowed and what is not, there are rules in force and a familiar order. Whereas here they come to believe nothing is certain, nothing is constant. They can’t even be sure of the love of their own parents. Out there, in the bush, at least they have a sense of the meaning of life and of belonging to a community.  

This is not to say that the ‘welcome home’ by the Acholi community and their effort of reconciliation should be considered dishonest or misleading. It is rather that it is based on a hope – and a need, for returning to normal life where things make sense again, and this is not an easy task to accomplish. Shared religious experiences promotes unity, but it doesn’t guaranty communitas. As the girls goes through rituals - they dance, sing and reunite with their families and clans, but will they ever be accepted as a ‘oneness’ with the community? Purification of the inner space is required, and the returned girls from the bush are just hard to fit in.

12.5 Final words

Religion provides protection from chaos and gives meaning to life, according to Berger. For the Acholi people, the theodicy of evil and good, gives meaning to their suffering. The dualism creates order. To know that it is spirits that have caused their misfortune, doesn’t necessarily heal the pain, but it ‘makes sense’ of it all. The weakness of the theodicy of dualism is that it requires a cleansing process. Good has to be separated from evil, pure from impure, inside from outside, safe from dangerous, love from hate. The Acholi society and the Acholi identity need to be purified, but as I learned in Acholiland is that with purification comes blame. The former abducted girls are obvious targets. With their ambiguous role as both victims and perpetrators, their impure sexual bush experiences and their often untraditional way of behaving, make them a hindrance to the social healing process. But it is important to have in mind that many other Acholi girls and women also experienced rape and abuse during the war, and there is also unacceptable motherhood among them. Additionally, in the camps, many war crimes and plenty of Acholi kiir were committed. Based on my fieldwork and other studies of Acholi society the worst problem which separates the returned girls from the rest of society is that they are perceived as carriers of the evil spirits of cen – thus they are considered a cause for the societies misfortune. This doesn’t mean that belief in
cen is particularly important, and in fact there doesn’t seem to exist a big spiritual fear of the girls, at least not among the young generation which hasn’t been much exposed to traditional belief. So it is rather, I will argue, that the accusation of cen serves as an explanation and a legitimation of the ritual and symbolical exclusion of the returned girls. Because as ‘possessed girls’ they belong on the outside of the group and their presence in Acholi society serves as a reminder of the boundary that secures the purity of the in-group. As possessed by cen, these girls belong to the bush and to the spirit world that is considered dangerous and impure. Thus, they are excluded so that the rest of the group can stay safe on the inside.

It can be argued that the girls are going through purification rituals, which bring them back into the Acholi society. But the reality is that these purification rituals don’t really work in the long run. The problem is that too few are real concerned about cen and the purification of it. Said differently, if you don’t believe in cen in the first place, why would your attitude towards these girls change after they have been purified from it? Based on my findings I would suggest that the stigmatization of the returned girls is not improved by rituals of purification because this is not about cen, it is about restoration of the Acholi society and revitalization of Acholi identity. In this process the returned girls serve as expendable scapegoats for the ultimate goal of restoring peace and social harmony.

To ease the reintegration of former abducted girls from the LRA I believe there is a need for healing of the wider Acholi society as a whole, with a special focus on the unspoken painful events of the war that took place all over Acholiland. And I believe there is a need to strengthen generational bonds. The unifying effect of religious rituals do not function if they are seen as empty traditions. But it is not only a generational challenge. In my interviews with returned girls they said that young women were the once who stigmatized most.489

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Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth


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Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gørl Tronsden Booth


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Appendix

Timeline – figure 1

Acholi women between 15 and 40 years old in various environment from birth up to today.

Blue indicates an environment most likely with strongest traditional influence.

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<td>1993 – Peace talks</td>
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<td>1994 – escalation of abductions</td>
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<td>1996 – camps established</td>
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<td>2006 – last LRA attack in Uganda</td>
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<td>2012 – closing camps</td>
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<td>Age of the Acholi girls and women:</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>30 years</td>
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<td>40 years</td>
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1. Green indicates the lifespan – from birth up to today.
2. Blue indicates time likely spent under relative traditional setting, even though under war and instability in certain periods. Lighter blue indicates the age between 0-4, early social development and a time under modern influence.
3. Yellow indicates time likely spent under little influence by traditions – like in camps or in LRA. Lighter yellow indicates additionally time in LRA.
This is not to say that there has been no influence of traditional life during the time of refugee especially between 1996 when the refugee camps got established until they closed down in 2012, where people might have moved later to the camps and returned home earlier. Additionally, those who has been abducted might have been abducted late in the war, but then they would have spent time in refugee camps first. To make sure; this graph is mainly and only to give us an idea of the possibilities of a lack of traditional cultural knowledge – including religious knowledge and the concept of *cen* - among the young generations of Acholi. It has clear deficiencies.
End Notes

1 From interview/conversations with returned girls in Gulu September 29. 2016.

2 The term 'receiving community' and 'receivers' will often be used for the local Acholi.

3 UNHCR/AVSI 2010

4 Mazurana and Mckay 2003:7

5 Mazurana and Mckay 2003:7, 9


8 Fattah 2003


11 Defeated in 1987 (Behrend 1999a).

12 The exact number of abducted by the LRA is unsure and disputed. According to Baines (2010): 30,000-60,000 children and youths have been abducted. The SWAY report I (Annan et al 2006:55) estimates about 66 000 youth between 14 to 30 years old are abducted during the war. Berkeley Tulane report 2006 estimated that as of April 2005 LRA had abducted between 24,000 and 38,000 children and between 28,000 and 37,000 adults (Porter, 2012).

13 To be more accurate; people started to relocate into camps in 1996 (some even earlier). September 2002 the government army instructed the remaining population into the camps within forty-eight hours. http://www.internal-displacement.org; Annan et al. 2011; UNHCR/AVSI 2010; Allen and Schomerus 2006; Liu Institute report 2005

14 Both UPDF and the LRA soldiers have also been accused of rape of men. (UC Berkeley School of Law 2015)


16 Aljazeera 2015.

17 From interviews in Gulu with returnees as well as NGO’s in October 2004 as well as in September 2016.

18 Baines 2014:406-409

19 From interview/conversations with returned girls in Gulu September 22. 2016.; Allen and Schomerus 2006:14

20 Including Baines 2007; 2013; 2014; 2016; Allen and Schomerus 2006; Holly Porter 2013; Gerald Ainebyona 2011; Annan and Blattman 2006; 2008; 2009; 2011; Mazurana and McKay 2003 and more

21 From interview/conversations with receiving community in Gulu, Amuru and Lamwo, September 22. 2016.

22 Jagielski 2012:264

23 Aljazeera - Marc Ellison 2015; Ainebyona 2011:47

24 A local Acholi in Gulu, September 2016.

25 *Ajwaka* is the Acholi term for a traditional healer, diviner, spirit medium and ‘witchdoctor’ - though, witchdoctor is a contested term. As an *ajwaka* in Attiak told me; “witch doctors do bad things, even kill - for the *ajwakas* we help people” It was the ancestral spirits that worked through her, not evil spirits like with the witch doctor. From interview/conversations September 21. 2016.

26 that I also will refer to as the receiving community.
They will be referred to throughout the text.

Porter 2013

Behrend 1999a; 1999b; 1991

Meier 2013a; 2013b


Baines 2007; 2010; 2016; as well as involvement in many reports (Liu Institute 2005).

Mæland 2010

Titeca 2010

Mpyangu 2014


UNHCR/AVSI 2010

Irigaray 2002:247


Fattah 2003

McGuire 2002; Berger 1967

Pals 1996:235

Geertz 1973

see Porter 2012

The focus in this thesis will be on women, but there are also men with similar experiences.

Interview with Bishop of Kitgum Macleod Baker Ochola II September 22. 2016

About 4.8% of the total population after national polls in 2002. There are also 30-50,000 Acholi over the border in South Sudan. (Ugandan Government 2002)

Behrend 1999a; Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; p’Bitek 1980; Doom and Vlassenroot 1999; Atkinson 1994; Finnstrøm 2008; Cline 2013

Behrend 1999a:14-18

Allen and Vlassenroot 2010:253

p’Bitek 1980

Doom and Vlassenroot 1999:10

Atkinson 1994

Finnstrøm 2008:54

Cline 2013:2

Barth 1969
59 Nilotic people are indigenous to the Nile Valley. They speak Nilotic languages. All descendants of the original Nilo-Saharan speakers are considered Nilotic. Ethnic groups like the Lou and Ateker in Uganda, the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania, the Dinka, the Nuer and the Shiluk in Sudan – among others is considered Nilotic People. (Okoth og Ndalo 2006)

60 Luo migration continued until 1700 – some integrated with bantus in the east, others migrated into Kenya and Tanzania (Mwakikagile 2009:60)

61 The earliest political structures in the area with centralized power was the empire of Kitara in 14th and 15th centuries, followed by the kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara and centuries later, by Buganda and Ankole in the 18th century (Mwakikagile 2009:59).

62 https://www.researchgate.net/figure/7343851_Fig-1-Bantu-and-Nilotic-migrations-into-Uganda-overlaid-on-a-map-of-the-present-day

63 The term protectorate should be looked at as a euphemism for colonial according to Mwakikagile (2009:15).

64 Mwakikagile 2009:15

65 33 years before his term as Prime Minister of the UK (Sseppuuya 2012).

66 Otunnu 2002; Sseppuuya 2012

67 Mwakikagile 2009:15

68 Otunnu 2002:11-13

69 Branch 2010:31; Cline 2013:5

70 Finnström 2008:64

71 Doom and Vlassenroot 1999:8

72 Cline 2013:5

73 Otunnu 2002:11-13

74 The rebel leader Alice Lakwena distinguished herself as a prophet (a nebi) versus an ajwaka. (Baines 2010:45).

75 Cline 2013:4

76 Allen and Vlassenroot 2010:254

77 Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 254; Allen 1991; Behrend 1999a

78 Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 254; Allen 1991; Behrend 1999a

79 Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 254; Allen 1991; Behrend 1999a

80 Mwakikagile 2009; Cline 2013; Atkinson 1994

81 Doom and Vlassenroot 1999:5

82 Cline 2013:6; Jackson 2010:17, Acker 2004

83 Latigo 2008:89; Cline 2013:6; Baines 2016:35, Finnström 2008:106

84 Latigo 2008:89

85 Cline 2013:6

86 Otunnu 2002:12

87 Cline 2013:6

88 Obote’s Army grew from 700 soldiers in 1962 to 9000-where 1/3 was the Acholi (Cline 2013).
between January and July 1971 (Cline 2013:7).

Cline 2013:7

Finström 2008:65

By PRA - Popular and Resistance Army, that later turned to NRA.

Otunnu 2002; Mwakikagile 2009:241; Gersony 1997:8

Mwakikagile 2009:211

Cline 2013:8

Otunnu 2002:13

Behrend 1999a:25

1971

Gersony 1997:24

Cline 2013:9; Behrend 1999a:25

In 1988 UPDA commander Odong Latek, did not accept an accord between NRA and UPDA and joined Kony rather than opting for peace (Acker 2004:348).

in the idiom of Alice Lakwena (Acker 2004:348)

Her name was Alice Auma, Lakwena means messenger.

Behrend 1999a:98

There were also quite a few number from the UPDA that joined HSMF. (Behrend 1999a:26)

Mwakikagile 2009:10

Acker 2004

Jackson 2009:323

Behrend 1999a; Acker 2004; Cline 2013; Jackson 2002; 2009; 2010.

e.g. Allen and Reid 2014:118

A term that is considered an anthropological construct. I will not go closer into the use of term as it is not important for this paper. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism

Legitimism - support for a ruler whose claim to a throne is based on direct descent. Oxford Dictionaries.

There is a difference between clan and lineages; while a family tree of a lineage is permanent and reflects either a real or a postulated kinship, the family tree of the clan varies from family to family (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Southall 1956).


Aristocratic lineage - ’kal’, commoner lineages – ’labong’ - in Acholi (Behrend 1999a:15)

Behrend 1999a:14; Cline 2013:3; Liu Institute Report 2005

Mukherjee, 1985:75; Allen 1991:381-82

There exist several contradictory reports on the position and power of the rwodi (Behrend 1999a:14).

Girling 1960:82ff in Behrend 1999a:15
Abila is a shrine for human ancestors, kac is an ancestor shrine for animals killed through hunt. (Ovuga 2015:4). p’Bitek uses abila and kac interchangeably for ancestral shrines. (1980:88,104)

sometimes spelled tibu (Meier 2013a)

Meier 2013a:234

Meier 2013a:234

Girling 1960:82ff in Meier 2013a:234

Behrend 1999a:15

Girling 1960:96 in Behrend 1999a:107

Behrend 1999a:108; Liu Institute for Global Issues et.al 2005

MacGaffey 1986 in Behrend 1999a:16

Cline 2013:3

Behrend 1999a:14

Behrend 1999a:15, 138.

Liu Institute 2005:11

Behrend 1999a:141

also called a messenger – lakwena. Example - Alice Auma ‘Lakwena’ was a messenger for the spirits.

Foucault 1992:107 in Behrend 1999a:144


Behrend 1999a:142-145

jogi - plural

Meier 2013a:232-233

Behrend 1999a:107

Meier 2013a:232 – as also calls for more research on Acholi cosmology.

Okot p’Bitek 1971:50 in Meier 2013b:22

Meier 2013a:232; 2013b:22

Present tense will be used about Acholi cosmology as it is still very much alive for many today.

Behrend 1999a:106-107

Behrend 1999a:106

Behrend 1999a:16, 45, 108

Cen is sometimes explained as a free jogi – right or wrong are left to be settled.

outside the Acholi community, especially outside the national borders.

Behrend 1999a:110-11, see more on the subject Werbner 1989:68

Behrend 1999a:110-11
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth

155 Behrend 1999a:111
156 Werbner 1989:239 in Behrend 1999a:111
157 Behrend 1999a:11
158 Liu Institute 2005:113
159 Behrend 1999a:104; 1999b:23
160 or nebbi
161 Behrend 1999b:23
162 and UPDA (Liu Institute 2005)
163 Behrend 1999a:106-107
164 To note; the Acholi themselves have no general term for sorcery in contrast to witchcraft (Behrend 1999a:112).
165 Meier 2013a:227
166 Behrend 1999a:112
167 Behrend 1999a:118
169 This refers to the Lugbara tribe, neighbors of the Acholi. Middleton 1963:274; Allen 1991:381
170 in this paper, in other words there are more.
171 Cline 2013:5
174 According to Job Akuni; What is designated as PTSD in the West, is viewed as a sign of an evil pronouncement or invocation in African tradition. (2011:33)
175 Ovuga and Abbo 2015:3
176 Porter 2013:99; Behrend 1999a:108; Liu Institute report 2005:113; Cline 2013; et. al
178 Behrend 1999a:108-111
179 a district in the middle of Uganda. (p’Bitek 1971/1980)
180 Behrend 1999a:24-28; Porter 2013:99
181 Porter 2013:98
182 According to JRP - a phenomenon now well-documented in Acholiland. I’m not sure if I can agree with this, at least I will add that there is a lot more to document. ( The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2007)
183 Honwana 2006 in The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2007:9
184 Liu Institute report 2005:112-113
185 Liu Institute report 2005:110
Ayweya is also used as a term for these jogi dwellings (Porter in O’Byrne 2015:42).


Ayweya are also a term for wild or free spirits that are held responsible for gemo in form of epidemics. These wild jogi penetrate both individual and the whole society and they cause ga marac - ‘bad things’. (Meier 2013a:235-236)

See more documented rituals in JRP report 2007:6. This includes; tum kulu - for girls who fought at the well, tumu bedo ki wat - for the case of incest, tum kir cele ki cente/lim - for people who threw money at each other, tumu butu latin ma obutu pat ki mine - cleansing a woman who had spent the night separate from her breast-feeding baby after a fight with her husband, moyo cere – for death and accident a particular spot where a massacre had happened. There is a ritual for almost every kiir committed.

tumu kiir means ‘cut with a knife’ - Porter 2013:101

I will return to this in chapter 12.
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth

Interview/conversation with Acholi elder in Gulu September 19, 2016

To substantiate my suggestion, I will present a figure—a timeline that will help to map out where young Acholi people has been located—under which environment, for the most part of their life. See appendix 1.

Mpyangu 2014:99

There are abductees in LRA today under 15, but not from Northern Uganda.

UNHCR 2012

Dunson 2008; Snow 2007; The Monitor 2017

Oosterom 2011:401; UNHCR/AVSI 2010

UNHCR 2012

Dolan 2009

Wegner 2012

Oosterom 2011:401; 2016:375-376

Allen and Reid 2014:110

Akuni 2011:78

Oosterom 2016:375-376

Annan and Blattman 2006:19

Kwero 2015

Kwero 2015

IRIN 2007

IRIN 2007

IRIN 2007

In 2007 UNHCR estimated about 1.2 mill people remained in the camps. UNHCR/AVSI 2010

UNHCR/AVSI 2010

UNHCR/AVSI 2010

UNHCR/AVSI 2010

Titeca 2010:59

According to researcher and specialist in African Studies; Kristof Titeca (2010:59)

Amnesty USA 1997

Titeca 2010:59

Ellis and Ter Haar 2004 in Titeca 2010:60

Jackson 2010:10

Wlodarczyk 2004 in Titeca 2010:60

Titeca also mentions the challenge to gather sources about spiritual and religious practices in LRA. “Hardly any written documents are available” (Titeca 2010:6)
To create a widespread culture of fear and guilt is a 'process of culpabilisation' (Jean Delumeau). Behrend, 1999a: 48 in Titeca 2010:62
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trondsen Booth

Dolan 2009:86; Allen1991; Behrend 1999a; Titeca 2010:66

Foucault 1973 in Behrend 1999a:32

Titeca 2010:69

Doom and Vlassenroot 1999: 25

Cakaj 2010

Interview/conversation with returned girls in Gulu September 29. 2016

Allen and Schommerus, 2006: 27

according to Kony recited by ex-commander in Titeca 2010:66

Titeca 2010:68

Allen and Schommerus, 2006: 27

Interview/conversation with returned former LRA soldier September 2016.

The Archbishop said he didn’t understand why the LRA was targeting the Catholic Church, why it suddenly had changed into a religious war targeting specifically the Catholic Church and particularly the leaders of the Catholic Church, like the priests, the religious nuns. (Voa News 2003)


Doom and Vlassenroot 1999:22

Interview/conversation with returned former LRA soldier September 2016.

Cakaj 2010

Cakaj 2010

Cakaj 2010


Human Rights Watch 2003; Cakaj 2010

Lubega 2002

Human Rights Watch 2003

Human Rights Watch 2003

Cakaj 2010
Scapegoats for social harmony.

Gøril Trondsen Booth

Jackson 2010:16
Titeca 2010:73
Berger 1967:27
Durkheim 1951:246-257; McGuire 2002:34
Botha 2016:23; Behrend 1991:173
Interview/conversation with returned girls in Gulu September 29. 2016
Botha 2016:24
Botha 2016:23
Johnson 2014 in Botha 2016:24
Behrend 1999b:111
Interview/conversation with returned former LRA commander September 19. 2016
Titeca 2010:60
Mæland 2010:5
Mpyangu 2014:105
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012
Baines 2007:93
For a more detailed description of above rituals, and more, I will refer to The Justice and Reconciliation Projects report in 2012 and the Roco Wat I Report, Liu Institute 2005
Interview/conversation with returned former LRA commander September 19. 2016
The Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012:7
Allen 2008; Liu Institute for Global Issues et.al 2005; Rose 2008
Mpyangu 2014:101
These rituals may be analyzed as ‘rites de passage’ (van Gennep1977(1960)), but since the effect is uncertain, they rather illustrate a weakening of a traditional Acholi society.
Mpyangu 2014:104
Mpyangu 2014:105
Mpyangu 2014:104-105, 108
Driver 2006:166 in Mpyangu 2014:107
Mpyangu 2014:108
Akuni 2011:34-35
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gørl Trøndsen Booth

343 Akuni 2011:34-35

344 Interview/conversation with returned girls in Gulu September 29. 2016; see also Ainebyona 2011:43

345 Latigo 2008:89

346 Latigo 2008:89

347 Ugandan Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Internal Affairs 1997 in Latigo 2008:89

348 Cline 2013:6; Jackson 2010:17, Acker 2004

349 Allen and Reid 2014:110


352 A presumption based on my interviews and conversations – but this needs to be closer examined.

353 Barth 1969; 1994

354 Barth 1969, 1974; Jenkins 2004

355 Barth 1969, 1994

356 Nielsen 2000

357 Barth 1969a:14 in Eriksen 1993:53

358 Barth 1969a:13 in Eriksen 1993:53

359 Eriksen 1993:54


362 the sole or ultimate purpose of something or someone

363 Eriksen 1993:54

364 Eriksen 1993:54

365 Eriksen 1993:54

366 Eriksen 1993:54

367 Allan 1994:112

368 a criticized term, see more (Moore 2005)

369 See more about kaka in Allen 1994:128

370 Allan 1994:133, 138

371 Allan 1994:134-137

372 ‘Other’ developed from Hegel’s concept of the self and self-consciousness (Edwards 1967:76)

373 in form of a parallel schismogenesis (Bateson 1935)

374 Joffé 2007:211

375 Joffé 2007:211

128
Scapegoats for social harmony. | Gøril Trøndsen Booth

378 Joffe 2007: 204
379 Freud 1920/1955; Kristeva 1980; Douglas 1982
380 ‘Other’ developed from Hegel’s concept of the self and self-consciousness (Edwards 1967:76) is widely used by scholars in all social fields, ex. Beauvoir 2000 (1949)
381 Said 1978 in Joffe 2007:198
382 Joffe 2007:197
383 Joffe 2007:201
384 Joffe 2007:203-204
386 Joffe 2007:202-203; see also Freud 1920/1955; Kristeva 1980; Douglas 1982
387 What’s causes abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”. (Kristeva 1982:4)
388 Joffe 2007:203
389 Joffe 2007:204
390 Joffe 2007:203-204
391 Joffe 2007:204-205
392 Joffe 2007:211
393 Joffe 2007:208
394 Joffe 2007:201
395 Perera 1986:98
397 M. Douglas 2003:121-125
398 M. Douglas 2003:121-125
399 M. Douglas 2003:122
400 Girard 1986 in M. Douglas 2003:121
401 M. Douglas 2003:122
402 Perera 1986:9
403 T. Douglas 1995:29
404 M. Douglas 1992:4
405 M. Douglas 1992:4
406 M. Douglas 1992:5
407 M. Douglas 1992:5

129
Their village identity was ambiguous and socially weak from the beginning, and must be understood within the context of Naples and southern Italy’s history. This is – as the Acholi - a history of conquest and foreign rule as well as discrimination and stereotypization as backwards from the northern Italians. (Goddard 1987:181-183)

M. Douglas 1984 (1966); 1997; Solheim 1998; Palmer 1989

Developed from William James 1929.
Palmer says here Western, but I believe it will be adequate to transfer the theory to a more general theory that fits Uganda many other places around the globe. (Palmer 1989:138)

Palmer 1989:138

Douglas 1997:9-13

Douglas 1997:9-13

Solheim in M. Douglas 1997:16; Solheim 1998

Douglas 1997:23

Driver 2006:137 in Mpyangu 2014:108

McGuire 2002:30, 52

Many sociological studies on religious meaning is based up on Max Weber. ex.1958a as for example ‘bad luck’, ‘market forces’, ‘God’s will’ McGuire 2002:26

Berger 1967:19; McGuire 2002:27

Geertz 1966:40 in McGuire 2002:27

http://central.gutenberg.org/articles/Peter_L._Berger

Berger 1967:30-31

Berger 1967:29ff

McGuire 2002:28

McGuire 2002:29

McGuire 2002:31

McGuire 2002:32

Berger 1967:24; McGuire 2002:33

McGuire 2002:33

McGuire 2002:33, 43

McGuire 2002:33

McGuire 2002:34-35

McGuire 2002:29, 34

Behrend 1999b:21; 1999a; 1991

McGuire 2002:29, 34-36

Durkheim 1951: 246-257; McGuire 2002:35

Berger 1967:27; McGuire 2002:35

McGuire 2002:36

McGuire 2002:36
Kony and Alice movements are also based on a dualistic world view.

From interview/conversations with returned girls from LRA in Gulu, Lamwo and Amuru September 2016.