

Roco Wat I Acoli

**Restoring Relationships in Acholi-land:
Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reintegration**



September, 2005

**Liu Institute for Global Issues
Gulu District NGO Forum
Ker Kwaro Acholi**



KER KWARO ACHOLI

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHY

Left: The Oput Root used in the Mato Oput ceremony, Erin Baines

Centre: Dancers at a communal cleansing ceremony, Lara Rosenoff

Right: A calabash holding the Oput and Kwete brew, Erin Baines

BACK COVER PHOTOGRAPHY

Background: Winnower for holding the Oput, and knife to slaughter sheep at a Mato Oput Ceremony, Carla Suarez

Insert: See above

ROCO WATI ACOLI

Restoring Relations in Acholi-land: Traditional Approaches To Reintegration and Justice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 19 year conflict in northern Uganda has resulted in one of the world's worst, most forgotten humanitarian crisis: 90 percent of the affected-population in Acholi is confined to internally displaced persons camps, dependant on food assistance. The civilian population is vulnerable to being abducted, beaten, maimed, tortured, raped, violated and murdered on a daily basis. Over 20,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and forced into fighting and sexual slavery. Up to 40,000 children commute nightly to sleep in centres of town and avoid abduction. Victims and perpetrators are often the same person, and currently there is no system of accountability for those most responsible for the atrocities. Given the scale and scope of the crisis, it is not surprising that an intense debate on the most appropriate strategy to realize peace and justice has emerged.

When the Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced its intention to investigate the LRA in 2004, many local leaders in northern Uganda were opposed to the initiative. Traditional, religious and civil society leaders have argued that the ICC places 'their' children at greater risk, and threatens to further damage their cultural identity and beliefs. Traditional justice, based on restorative principles, is widely supported as a favourable alternative to the punitive approach of the Court. A number of advocates, therefore, argue the Court should cease its current investigation until local approaches are given an opportunity to work, or until peace is realized in the region. Despite this, very little is known about traditional justice in Acholi beyond its normative dimensions.

This report, *Roco Wat I Acholi*, provides a much needed analysis of what traditional justice in northern Uganda is, how it is currently practiced and what value it could add. It documents existing practices of traditional justice in 16 internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Northern Uganda. It further examines how some of these rituals have been adapted to promote the reintegration of former rebels. It does so in order to provide an initial assessment of whether or not traditional rituals and ceremonies could be further adapted in the context of the enduring 19-year old conflict.

The findings suggest that the Acholi people continue to hold sophisticated cultural beliefs in the spirit world, which greatly shape their perceptions of truth, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. Nevertheless, traditional cultural practices and the role of Elders, Mego and Rwodi have been severely restricted by the conflict and circumstances of displacement. In the words of one Elder, 'these children don't know how to be Acholi'. Since their re-institutionalization in 2000, traditional leaders, through Ker Kwaro Acholi, have attempted to revitalize cultural rituals and practices, and to reach out to the population to encourage the safe reintegration of formerly abducted persons. Findings suggest that this initiative has had varying degrees of success on the ground, largely dependant upon the camp setting, leadership within the camp, as well as the individual circumstances the formerly abducted person (FAP) returns to, such as family life. Likewise, the approaches are often ad-hoc and lack coordination with other existing efforts, reflecting an institutional weakness of the organization.

Ker Kwaro Acholi must begin to define a unified, consensual vision of not only cultural contributions to the reintegration process, but also of how to adapt traditional justice mechanisms. This requires sorting out who should be subject to this justice process, as well as the mechanics of how this could take place. It will require local, national and international consultation and coordination with other stakeholders. For instance, the process of *Mato Oput* has received much attention by national and international stakeholders, with little understanding of what exactly is involved. The research found that the majority of Elders and Rwodi interviewed did not think that the process itself was possible to adapt in its current form. However, the principles, values and symbolic meaning of *Mato Oput* were considered essential to rebuilding a devastated Acholi-land, and should be carefully taken into consideration in the design of any future justice program in that region.

It is recommended at the conclusion of this report (see Chapter 6) that a Commission on Reintegration and Reconciliation be established in order to begin to investigate questions related to how best to: promote both justice and peace; facilitate reintegration and reconciliation; to maintain the momentum of the Amnesty Commission while at the same time ending the current impunity; and, to balance traditional and international approaches to justice.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ACRONYMS	VII
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW	3
PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT	6
METHODOLOGY.....	8
PARTICIPANTS	8
STRUCTURE OF REPORT.....	9
II ACHOLI JUSTICE.....	10
BACKGROUND TO SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ACHOLI.....	10
TRADITIONAL JUSTICE.....	14
<i>Trust</i>	14
<i>Voluntary Process</i>	14
<i>Compensation</i>	15
<i>Restoration</i>	16
III THE DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF ACHOLI CULTURE.....	20
THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON CULTURAL LEADERS	20
CHANGING ROLES OF WOMEN	23
THE GENERATION GAP: CHILDREN AND YOUTH	24
CULTURAL SURVIVAL	26
CULTURAL REVIVAL	30
IV CULTURAL PRACTICES AND REINTEGRATION	34
THE CHALLENGE OF REINTEGRATION	34
<i>Stigmatization and Resentment</i>	35
<i>Economic Challenges</i>	36
<i>Insecurity</i>	37
THE ADAPTATION OF CLEANSING RITUALS TO RETURNEES	39
COMMUNAL CEREMONIES TO PROMOTE REINTEGRATION.....	44
<i>Impact</i>	45
<i>Continuation</i>	46
THE LRA.....	49
V MATO OPUT AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE CURRENT CONTEXT.....	54
MATO OPUT	54
THE MATO OPUT CEREMONY.....	57
MATO OPUT CASE STUDY: PAJULE CAMP, APRIL 4, 2005.....	58
<i>Background</i>	58
<i>The Ceremony</i>	59
<i>Two Months Later</i>	61
<i>A Twist of Events</i>	61
<i>Lessons Learned</i>	64
ADAPTING MATO OPUT TO THE CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES.....	66
VI CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS.....	72
CONCLUSIONS	72
<i>Acholi Justice</i>	72

<i>Ker Kwaro and the Revival of Acholi Culture</i>	73
<i>Return and Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Persons (FAPs)</i>	73
<i>Mato Oput and its Relevance to the Current Context</i>	74
RECOMMENDATIONS	74
<i>Recommendations for the Establishment of a Commission</i>	75
<i>Recommendations to the KKA</i>	76
<i>Recommendations to the UN and NGOs</i>	77
<i>Recommendations to Donors</i>	77
<i>Recommendations to the Government of Uganda</i>	77
<i>General Recommendations</i>	78
GRAPHS	80
1. AGE AT ABDUCTION	81
2. AGE OF RETURN	82
3. DID YOU TELL ANYONE OF YOUR EXPERIENCES / WHAT YOU DID?	83
4. FOLLOW UPS BY RWODI AND/OR ELDERS	84
5. FOLLOW UPS BY REHABILITATION CENTRES	85
6. REHABILITATION CENTRES ATTENDED BY RETURNEES.....	86
7. PARTICIPATION OF FAP IN PRAYER CEREMONIES	87
8. PARTICIPATION OF FAP IN FAMILY CLEANSING CEREMONIES	88
9. PARTICIPATION OF FAP IN COMMUNAL CLEANSING CEREMONIES.....	89
APPENDICES	90
APPENDIX 1 - RECORDS OF MATO OPUT 2000-2005	91
APPENDIX 2 - LIST OF COMMUNAL CLEANSING CEREMONIES BY KKA.....	95
APPENDIX 3 - LIST OF INTERVIEWS, MEETINGS AND CAMPS IN THE STUDY.....	98
APPENDIX 4 - CASE STUDIES	105
<i>Family Cleansing Ceremony, Lacor, Gulu</i>	105
<i>Moyo Piny – Corner Kilak, Pader</i>	107
APPENDIX 5 - EXAMPLES OF KIIR	111
APPENDIX 6 - STRUCTURE OF A TYPICAL CLAN.....	113
<i>Structure of Ker Kwaro Acholi</i>	114
APPENDIX 7 - MASSACRE SITES REQUIRING RITUALS	115
APPENDIX 8 - DATA BREAKDOWN	119
<i>Age at Abduction</i>	119
<i>Age at Return</i>	121
APPENDIX 9 - GLOSSARY	123

Acronyms

Formerly Abducted Child	FAC
Formerly Abducted Person	FAP
International Criminal Court	ICC
Internally Displaced Persons	IDP
Ker Kwaro Acholi	KKA
Local Council	LC
Lord's Resistance Army	LRA
National Resistance Movement/Army	NRM/A
Sexual/Gender Based Violence	SGBV
Uganda National Liberation Army	UNLA
Uganda People's Defence Force	UPDF

I INTRODUCTION

We have to understand our culture and know what kind of people we are. Are we the kind that are willing to accept other people's mistakes without pointing fingers? Are we the kind of people who can confess truthfully and forgive wholeheartedly? - Paramount Chief, David Onen Acana II¹

This report documents existing practices of traditional justice in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in northern Uganda. Further, it examines how some of these rituals have been adapted to promote the reintegration of former rebels. It does so in order to provide an initial assessment of how traditional rituals and ceremonies could be further adapted to address the crimes committed during the 19-year old conflict in Uganda.

The 19 year conflict in Northern Uganda has resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian crisis: 90 percent of the affected-population in Acholi is confined to internally displaced persons camps, dependant on food assistance. Over 20,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and forced into fighting and sexual slavery. Due to fear of abduction, up to 40,000 children commute nightly to sleep in centres of town and avoid abduction.

The Government of Uganda has adopted a two-prong strategy to end the conflict: a military campaign; and a general amnesty. While the LRA have been severely weakened, the human costs of the military strategy have been high. Internal displacement has quadrupled, and abduction doubled in the two years following the launch of Operation Iron Fist I. In addition, the number of formerly abducted children killed in military engagement while unknown, is feared to be high. Members of Ugandan civil society, therefore, are strongly opposed to the military campaign, and advocate in favour of the Amnesty Act passed in 2001 by the Government to encourage the return and reintegration of LRA, and peaceful talks.

Against this backdrop, the ICC announced in January 2004 its intention to investigate atrocities committed during the course of the conflict, and to arrest and try those most responsible. Much to the surprise of supporters of the Court, the announcement was met with little enthusiasm by civil society in Uganda. The reasons were two-fold. First, it was feared that prosecution at this time would undermine the Amnesty and attempts at peace talks. Second, it was argued that international approaches to justice were inappropriate to the current context, and possibly undermined traditional approaches to justice.

The report was researched, written and finalized in the midst of new debates about how and when justice can be pursued in the context of ongoing conflict.² These debates involve much

¹ Interview, Gulu Town, July 2005.

² See CSOPNU, *The International Criminal Court investigation in northern Uganda*, briefing paper, 1 February 2005, csopnu@yahoo.com; ICC: *Investigate All Sides in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch, 4 February 2004, Website <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/04/uganda7264.htm>>; Amnesty International, *Uganda: International Criminal Court investigation an important step toward ending impunity*, 30 January 2004, Website <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR590062004?open&of=ENG-385>>, International Criminal

speculation about the appropriateness of international versus traditional justice mechanisms, and the advantages of the traditional approach of ‘truth-telling’ versus blanket amnesty when seeking to end the conflict peacefully.

Many of these debates are ill-informed as to what traditional justice practices exist on the ground.³ As a review of the literature reveals, there is a general lack of easily accessible written documentation on traditional practices relating to justice in the 53 IDP camps in Acholi-land. This report seeks to fill this knowledge gap and to stimulate debate, discussion and action on what next steps might be pursued or supported by the consortium of local, national and international stakeholders.

The researchers chose the title *Roco Wat I Acholi* (the restoration of relationships) because it captures the essence of Acholi approaches to justice. It also recognizes that after nearly two decades of conflict, social relationships and trust within a traditionally communal culture have been severely degraded. Consequently, so has Acholi culture, and the prominent role cultural leaders (Chiefs, Elders and *Mego*) once held in society. Due to mass displacement, youth have little opportunity to learn about their history or culture. It is estimated that over 90 percent of the population lives in these camps, without access to their land and homesteads - the heart of cultural practices and learning.

But there is cause for some optimism. The re-institutionalization of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA - the cultural institution of Acholi) in 1995 provides a foundation to rejuvenate traditional culture and restore relationships. For instance, the leadership of KKA has begun to stimulate the use of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in camps, and is revisiting traditional by-laws and practices to adapt to current circumstances. These developments are worth a serious and lengthy investigation of KKA, in order to assess their impact and generate ways to support them.

Court, *Situation in Uganda*, Website < http://www.icc-cpi.int/cases/current_situations/Uganda.html>; Tim Allen, *War and Justice in Northern Uganda: An Assessment of the International Criminal Court's Intervention*, Crisis States Research Centre, February 2005, DRAFT, Website <<http://www.crisisstates.com/download/others/AllenICCRReport.pdf>>; Lucy Hovil and Joanna R. Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later: Traditional Justice in Northern Uganda*, Working Paper no 17, Refugee Law Project, July 2005, Website < <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/papers/workingpapers/RLP.WP17.pdf>>; Lucy Hovil and Zachary Lomo, *Whose Justice? Perceptions of Uganda's Amnesty Act 2000: The Potential for Conflict Resolution and Long-term Resolution*, Working Paper No 15, Refugee Law Project, February 2005, Website < <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/papers/workingpapers/RLP.WP15.pdf>>; Zachary Lomo and Lucy Hovil, *Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences and the Search for Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda*, Working Paper No 11, Refugee Law Project, February 2004, Website < <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/papers/workingpapers/RLP.WP11.pdf>>; *Forgotten Voices: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda*, International Center for Transitional Justice and The Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, July 2005, Website < <http://www.ictj.org/downloads/ForgottenVoices.pdf>>; Erin Baines et al, *Northern Uganda Human Security Update: Pursuing Peace and Justice: International and Local Initiatives*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, May 2005, Website < <http://www.ligi.ubc.ca/admin/Information/480/Justice-Peace-Liu-May05.pdf>>; Adam Branch, ‘International Justice, Local Injustice: The International Criminal Court in Northern Uganda’, *Dissent Magazine*, Summer 2004.

³ Exceptions are a series of unpublished Working Papers by Caritas Gulu Archdiocese (1-20) and the International Rescue Committee in Gulu Town, 2004 and 2005, kindly availed to the researchers and referenced throughout this report where relevant.

The process of reviving traditional justice is not an easy task. Many questions arise about as to the relative merits of a long and spiritual approach to justice, especially where there is an immediate need for people to realize peace, return home, and know the truth about why they have been forced to live in such circumstances. In order to play a positive role, cultural leaders in Acholi need first to reflect on – as the Paramount Chief of Acholi suggests – who they are as a people, and what they want in the form of justice. While Acholi leaders have unwaveringly fought for forgiveness and amnesty as an official policy to end the war, the findings of the report suggest that the lived realities of those in the camp, and the contending political agendas of the parties to the conflict (as well as advocates of peace), require that this policy be revisited to take into consideration the complexities of justice at these levels.

One of these complexities is that the lines between perpetrator and victim are blurred by the fact that tens of thousands of ‘rebels’ were forcibly recruited into the ranks of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Under the command of Joseph Kony, the LRA has carried out a brutal war not only against the Government of Uganda but against the people of Acholi and neighbouring regions. Young adults and children compose a disproportionate number of the abductees, and have been forced to commit gross violations against their own families and communities. As they escape or are captured from the LRA, they return to impoverished and insecure camp settings. These camps are seen as a gross violation of human rights in themselves, and some demand that the Government of Uganda be held to account for their creation and continuation. The Ugandan People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) – charged with the protection of IDP camps - have also been accused of violating human rights, including indiscriminate torture, murder, and rape.

What form of justice can possibly apply to this situation? This question is further complicated by the fact that formerly abducted persons (FAPs) stay for varying lengths with the LRA, hold different ranks, and participate in different forms and levels of violence. Similarly, who is responsible in the Government of Uganda for atrocities carried out by the UPDF? While the Government claims that such acts are committed by a few undisciplined soldiers, the cumulative years of violence demands a full investigation.

How to address these complexities is a question that has yet to be adequately answered by the stakeholders. Yet as the research findings reveal, their reintegration into camps has been riddled with resentment, tensions and in some cases, violence.

A Brief Literature Review

A number of detailed historical texts describe traditional Acholi approaches to resolving conflict and realizing justice in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.⁴ There

⁴ See F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, London, HMSO, 1960; R.A. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994; J.P. Crazzolaro, “The Lwoo Part I: Lwoo Migrations”; “The Lwoo Part II: Lwoo Traditions”, and “The Lwoo part III: Lwoo Clans”, Verona, Museum Combonianum/Instituto missioni africane, 1950, 1951 and 1954; Onyango-ku-Odongo and J.B. Webster (eds), *The Central Lwo During the Aconya*, Nairobi, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1976; Okot p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, Nairobi, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1971.

are also a wealth of informants – namely Acholi Elders – who can recall traditional justice as practiced within villages when they were young, and how such practices were affected by the introduction of the British colonial administration.

However, few reports have attempted a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the conflict on such practices, processes and approaches in the current context. To be sure, Elders are able to describe the devastating impact of the conflict on Acholi beliefs and traditions. However, no documentation currently exists to elaborate how Acholi traditional culture might be adapted to address the forms of war crimes inflicted upon the civilian population. Indeed, as most Elder informants in this report acknowledged, some of the current war crimes are unprecedented within Acholi-land, and pose a significant challenge to traditional justice based on restorative principles.

For instance, LRA massacres, mass rape, abduction, arson and mutilation are not crimes Acholi Elders are familiar with in the history of the region. Although variants of such crimes have existed in Acholi history (Nubians, Arab slave trade), the scale and devastation on the population have not been witnessed before. One of the most challenging aspects to adapting traditional justice to these crimes is the fact that most LRA are considered to be the ‘children’ of Acholi; that is, most were abducted and forced to commit crimes, mass rape and massacres on a scale without precedent.

Despite these grave conceptual, contextual and ethical challenges, in the past decade, traditional justice has frequently been upheld as a ‘complementary’ form of justice to Western judicial processes and holds promise for promoting long-term reconciliation and peace in the region, if not the country. This argument has been advanced, in part, out of recognition of the inadequacy of applying a solely Western judicial process.

For example, in Dennis Pain’s *The Bending of Spears*, it was suggested that Western law is not equipped to address the social, cultural and economic devastation of the northern conflict. “In particular, it is incapable of coming up with a resolution which has a healing effect on society.”⁵ Pain argued that the principle and practice of *Mato Oput*, based on “self-reflection, recognition of wrongs committed, repentance and reconciliation”, was a desirable alternative in this case, and he urged the international community to support the process of strengthening traditional leadership structures and initiating *Mato Oput*.

Pain’s report served as a catalyst of sorts. Following its release, ACORD and the Belgian Government began an extensive search for the descendants of *Rwot Moo* (anointed Chiefs) in 52 major clans of Acholi-land. In 2000, these Chiefs were formally institutionalized, and so began a series of internationally and locally supported efforts to bolster the roles of Chiefs and Elders in conflict resolution.

The report and subsequent initiatives to restore Acholi traditional institutions led to new interest by legal minds and activists alike. In a study of justice in northern Uganda in 2000, *African Rights* stressed the equivalencies of traditional mechanisms to judicial mechanisms – such as the concept of precedence and ground for appeal – in order to illustrate its potential

⁵ Dennis Pain, *The Bending of the Spears: Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda*, London: International Alert and Kacoke Madit, 1997, p 59.

to act as an alternative justice mechanism.⁶ In most reports at this time, there was an underlying assumption that traditional justice could set the groundwork for a transition to peace and reconciliation.

It was only with the announcement of intentions to investigate the LRA by the Chief Prosecutor to the International Criminal Court, together with President Yoweri Museveni at a London-based press conference in January 2004 that the flurry of debate regarding the sequencing of peace and justice begin to heat up. This debate also extended to the question of whether or not traditional and Western justice were compatible and what impact either process had on the potential for fostering a peace process.⁷

The Refugee Law Project (RLP), a Kampala based, action-oriented research group, was remarkably unambiguous in its position on this issue, outlined in a position paper on the impact of the ICC in July 2004.⁸ Applying a political analysis to the circumstances surrounding the announcement of the ICC's intentions and eventual decision to investigate LRA war crimes in the North, the RLP concluded that the Chief Prosecutor had in fact been manipulated by President Museveni who wished to stave off international pressure to end his military campaign, Operation Iron Fist. Urging the Prosecutor to be more mindful of existing attempts by the Amnesty Commission, civil society and local traditional and religious leaders, the RLP predicted the ICC's investigation would undermine a peaceful alternative to resolve the conflict⁹ and indeed, would result in escalating violence and atrocities.¹⁰

In a second, more in depth study of local perceptions of justice and the Amnesty Act¹¹, the RLP further concluded the ICC undermined the Amnesty Act, and therefore, was not acting in the best interests of the victims who were found to overwhelmingly support it. The RLP found a remarkable level of forgiveness and restraint within the local populace absorbing returnees, which RLP attributed to Acholi cultural values and ideas about justice. However, they also noted with concern that in order to be sustainable, initiatives to facilitate peaceful reintegration need to extend to a process of truth-telling and accountability:

...numerous respondents emphasized the fact that [the Amnesty Act] resonates with specific cultural understandings of justice: amnesty is taking place within societies in which the possibility of legal and social pardon is seen to better address the requirements for long-term reconciliation than more tangible forms of punishment meted out within the legal structures. However, the findings also indicate that lack of formal mechanisms for the process of truth-telling, or the admittance of guilt on the part of former combatants, is currently hindering the process of reconciliation...the admittance of guilt on the part of combatants is vital to creating the necessary conditions for healing to take place. Currently there is no formal mechanism for this to take place, and it is vital that one be created – although it is also important to note that any truth-telling process inevitably needs to be handled with extreme caution. Indeed, there needs to be considerable commitment from former combatants, community members and the government alike to follow through the process of amnesty.

⁶ *Northern Uganda: Justice in Conflict*, African Rights, 20 January 2000, Website <<http://www.africanrights.unimondo.org/html/ugand001.html>>.

⁷ Tim Allen, *War and Justice in Northern Uganda*, 2005.

⁸ RLP, Position Paper on the ICC, 2004.

⁹ See especially, Hovil and Lomo, *Whose Justice?*, 2005, p. 7-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* See pp 2 – 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Without addressing these two issues, there is a danger that the Amnesty Act could, in the long run, become divisive.¹²

In a third study on justice in Northern Uganda, *Peace First, Justice Later*, RLP found that the Amnesty Act appears to be a useful mechanism for ending the war, but not to pursue justice.¹³ In this report, traditional approaches to justice are examined for how they might fulfill requirements of accountability, build social trust and foster reconciliation. RLP concludes, alongside reports by the New York based International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and London School of Economics anthropologist, Dr. Tim Allen, that it appears the Uganda public are still far from clear about what form of justice is most appropriate in the post-conflict period, let alone in the current context of on-going conflict.¹⁴ At least one priority of the population is discernable: people want peace. Whether or not the pursuit of justice can facilitate the process of peacemaking is less clear from interviews with the local war-affected population. While RLP has a degree of optimism about traditional justice, the ICTJ report found a low percentage of the population even recognized traditional justice institutions and practices. Allen is skeptical of the representative legitimacy of KKA today, particularly among the younger generations.

However, these reports are not an analysis of traditional practices as practiced with returnees or in the camps *per se*, and thus such conclusions are still untested. The extent to which the ritual and principles of *Mato Oput*, which involves such a process at the level of individual crimes, and facilitates reconciliation between conflicting parties involved, can be adapted to fulfill this role is also unexplored. The dividing issue on timing (when best to pursue justice in the context of war), moreover, is ill informed given the lack of factual data. For instance, in debates regarding peace vs. justice, it appears the principal referent is the ICC and not traditional justice.

Purpose of this Report

This report lends some insight into these challenging debates, without seeking to definitively answer them. It does so in recognition that such debates are ones that must be addressed through a process of dialogue among all stakeholders to peace and justice processes – local, national and international – and that in order to move from the current, sometimes rhetorical level of debate, a common reference point and factual data is required.

The research was born out of a three-year relationship between the Acholi community of traditional and religious leaders, human rights workers and the NGO community, and the Liu Institute for Global Issues.¹⁵ On the eve of Operation Iron Fist I¹⁶, these groups collectively came together to document human security issues stemming from the military

¹² *Ibid.*, p 1 and 5.

¹³ Hovil and Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later*, 2005.

¹⁴ ICTJ, *Forgotten Voices*, 2005; Tim Allen, *War and Justice in Northern Uganda*, 2005.

¹⁵ For a history of this relationship, see Liu Institute for Global Issues, Canada, *The Origins and Activities of The Coalition for Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda*, Vancouver, Liu Institute for Global Issues, 22 January 2004, Website <<http://www.up.ligi.ubc.ca/HistoryoftheCoalition.pdf>>

¹⁶ Operation Iron Fist I began in March 2002. *Background on the Conflict in Northern Uganda*, Human Rights First, *no date*, Website <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/international_justice/regions/uganda/uganda.htm>

campaign and advocacy for local, national and international actions to protect the vulnerable and resolve the conflict.¹⁷ The collective went on to support research into the roots of the conflict, and lobbied both in Kampala and internationally for swifter responses to the crisis at hand.¹⁸

Following the announcement of the Chief Prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, from the International Criminal Court (ICC) that he would investigate crimes committed since July 2002, members in this loose coalition recognized the urgency of documenting local traditional justice mechanisms, and to analyze the role cultural leaders were playing or could play in the promotion of justice in the region. The terms of reference for the project were to identify and describe:

- a) Justice from the perspective of Acholi traditional culture;
- b) The processes and mechanisms of traditional justice;
- c) Traditional rituals and ceremonies for promoting reintegration of formerly abducted persons (FAPs);
- d) How traditional justice practices and rituals are being adapted; and,
- e) How such processes could be further adapted to address the crimes committed during the course of the war.

The report therefore moves beyond the normative discussion of Acholi justice to include an assessment of current practices within the context of displacement. It strives to provide an initial assessment of the adaptation of traditional practices of cleansing and welcoming back returnees. As Acholi justice purports to be a restorative approach, traditional rituals being aimed at reintegration, it appears to be particularly fitting to also assess also the potential of Acholi justice as it could be applied to other groups, such as former commanders.

At the sunrise of a new Presidential election, which has once again opened a Pandora's Box regarding questions of national unity in Uganda, the report's authors recognize that such dilemmas also revolve around questions of representation and identity. While focused exclusively on Acholi initiatives, it would be neglectful to assume that regional, national and international actors and factors do not shape or influence either the conflict or Acholi initiatives. On the contrary, while often described as a conflict that has tragically turned Acholi against Acholi, the international and national role of governments and non-governmental organizations, as well as the Diaspora, have helped to both sustain and transform the conflict throughout the past 19 years. The report therefore recognizes the need for future discussions of how to extend this discussion to neighbouring, national and international questions about justice and reconciliation, a subject that falls beyond the scope of this report.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, New York, Human Rights Watch, July 2003, Website<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/uganda0703/>>

¹⁸ See Coalition for Peace and Security, *War in Acholiland and its Ramifications for Peace and Security in Uganda*, Vancouver, Liu Institute for Global Issues, 2003, Website <http://www.up.ligi.ubc.ca/_assets/031106uganda_fullreport.pdf>

Methodology

The research was carried out by the Liu Institute for Global Issues with the assistance of the Gulu District NGO Forum and the support of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA). It involved a seven month study (February-August 2005) in sixteen internally displaced camps in the Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, involving over 120 interviews with Elders, Rwodi and Mego; 506 formerly abducted persons; 2 former LRA commanders; 80 displaced persons; and an array of religious groups and NGOs. It also included case studies, using observational techniques and/or semi-structured questions with participants. These case studies included a *Mato Oput* ceremony in Pajule, a *Moyo Piny* ceremony in Corner Kilak, a cleansing ritual of a FAP in Lacor and half a dozen communal cleansing ceremonies in all three districts.

This primary research involved ten qualitative structured surveys, each designed for a different set of informants. It was sometimes necessary to move beyond the questionnaire if the informant raised issues that were new and relevant to the research. However, each informant completed the same survey questions so that answers could later be compiled and compared. One quantitative survey was conducted with 506 formerly abducted persons, from which a database was compiled. Through the database, a series of tables, charts and graphs were compiled to produce the statistics used throughout this report. Some of these tables and graphs are found in this report between Chapters IV and V.

In early August, the preliminary findings were organized into a short report which was then presented and discussed in a participatory, consultative workshop with 32 Elders, *Rwodi*, *Mego* and other supporters of Ker Kwaro on August 12-13th at GUSCO Peace Centre. The workshop provided an opportunity to clarify terms and references, and promote ownership of the findings. The workshop was held in Luo with 32 persons, including the attendance of the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands, the Amnesty Commissioner and presided over by His Highness David Onen Acana II. Participants generously worked long hours in order to jointly develop the recommendations found in the report, and we thank them for their insightful contributions. The research also involved a literature review of international and local reports, the latter of which were gathered with the generous help of Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, LDI, ARLPI, IRC, CPA, KICWA, AVSI, and KKA. We are also grateful for their assistance in availing unpublished works and providing insight on the rituals documented in this report.

Participants

Gulu-based researchers include Kevin Aciro, Dorothy Omuk and Boniface Ojok, under the supervision of Michael Otim, Gulu District NGO Forum Coordinator. Boniface Ojok served as the project officer as well, greatly facilitating the movements of the research teams. Research design and analysis were supported by Dr. Erin Baines, Carla Suarez and Elizabeth St. Jean of the Liu Institute for Global Issues, as well as the support of Heidi Rose for programme assistance in Canada. Dr. Erin Baines spent two months conducting observational research in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader in the months of February and March of 2005. Ker Kwaro Acholi and the researchers then met in a feedback workshop in late March 2005 to go over the terms of reference, design and to share initial findings. Research

assistants were trained, and the surveys were piloted in early April. The Gulu team carried out surveys from the end of April through August, culminating in the consultative feedback workshop with Ker Kwaro to discuss findings and develop a set of recommendations (see the sister report, Report of Key Findings and Recommendations).

The report would not have been possible without the generous assistance of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands, contributions from MindsetMedia and in-kind support of Ker Kwaro Acholi, the Gulu District NGO Forum and Liu Institute for Global Issues.

Structure of Report

The report is divided into four main chapters. Chapter II, *Acholi Justice*, describes the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Acholi, setting the stage for better understanding Acholi conceptions of justice. The findings of what was most valued in Acholi justice by informants, and how traditional justice was once practiced in Acholi prior to colonialism and the conflict, are then considered.

Chapter III, *The Decline and Revival of Acholi Culture*, analyzes the impact of the conflict on social roles, relations and trust. This chapter was considered a necessary backdrop to assess both the process of cultural reintegration (as applied to formerly abducted persons – largely youth) in camp settings, reconciliation rituals and ceremonies, and the challenges of adapting traditional justice mechanisms to the current circumstances.

In Chapter IV, *Cultural Practices and Reintegration*, the report presents the findings of qualitative interviews with 35 returnees about their experiences reintegrating into camp settings across all three Districts. It then presents a description of rituals and ceremonies currently being held with returnees, and assesses their initial impact based on findings from the quantitative survey with 506 returnees. Finally, it argues such rituals form part of the traditional justice process in Acholi, setting the stage for building trust and confidence in cultural approaches, despite certain limitations.

Chapter V, *Mato Oput and its Relevance to the Current Conflict*, presents the general principles, processes and ritual ceremony involved in *Mato Oput*. It examines a case study of a *Mato Oput* in Pajule to highlight the weaknesses and strengths of the current process. Finally, the findings of interviews with Elders on if and how *Mato Oput* could be adapted to address the current crimes are considered.

In each Chapter, key findings are presented in boxes for the ease of the reader.

II ACHOLI JUSTICE

*The story of justice in the north is a tale of the emasculation of the formal institutions and the resilience of alternatives in the face of the most serious adversity.*¹⁹

This Chapter unfolds into two parts: the spiritual dimensions of Acholi culture, and an analysis of the most important aspects of Acholi justice. First, an exploration of the spiritual dimension among Acholi is presented in order to provide a backdrop to the rest of the report. It argues that the phenomenon of *cen* and spirits are believed to play an active role in leading perpetrators of crimes to voluntarily submit to the process of justice. Second, it outlines the traditional mechanisms for realizing justice prior to colonialism, illustrating that different courts existed for different crimes. Historically, compensation and rituals were highly employed to promote restoration of relations. Today, traditional courts have largely been replaced by the state. While not viewing traditional justice to be ‘above the law’, cultural leaders highlighted what they believe are some of the fundamental problems with the formal legal system, and argued traditional justice continues to be a practiced and much desired supplement to this system.

Background to Spiritual Dimensions of the Acholi

Historically, the good health and happiness of the Acholi individual was always situated in the context of the harmony and well-being of the clan. The ancestral and religious spirit worlds provided guidance to the Acholi people, maintaining the unity of the clan. Conversely, conflicts, misfortune and poor health could be ‘sent’ by angry spirits, and extended not only to the violator of moral codes, but to his or her family and clan. Thus one person’s actions always had ramifications for his or her family and clan who in turn assumed collective responsibility for the offence. It is this spiritual dimension of the Acholi which is little understood by non-Acholi and therefore is the focus of the first section of this chapter.

The majority of Acholi people continue to hold sophisticated cultural beliefs in the spirit world which greatly shape their perceptions of justice and reconciliation. Jok (Gods or divine spirits) and ancestor spirits guide the Acholi moral order, and when a wrong is committed, they send misfortune and illness (cen) until appropriate actions are taken by Elders and the offender.

Historically, Acholi culture produced a hierarchical social order rigorously maintained through social compliance to a central value system.²⁰ These values were connected to a

¹⁹ African Rights. *Northern Uganda: Justice in Conflict*, Kampala, Uganda, 20 January 2000, p.1.

²⁰ See F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, London, HMSO, 1960; R.A. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994; J.P. Crazzolara,

spirit world, which in turn was intimately connected with the conduct of persons in everyday life. A communal society, the Acholi valued first and foremost the unity of the clan. As a result, each member of the social unit was expected to fulfill different but complementary productive, reproductive, and cultural roles. The religious and spiritual worlds – through spiritual representatives and selected human representatives – actively enforced codes of behaviour. The spiritual beliefs continue to be widely held by Acholi in camp settings, although conditions of the camp have led to a proliferation of abominations and decline in use of rituals (See Chapter II, The Decline and Revival of Acholi Culture).

According to informants, the Acholi believe in *Jok* (god or divine spirit) as well as the active presence of ancestral and foreign spirits. Most informants identified the *Jok* as a divine or God-like spirit. There are many different *Jogi* (plural of *Jok*), who preside in specific abodes (rivers, rock outcrops, mountains, forests). For instance, each clan has its own *Jok* or *Jogi*, which was depended upon for success in agriculture, hunting and in times of war. *Jok* were appealed to at the *Wang Jok* (spirit shrine), which was typically located in the abode of *Jok*.²¹ Sacrifices were made to ask for favours or blessings, or to prevent disasters from occurring, or to give thanks.

Elders, considered closest to *Jok*, made such sacrifices at the clan shrines. However, many shrines to *Jok* have been destroyed during the course of the conflict, purposefully and strategically targeted by both the LRA and UPDF. Those that remain are often in areas inaccessible to the internally displaced person. Nevertheless, in general informants still appeared to believe in the power and presence of *Jok*, even if cut off from the means of communicating or worshipping them, or if their understanding of them has been transformed through the adoption of an external set of religious beliefs.

In addition to *Jok*, informants spoke about ancestral spirits who provide guidance to their respective lineages on how to maintain the communal and unified whole. Like *Jogi*, the spirits of ancestors protected and guided a moral and social order, sending misfortune or illness whenever that order was disturbed, particularly at the family level.

Prior to the conflict, *ladit kaka* (Elders) would conduct a series of rituals within village settings and household compounds in order to appease the ancestors and ensure the moral order was upheld. According to Ladit Alfred Adonga, “all rituals...are meant to inculcate good behaviour.” He elaborates that, “for good behaviour to be entrenched in Acholi, all acts of misbehaviour are linked to the spiritual world. Anyone who acts contrary to established norms displeases our ancestors and rituals should be performed to appease them. If the ancestors are annoyed...they cast curses in the form of death, diseases, drought, madness and so on.”²²

The Luvoo Part I: Luvoo Migrations; The Luvoo Part II: Luvoo Traditions, and *The Luvoo part III: Luvoo Clans*, Verona, Museum Combonianum/Instituto missioni africane, 1950, 1951 and 1954; Onyango-ku-Odongo and J.B.Webster (eds), *The Central Luo During the Aconya*, Nairobi, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1976; Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, Nairobi, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1971.

²¹ Historically, every *Rwot Moo* (anointed Chiefs) had a shrine. He was also endowed with the power to offer blessings to his people on important events. For instance, to date people still approach *Rwot-Moo* to bless seeds for a good harvest.

²² Ladit Alfred Adonga, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 14 May 2005.

Through lengthy interviews with cultural leaders, it was explained that cen is sent when a wrong against the dead has been committed. The phenomenon of cen illustrates the centrality of relationships between the natural and supernatural worlds in Acholi, the living and the dead, and the normative continuity between an individual and the community.

Cen was described by Elders and *Mego* as the entrance of an angry spirit into the physical body of a person or persons that seeks appeasement, usually in the form of a sacrifice or, in the case of a ‘wrongful death’, compensation and reconciliation between the clan of the offended and offender. The spirit manifests as *cen*, which will ‘haunt’ the wrongdoers by entering their mind or body in the form of visions and nightmares that may result in mental illness and sickness until the wrong is made right. *Cen* can also send nightmares and sickness to the rest of the family of the individual involved, so threatens not only the individual, but the family and community.

Cen manifests over a period of time²³ in several ways, but typically attacks the family or sub-clan of a person who: 1) treated the dead or dying in an ill-manner (a form of *keii* – or abomination); 2), committed murder or manslaughter; and, 3) inherited the wrong-doing from a parent or grandparent.²⁴

First, treatment of the dead and dying are central processes and practices in Acholi. For example, if one dies “in a bad way” (through neglect by family members, by being forced from the family home in anger, or because they were denied food), the spirit of the dead will not rest, or, will actively seek to correct the wrong committed in the form of *cen*. As a result, elaborate burial and funeral rituals and ceremonies have evolved to show respect to the dead, and are considered vital to maintain the well being of the clan. *Cen* also haunts those who have disrespected the dead, either by failing to provide a proper burial, or for failing to show adequate respect.²⁵

A number of younger informants recalled that during periods of extreme violence during the conflict, they would pass dead bodies in the street on their way to school and were instructed by their parents that they must always place a leaf of the *olwedo* tree (or any other in its absence) on the body to show respect, and ward off *cen*. Likewise, as many may pass the dead on the road – due to accidents or violence related to the conflict – the same practice is required. *Cen* can gather in places where a person’s death occurred, and enter one who moves through this place. Hence, people are reluctant to move through or live around sites of *cen*, such as places where traffic accidents occurred or, too commonly in Acholi, massacre sites.

²³ Some respondents argued *cen* could take decades to manifest. Indeed, several cases examined in the course of the research illustrated this was the case, see the case study of *Mato Oput* in Pajule, Chapter V.

²⁴ Ladit Jurubabel Ojok also argued that a family of a person who committed suicide were also susceptible to *cen*.

²⁵ For instance, Ladit John Moro argued *cen* could be ‘got’ from a spirit of a mother who died if her relatives were not given proper *panejo*, that is, a type of contribution or compensation (usually livestock), wasn’t paid by people attending the funeral. Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 May 2005.

Second, *cen* manifests in persons who purposely committed an act of murder that is unresolved. In some clans, this extends to accidental death or manslaughter. In either case, the responsibility for setting things right falls not only on the individual, but the family and community of Elders within the clan. One Elder gave an example of what the spirit might say if contacted:

I'm very annoyed with you the Elders. When I was murdered you didn't ask for compensation from such and such clan. Or, when I died you didn't bury me at home [referring to a person who died in the bush]. Or, when I died, you didn't perform last funeral rites (*guru hye*). I therefore demand a sheep, hen, cow, revenge, compensation etc.²⁶

Third, persons can inherit *cen* from the wrong doings of a parent.²⁷ *Cen* is said to manifest over a long period of time and therefore, may manifest only in the second generation of the wrongdoer. It is said that a baby can be born with *cen*, if the mother or father also had *cen*. Alternatively, *cen* might not even manifest in the wrongdoer themselves, but in future generations; a reason why Elders are concerned about future generations of former rebels. As one Elder stated: "If *cen* is not ritualized, it may follow the family lineage of the killer."

The types of rituals used to "chase *cen*" depend on the clan affected and the act which led to *cen*. In most cases, the sacrifice of an animal, or the slaughter of an animal is used to chase away "bad spirits" to the setting sun. In the current context, many Elders argued poverty limited their ability to carry out rituals. In some cases, livestock was substituted; for instances, herbs were used in Acholi-bur when no livestock was available.

Often, when the source of *cen* is not readily apparent, Elders may consult one another and the affected family or sub-clan to determine the circumstances that must be addressed. If this fails, Elders will often call upon diviners, or healers, *ajwaka*.²⁸ Using 'powerful rituals,' *ajwaka* are adept in interpreting whether or not a person has *ayweya* (a collection of bad things) or *cen*, and if so, where it was derived from. They are believed to have a strong communication link to the spirit worlds, and ability to heal those afflicted. In Acholi-bur, one Elder described *ajwaka* as a last resort when Elders, *Rwodi* or courts of law fail. Using traditional instruments such as the *ajaa* (a shaker constructed out of a gourd) to contact the supernatural world and, with their guidance establish the 'truth' about a particular incident, such as theft.²⁹

²⁶ Ladit Jackson Opiro, Interviewed in Lacor camp, 12 April 2005.

²⁷ Not all elders agreed *cen* could be inherited.

²⁸ The spiritual powers of *ajwaka* can come either "in a form of a human beings (although they unable to identify the identity of the person prior to their contact) or directly through them." (Interview with an *ajwaka*, Corner Kilak camp, 29 July 2005). When the spirit contacts her, it provides visions that assist her with her work, particularly of where certain herbs are kept in order to heal those that are ill or instructions on the type of herbs to use for certain sicknesses. *Ajwaka* are able to look into the future and frequently consult the ancestors on pressing matters.

²⁹ *Ajwaka* are believed to be able to perform good and evil deeds. For instance, should her or his power be denied, they are able to cast a curse on the family of the individual in question. That some *ajwaka* might do so in order to amass power and wealth, has led to witch-hunting in Acholi-bur. Witch hunts can involve a 'serious warning', or, in extreme cases, lynching.

Traditional Justice

*In traditional Acholi culture, justice is done for ber bedo, to restore harmonious life.*³⁰

In the course of this research, the phrases *ngol matir* (the right decision) or *ngol me te kwaro* (decisions according to traditional laws) were used to refer to the English term ‘traditional justice’, which has no direct translation in Luo. Interviews with Elders, *Mego*, and *Rwodi* revealed that the most important aspects of traditional justice are: the establishment of truth, the voluntary nature of the process (particularly on the behalf of the offender), the payment of compensation to restore what was lost, and finally the restoration of social relations and unity of the family and clans. The following section elaborates on the characteristics and components that define Acholi traditional justice systems.³¹

Traditional justice in Acholi is restorative. Informants identified the following aspects of traditional justice as the most important: trust, a voluntary process, truth, compensation and restoration.

Trust

*It is fear that is keeping people [returnees] from confessing.*³²

In order to initiate a process, the offender and people affected must fully trust the parties involved in mediation. This often requires a confidence building process in the mediators first.

Voluntary Process

*Human beings are a part of the universe which includes both the natural and supernatural world. The whole system lived in co-existence and ‘justice’ was a way to promote co-existence.*³³

Traditional justice was distinguished from formal justice in terms of the voluntary willingness of the perpetrator to confess. Part of the logic of Acholi cosmology is to illicit fear and shame if one broke a social norm and to encourage people to take the appropriate steps towards restoration. For instance, the powerful narrative of *cen* - that one would endure sickness and death until a wrong is made right - was a form of psychological punishment to the wrongdoer.

³⁰ Ladit Leander Komakech, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 4 May 2005.

³¹ For another description, see also Hovil and Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later*, RLP, 2005.

³² Participant, *Roco Wat I Acoli*: Consultative Workshop to Discuss the Findings of the Study on Traditional Justice, August 12-13, GUSCO Peace Centre, Gulu District.

³³ Ladit Leander Komakech, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 4 May 2005.

In cases when a killer is well known but refuses to admit to his or her guilt or crime, then revenge by the spirit of the murdered victim is encouraged by Elders. This will result in misfortune of the offending clan. Otherwise, the offending parties may legitimately threaten revenge (a blood revenge), but this is said to be kept in check by a period of “cooling off” between clans and enforced by Elders. The community has an interest in avoiding revenge killings, and will do all it can to cool off the high level of tensions.

Truth

*People want to talk about what has happened to them.*³⁴

The process of establishing the facts of a particular conflict was considered by most respondents as essential to resolving the conflict. In general, a mediator (usually an Elder at the family and sub-clan level, a representative of the *Rwot-Moo* (anointed Chief) at the clan level, or the *Rwot-Moo* himself at the inter-clan level) would establish these facts in consultation with the involved parties, their relatives and witnesses. This was done either in a process of ‘shuttle diplomacy’ or in public meetings, depending on the circumstances. Establishment of the facts (such as whether a crime was intentional or not) could determine the amount of compensation and the corresponding ritual or ceremony required to appease spirits and ancestors. Finally, establishing the truth was regarded as an important component for facilitating reconciliation between conflicting parties, at the family, clan, inter-clan, or inter-tribal levels. Women were involved only in instances when a conflict involving women or a “woman’s issue” arose. Senior women were limited to being witnesses to crimes committed, and women were never given the opportunity to preside over any open court.

Compensation

*Human blood must not be spilt for nothing.*³⁵

Categories of crime and corresponding compensation exist in Acholi traditional by-laws, some of which have now been documented and are currently being translated into English.³⁶ These include compensation on a wide range of family laws, including divorce, marriage, burial rites, and criminal laws including arson, theft, or murder. The circumstances surrounding the crime are always considered in determining compensation, including whether or not the crime was intentional. Compensation is largely paid in the form of livestock (cows, bulls, goats), or increasingly in the context of the displacement camps, the monetary equivalent of the required livestock. A chief Elder in charge of compensation receives it from the offending person’s entire clan. The clan or family of the wrongdoer will be expected to help contribute to raising the compensation.

³⁴ Participant, *Roco Wat I Acoli*. Consultative Workshop to Discuss the Findings of the Study on Traditional Justice, August 12-13, GUSCO Peace Centre, Gulu District.

³⁵ Ladit Gerrison Latim, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 15 March 2005.

³⁶ The by-laws can be found in the archives of Ker Kwaro Acholi, or Gulu District NGO Forum.

Restoration

*In Acholi, one lives because of the other.*³⁷

Traditional justice in Acholi culture was described by informants as restorative rather than punitive, seeking to repair social harmony of a community, rather than establish individual innocence or guilt. In Acholi, one person's crime extends to the entire family, and the family of the injured party is likewise affected. Thus one person's crime causes a rift within the entire community that can only be resolved after establishing the truth, payment of compensation and followed by a series of rituals or ceremonies in order to reconcile 'bitterness' and chase away ill will or spirits that threaten the unity of the clan.

Traditional justice was described by respondents as a collective and transparent process that once took place in open courts, with specific roles for Elders and representatives of Royal Clans according to the offence committed.

Prior to colonialism, crimes were handled in "open courts" held at different levels of social organization (household, sub-clan, clan, inter-clan and inter-tribal) according to the nature of the conflict (land, domestic conflict, arson, murder). Serious conflicts involved Elders and *Rwodi* at the clan or inter-clan level, whereas less serious crimes could be handled by Elders and peers at the familial, sub-clan or clan level. The voluntary admission of guilt was considered a necessary act for moving forward. Ideally, the decision regarding compensation and rituals for reconciliation was arrived at 'consensually' among Elders and in consultation with injured parties, and according to interpretation of traditional by-laws.³⁸

During pre-colonial times, when a transgression occurred the Elders would gather the people and inform them of the problem. The Elders then met the involved parties to listen to both sides of the case before deciding what compensation was appropriate. Respondents often insisted this was a consensual approach, and no decision was taken until all parties agreed. While the introduction of the court system by colonialists did not appear to wholly undermine traditional court systems, it was not clear from respondents if traditional mechanisms once practiced continue to exist in camps today (and therefore should be subject of further study). These included:

Family Courts: The *won-ot* (head of household, always a man), would be the first to attempt to resolve any domestic crimes or sources of conflict including quarrels between family members. The rituals of *tummu-buru* (incidents involving fire) or *tummu-keir* (all other incidents) were then performed to appease *Joké*.

³⁷ Ladit Hannington Opira, Interviewed in Amida, Kitgum, 18 April 2005.

³⁸ See also the documentation of traditional justice mechanisms in Caritas, Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Conflict Resolution*, unpublished Working Paper 13, 3 November 2004, p. 2-4; and Caritas, Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Ways of Preventing and Solving Conflicts in Acholi*, Unpublished paper, January 2005, especially, p. 9.

Clan Courts: The *Atekere*³⁹ or *Ladit Kaka* settled disputes at the family level that could not be settled by the ‘family head’, and conflicts (over land, food, water) at the clan level. But most often, the *Atekere* was responsible for conducting rituals when *kii* occurs. Abomination (*kii* or *kiiir*) is often an individual act or curse that symbolically jeopardizes the well-being of the family and therefore of the entire clan. It is often committed by a husband or wife who has exhausted all other avenues of communication or resolution. For instance, the act of throwing food at a person in anger is considered a grave taboo that will offend both the ancestors and Gods.⁴⁰ Without an immediate ritual (in this case, sacrifice of a goat), “grave misfortune to the person and their family” will follow. Informants could identify a very long list of forms of *kii*, and Elders were adept at knowing the corresponding rituals necessary for lifting a curse cast by the act. Most cases of conflict also involved *kiiir* that require purification rituals, usually the sacrifice of a goat or sheep to the ancestors. The guilty party played a central role, hanging his or her head in shame. Purification called relevant parties together for a discussion of the events which had occurred and to identify ways to prevent the offence or conflict from occurring again. The *Atekere* was responsible for overseeing the rituals.

Inter-Clan courts: Typically, inter-clan conflicts were mediated by the *Rvot Moo* from the two clans involved. A messenger – *lakwena* – would then act as a go-between to the parties involved and the *Rvot Moo*. *Rvot Moo* only became involved in cases of serious injuries, murder and in the interpretation and execution of by-laws determining compensation. In some instances, this involved holding court at the home of the *Rvot Moo*, and bringing in the advice of other *Rwodi* for determination of compensation.

Inter-tribal courts: To end a conflict, Elders from conflicting tribes would meet to discuss the source of conflict, develop prevention strategies and to warn the population to discontinue fighting. The mediator would bend the spear (*Gomo Tong*) to signify discussion is over and as a vow to end hostilities. It was reported to have been carried out both with the ceremony of *Mato Oput* and without, depending on the conflict.

Rituals to Establish Evidence

Different rituals are undertaken when the facts of a crime are not all available, and there is no way to establish the truth. In one version, a spear is put in the flames until it turns red. All suspects are made to hold or lick the spear. If one is innocent then the spear will not burn you. This can only be conducted by *ajwaka* or one who was born with the special gift to do this ceremony. Another way to determine innocence or guilt is digging a hole and all suspects jump over it. If the person is guilty they will fall in. A third way to establish truth is to have the suspects feed a hen using poisoned food. If one is guilty the hen will move towards the offender and eat the poisoned food right away, if not guilty then the hen will run away. One can note that these rituals also play with the psychological conscience of the offender in the same way that the spiritual world does.

³⁹ The *Atekere* is responsible for safekeeping of royal cultural items, such as the drum, the royal arm band (*Ogul*), hoe, beads, or gourd (*abino*), and therefore also rituals required for performing purification. It was not clear if every clan had an *Atekere* or not.

⁴⁰ For other examples, see Appendix 5.

Another means of establishing the truth is to consult an *ajwaka*. A group of Elders consult up to three different *ajwaka* living in areas far from the area where the crime took place (this way the *ajwaka* would not know about the crime prior to the consultation). The *ajwaka* invite the spirits of dead and reveal the identity of the perpetrator. If the three *ajwaka* identified the same perpetrator then truth would be established.

It is important to recognize that establishing the truth will not necessarily lead to a ritual or a mediation of the conflict. It is always up to the individual, the offender, to initiate this process.

Traditional open courts appear to have been taken over by Local Courts under the administration of the state. The conflict has led to instances of corruption and abuse of power in formal justice systems. Despite this, cultural leaders do not view traditional justice to be above the law.

Under the British colonial administration, the cultural practices relating to justice were replaced with formal legal codes and the introduction of Local Courts (LCs). This significantly undermined the authority of Elders and *Rwodi*, although they continued to play an active role in the resolution of family disputes, and mediate community conflicts. In addition, the practice of paying compensation also remains and Elders continue to play an important role in mediating this process.

However, the wisdom implied in the traditional system was viewed as corrupt in the modern LC system: “People look at justice [today] in terms of making someone suffer,” and indicating the individualist approach ran contrary to communal, restorative approaches. Elders maintained there was no such form of punishment in the past. Furthermore, Elders argued that the role of mediation in the past was absent in LCs. Thus, the ‘truth’ was replaced with the ability of lawyers to make a strong defence, regardless of the innocence or guilt of the party involved.

The practice of traditional justice has been further jeopardized over the course of the war. As argued in Chapter III, the intermixing of clans, poverty and extreme violence has broken down levels of social trust. In addition, mechanisms for socializing Acholi youth about social rights and wrongs, and about traditional rituals and beliefs, have been challenging obstacles in displacement camps. In the past, “people were united. If you were not on good terms with your neighbour, life may not be simple for you. This is because each and every person depended on one another.”⁴¹

Some informants argued that cases are resolved today by paying a price to the local judge or courts, run by Local Councils. As one Elder put it, “many people now look at justice in terms of money and imprisonment”.⁴² Another Elder argued that in camps today, “people look at justice in terms of force. They use the LC system, police and camp leaders. [Before

⁴¹ Ladit Hannington Opira, Interviewed in Amida, Kitgum, 18 April 2005.

⁴² Ladit Francis Okumu, Interviewed in Anaka, 23 May 2005.

the colonialists came] there was no force like now”.⁴³ The Acholi commonly known saying ‘*Agoyi ci wa pida apida*’ perhaps sums it up best ‘I beat you and then I win’, meaning as long as the perpetrator has the money to buy off the judge, he or she can do what they want.

Despite all this, formal judicial bodies are respected by virtue of the law by Elders; in most cases, they make the distinction between national and traditional laws. For instance, Ladit Latim as well as other informants recognized that no one should interfere with or attempt to replace the law. “It is wrong for a cultural institution to appear superior to the law. The legal system takes precedent. At the end of one’s jail sentence, then traditional justice may come in. Until this is done, one is a social outcast.” Traditional justice may be a compliment but not alternative to the formal system. It is also required, according to Elders, to restore relations between conflicting parties, and for one to reconcile with her or his-self to the spirit world. “Even if you win in court but you are guilty, you are able to bribe your way out of it, *cen* will still follow you. So at the end the offender will have to return to the Elders and tell them the truth of what really happened.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Ladit Valentino Okullu, Interviewed in Anaka, 23 May 2005.

⁴⁴ Ladit Angelo Banya, KKA, *Roco Wat I Acoli*: Consultative Workshop to Discuss the Findings of the Study on Traditional Justice, August 12-13, GUSCO Peace Centre, Gulu District.

III THE DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF ACHOLI CULTURE

*Without culture you are no one, without culture you are dead.*⁴⁵

This chapter examines the impact of the conflict on Acholi cultural institutions and social relations. It argues that the respect once given to cultural leaders, such as Rwodi and Elders has greatly diminished since the advent of colonialism, and over the course of the 19 year old conflict. The roles of these leaders have been significantly transformed and in political terms, replaced by state officials. The conditions of the camps have meant that cultural transmission and practices have been degraded. However, the recognition of Ker Kwaro in the 1995 Ugandan Constitution has led to a revival of cultural practices. Moreover, it was found that within camp settings, cultural practices continue to exist, and have been adapted to the circumstances of poverty.

Traditional practices, norms and values have been greatly affected by the on-going conflict, diminishing the role and status of cultural leaders, the transmission of culture to the next generation, and increasing the burden of women and girls in camps.

The Impact of the Conflict on Cultural Leaders

According to informants, prior to colonialism, the Acholi kingdom was composed of *kaka* (loosely knit clans), each headed by a *Rwot Moo* (anointed chief) derived from a royal clan⁴⁶. He was typically the Eldest son, although reportedly ‘the people’ could remove and replace *Rwot Moo* should he not represent or care for them well. Each *Rwot Moo* lived in a large, extended and polygamous household located within the domain of his clansmen. He was responsible for promoting unity and the social welfare of his clansmen; to provide for them in times of need.

Each *Rwot Moo* was supported by a Council of Elders through which he ruled based on consent, rather than force.⁴⁷ The structure of the Council of Elders was complex with variations from clan to clan. Its main function was to “guide communities, solve disputes and create peace and unity among people”.⁴⁸ Councils were present at all social levels, starting with the family level. Every household unit appointed an *Apoka* (Elder) to represent their voices.⁴⁹ *Apokas* from the different clans formed a Council of Elders, which was

⁴⁵ Paramount Chief of Acholi, David Onen Acana II, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 20 July 2005.

⁴⁶ *Rwot* – singular; *Rwodi* – plural. See Appendix VI, *Structure of Traditional Leadership*.

⁴⁷ See also the historical overview in Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Ways of Preventing and Solving Conflicts in Acholi*. Unpublished paper. January 2005, p. 1-5.

⁴⁸ Ladit Olanya John, Interviewed in Anaka camp, 25 May 2005.

⁴⁹ Ladit Oweka Yutiko Oyii, Interviewed in Lacor camp, 18 April 2005.

presided over by the *Atekere*.⁵⁰ The *Atekere* was the middleman between the *Apoka* and the *Rwot Moo*. Meetings among these actors were held regularly to discuss community issues and concerns.

Under the British colonial administration, the *Rwot Moo* were stripped of power and replaced by the *Rwot Kalam*, translated to ‘men of the pen’ (educated men who served the colonial administration). *Rwot Moo* continued to exercise free, if informal, cultural leadership among his people, but was limited in the exercise of administrative power. Under colonialism, the *Rwot Moo* of the largest clan, Payira, emerged as a ‘leader’ among other *Rwot Moo*. However, until this era, the Acholi had no Paramount Chief. As one informant observed, “The institution of a Paramount Chief was a completely new one. In the past, there was no one *Rwot* who was more powerful than the other.”⁵¹ During colonialism, however, *Rwot Camo* (1887) and *Rwot Awich* (1888-1946) of Payira, emerged as the informal leaders of Acholi. In post-independent Uganda, *Rwot Adonga* of the Payira clan was installed by *Rwodi* as ‘the perfect leader’ (*laloya maber*). However, the brutal dictatorship of Idi Amin (1971-1979) displaced Adonga, resulting in the temporary lapse in leadership. At independence, the *Rwot Kalam* system was dismantled, and the *Rwot Moo* remained officially unrecognized in the Ugandan Constitution until 1995. Elders and *Rwot Moo* continued to play important cultural roles, but political structures by the time of independence had been slowly replaced by the apparatus of the Ugandan state.

The on-going conflict further weakened both *Rwodi* and the Councils of Elders. Like the rest of the population, *Rwodi* and Elders were forced to leave their homesteads and live in IDP camps. In fact, the majority of *Rwodi* no longer live in the centre of their subject’s domains, but in town centres. As a result, many people today no longer automatically know their *Rwot*, nor what his role should be.⁵² When they do live in camps among ‘their people’, it is in a setting of extreme poverty, limiting the role they can play in cultural rituals, mediation or unity building.

Most informants argued that the spirit of communalism that characterized Acholi domains in the past has been replaced with that of individualism. As one Acholi proverb puts it, “*oyo man ki wino doge*” – “each rat with its own whisker”. Respect tends to be afforded to persons with money or power, and yet *Rwodi* in camps have little more than their people. Research revealed that more IDPs could identify their Local Councillor (LCs), religious leader or camp leader than their *Rwodi*. However, when *Rwodi* do live in a camp, people are more likely to know their *Rwot*. Moreover, camps where strong *Rwodi* – those considered persons of good moral character – live, an increased level of respect was afforded to them.⁵³

Informants argued that the duty of Elders in conflict resolution has largely been replaced by the work of camp leaders and LCs. As Ladit Eromasio Odara commented, the “Elder institution has been replaced with camp leaders and LCs who are not always able to pass the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ However, in times of need, smaller clans were known to approach and integrate into larger, more powerful clans. Moreover, all clans were known to unite in times of grave external threats.

⁵² This analysis is based on interviews with over 80 ‘everyday’ camp residents living in Corner Kilak, Pajule, Lapule, Amida, Labuje and Palabek.

⁵³ Observation of Pajule and Lapule Camps.

best advice. Their neutrality in handling cases is normally compromised because of money, nepotism and politics”.⁵⁴ Elders have also become isolated from ‘their’ people, with whom they once had close proximity to in the village. Clans are often intermixed in camp settings, or in some cases, extended families are dispersed across different camps. “Elders are now scattered everywhere, they use to live with their people”.⁵⁵ Displacement has also separated Elders from each other and poor security conditions prevent them from meeting regularly to discuss community issues.

In addition, displacement has changed the status of Elders. The majority of Elder informants argued that they are no longer shown respect by their communities, especially by the youth. They claimed that the youth have grown up only knowing camp settings and are therefore unable to see the previous roles and duties that Elders performed. One Elder remarked that the younger generations do not know “how to be Acholi”. The researchers observed that it is now common for one to pass an Elder on the way without greeting him as culture once demanded. In addition, the word *Ladit*, once accorded to Elders because of their wisdom, is increasingly used to refer to one with money or power.

One reason for this cultural generation gap is that traditional means of transmitting culture have been restricted in camps. Prior to displacement, each series of interconnecting households had a *wang oo* (central fireplace) where extended families would gather to hear stories and proverbs from Elders and *Mego* (‘mother’ or Elder women) on a nightly basis. *Wang oo* was an important site of transmitting cultural norms, particularly to the youth. However, a number of factors prevent the practice of *wang oo* in camps: in some camps, curfews forbid social gatherings in the evening and many fear fires would attract LRA anyway; in other camps, there is a scarcity of firewood and the congestion of the camps means that huts could easily catch on fire.

Many informants identified alcohol as a dividing force in camps. The amount of drinking that occurs in IDP camps has disrupted social order and harmony, leading to grave social abominations. Unfortunately, Elders have been unable to advise on this matter, especially since many Elders have also fallen into this same trap, which also affects how society views them. It was observed that due to lack of space in camps, it is common to find Elders socializing in the same places as the average IDP; this contrasts with the past, where Elders had their own social places to relax within every family compound. In town centres, ‘veranda Elders’ lack the respect of educated youth, who view them as representative of the past, and not of the future, in Acholi-land.

Additionally, Elders questioned their ability to provide proper guidance for youth in the environment of a displacement camp, which “dictates the behaviour of youth. [It is] a setting where youth are always idle and all they can do is to engage in heavy drinking and prostitution. How then can [Elders] be useful when the camp setting has eaten up the young? Is the future in safe hands?”⁵⁶ Several Elders argued that their “advice is easily denied,”⁵⁷ and both youth and traditional leaders acknowledged that today Elders and *Rwodi*

⁵⁴ Ladit Eromasio Odara, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 April 2005.

⁵⁵ Ladit Komakech Leander, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 2 April 2005.

⁵⁶ Ladit Ocitti Francis, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 May 2005.

⁵⁷ Ladit Adonga Alfred, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 14 May 2005.

often play a small role in providing leadership for youth.⁵⁸ This indicates the breakdown of a central tool that was used to ensure positive societal relations and the dissemination of culture.

In short, Elders previously gained the ultimate respect of their communities because “they were seen as fathers by the younger generation. The way Elders conducted themselves was so extraordinary that many would refer to them as gods”.⁵⁹ Elders were always approached for advice, however, the problems that have occurred in the camps are beyond the reach of the Elders, and thus render them unable to perform their duty.

Changing Roles of Women

Historically, Acholi women were defined almost exclusively in relation to their reproductive role. The socialization of girls revolved around their preparation for the role of wife and later, mother. One of the most important lessons passed on to young girls was “how to respect and care for a man.” Elaborate ceremonies prepared young girls and women for these roles, including marriage and birth ceremonies which formally recognized a woman’s status within the family home she was married into, and validated her worth to the family and, by extension, the clan as a whole. The gendered division of labour followed. In the home, women were expected to care for children, tend the fields, cook and clean. In contrast, men were expected to dig, harvest and hunt, and to construct and maintain the compound.

The *Mego* interviewed argued that the conflict has transformed traditional gender roles. Confined to camps, men are no longer able to fulfill traditional productive roles. Women, on the other hand, continue to be responsible for reproductive roles with the added burden of having to care for orphans and, in some cases, have been forced to assume a position as head of the household. “Men relieve their burden on women,” said *Mego* Dorothy Abwot. Today, women are “responsible for feeding the family” [digging, planting, harvesting, food collection from WFP] and moral and universal education, areas in which men were once prominent. “Men only know how to drink now.”⁶⁰ Yet men continue to dominate decision-making in the household and community.

The institution of marriage in Acholi was a central feature of Acholi culture. Historically, young boys are expected to ‘move out’ of the house to construct their own hut in preparation for marriage (the bachelor’s hut). Brideprice, traditionally in the form of cattle, was paid to the family of the girl, but held in trust for brothers of the girl for their own bride price. Given poverty and congestion in camps, this is not always possible. This has a two-fold impact. On the one hand, a young boy may feel pressured to leave the house to find an independent livelihood – exposing him to greater vulnerability and potential exploitation. On the other, the idleness and frustration of young men who cannot provide traditional means

⁵⁸ There are of course always exceptions to this, and in many cases traditional leaders have played central roles in the lives of youth.

⁵⁹ Ladit Adonga Alfred, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 May 2005.

⁶⁰ *Mego* Rose Abwono, Interviewed in Anaka camp, 25 May 2005. Many of the respondents lamented the consumption of alcohol by men in the camps.

for marriage may lead to increased tensions and violence within camps, as has been documented in other studies of conflict zones.

According to Acholi cultural norms, boys and men are responsible for the protection of girls and women. As one *Mego* observed, this is no longer possible “because even the boys are threatened by rebels.” At the same time, men are also the greatest violators of women’s personal and bodily security. The sexual norms which once protected the virginity of girls and women before marriage – including a taboo against sex outside the institution of marriage that would result in infertility – have collapsed inside camps. In Pabo camp, rape is reportedly the most serious threat of harm against women and girls. As one *Mego* observed, “After rape you are considered a public woman.”⁶¹ Prostitution has grown rampant as a means of survival among young girls – in Pabo, a lane for prostitutes is well known by locals. In a number of camps, women reportedly left their husbands for soldiers and militia who had a source of income.

While women who are raped are considered prostitutes and still socially ostracized, the conflict has opened new avenues for women to “assuming the roles of men” and providing for themselves and their families. “Many can now afford to live without men and still take care of the family, not like those days when if a man was not there the family could not function.”⁶²

The Generation Gap: Children and Youth

In traditional Acholi society, children and youth were to be looked after and provided by adults. Until married, they lived with their father and mother(s). Although they were expected to assist with household tasks, the responsibility of providing basic necessities broadly fell to parents. Beyond this, in times when parents were unable to provide for their family, the responsibility fell to the extended family and *Rwodi*, due to the communal nature of the Acholi culture.

Youth and children thus held societal roles of obedience to adults, particularly Elders. Young people were expected to possess proper respect for Elders, and in turn, Elders taught youth societal values to guide their actions. As Ocitti Francis elaborated, “[Elders played an] advisory role. [They] imparted discipline into children [and] socialized the young into culture.”⁶³ Through formal (*wang oo*) and informal (traditional dancing, private counsel) mechanisms, cultural leaders played a key role in facilitating the transfer of social knowledge, which provided the cultural and behavioural codes that shaped Acholi society. In addition, children and youth who commute nightly into towns have little interaction with their family structures anymore.

Years of conflict and displacement has had a fundamental impact on the dynamics that shaped both the role of Acholi children and youth as well as their relationships with their

⁶¹ Mego Margaret Tebere, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 20 April 2005.

⁶² Mego Alum Pelisena (Acholi-bur), Aweko Albina (Ogole Clan), Atim Nighty (Opii clan), Martha Akech (Lamogi clan), Group interview in Pajule/Lapule camps, 5 May 2005.

⁶³ Ladit Ocitti Francis, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

parents and to Elders in society. Youth are no longer cared for and protected to the extent that was accorded them previously. Today, instead of being the object of protection, they are targets of physical attack from either side of the conflict, creating a range of security threats for youth. There are no formal protection measures in place for youth and children, and they are thus forced to adopt informal strategies “by relying on their basic senses. They have learned to be observant of their environment at all times, they are quiet when they spot the LRA, or they run away when the UPDF is trying to harm them.”⁶⁴

Additionally, the ratio of youth to adults has risen, and the economic burden of providing food and other non-food items falls increasingly to young people. They are now considered the ‘productive force’ of their families, which is a departure from traditional practice, where adults provide for them. In order to access survival items, such as firewood, water and vegetables, they must risk moving outside of the camp, exposing them to serious physical threat.⁶⁵

Furthermore, the critical lack of educational and economic opportunities within camps have caused many youth to become ‘idle.’ A significant proportion⁶⁶ of youth have likewise turned to drinking and are ignoring sexual taboos, causing an increase in sexual activity, particularly of rape and other sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Moreover, there is a large group of returnee youth and children who have difficulty in adjusting to expected social norms after living in the bush and who are often ostracized by the community. The outcome of these factors is that a significant number of Acholi youth are engaging in socially objectionable behaviour according to Acholi cultural norms.

Finally, although they form the largest proportion of Acholi society,⁶⁷ youth are unable to properly voice their opinions and needs. While there is a youth representative at the district level, this office lacks resources and assistance from other government bodies or NGOs. Moreover, there is a palpable lack of youth representation within the camps; while some camps have adopted youth representatives,⁶⁸ this occurs infrequently and informally. The result is that children and youth form a particularly vulnerable, as well as large, group in society, but lack adequate support from parental, guardian, Elder, governmental, or NGO leaders.

⁶⁴ Liz St. Jean and Carla Suarez, *When All You Do Is Fear*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, www.ligi.ubc.ca, forthcoming publication.

⁶⁵ See Liz St. Jean and Carla Suarez, *When All You Do Is Fear*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, www.ligi.ubc.ca, forthcoming publication.

⁶⁶ No study to date has explored the extent or prevalence of this problem.

⁶⁷ For instance, in Gulu, persons under 25 form 68% of the population. Gulu Planning Unit, Population Office, 2005.

⁶⁸ Awer camp in Pader District is one such camp.

Cultural Survival

Traditional rituals and ceremonies continue to be practiced in camps, but at a significantly reduced level. In some cases, they have been adapted to adjust to poverty levels.

Despite the degradation of culture, traditional rituals continue to hold an important value to people inside camps. Although restricted by a lack of resources, where possible people continue to either enjoy contributions by the community, or in some cases, have adapted by selecting less expensive cultural items to replace more expensive ones (such as a hen instead of a goat, seeds instead of an egg, or herbs instead of a hen). The extent of cultural practices largely depends on the participants and the role of cultural leaders in camps. For example, if Elders continue to play a prominent role they are more likely to promote and perform rituals when they are needed.

The researchers were able to document a number of rituals that continue to be practiced in camps, presented below. This list is not exhaustive, nor representative of all camps in Acholi; researchers were only able to visit 17 of the now 53 IDP camps in Acholi. Given that written records are not kept of such rituals, the researchers had to rely on the oral testimony of Elders, Rwodi and people in the camps, as well as documentation by other NGOs such as Caritas Gulu Archdiocese and IRC⁶⁹. In some cases, Elders notified researchers of a pending ritual and invited the team to participate as a witness. Further research is required to assess how often rituals occur in camps, and why some rituals are more practiced in some camps than others. Furthermore, it was suggested in the consultative workshop with Elders, Mego and *Rwodi* in mid-August that such rituals need not only recording, but systematization.

Nyono Tong Gweno

The 'Stepping of the Egg' ceremony welcomes home a member of the family that has been away for an extended period of time. Absence may have been caused by some domestic dispute or may have been voluntary, such as for education, hunting or work. In either case, there is a perceived need to receive a person back home in order to reconcile any problems or feelings of alienation that may have resulted from their extended absence, and to ensure that the person feels once again a full member of the family. This ceremony has been adapted to facilitate the reintegration process of returnees. The ceremony involves the returnee stepping on an egg (*tongweno*) placed on a 'slippery branch' (*opobo*) and a stick with a fork (*layebi*), traditionally used to open graineries. The egg is said to symbolize purity. "The egg has no mouth, and cannot speak ill of others"⁷⁰. The egg also symbolizes that which is 'soft', 'fragile', suggesting a restoration of innocence. The *opobo* is a soapy, slippery branch, which helps to cleanse the returnee from any external influences he or she might have encountered in the 'bush' that might be calling them back. The *layebi* is a symbol of welcoming a person back into the home, where the family members will once again share

⁶⁹ See footnote 3 for list of unpublished reports.

⁷⁰ Ladit Ojara Ojok, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 16 February 2005.

food together. Such cleansing ceremonies were mostly practiced in the private domain of the family home or compound and involve a ritual practice. Since 2003, communal ‘Stepping on the Egg’ ceremonies have been initiated by His Highness, Rwot Onen David Acana II, for large numbers of returnees living in camps. This ceremony has also been conducted for former LRA commanders upon their return home.

Agat

A form of prayer before initiating any rituals, it is a way to call or communicate with the ancestors and the spirit world in order to ask them to accept your ceremony. For example, Agat is done when you sacrifice a goat to *Joké* (Acholi god). If it is not done, you are not notifying the gods and the ritual can fail as a result. This is normally practiced before every ritual by Elders involved in the ceremony.

Goyo laa

Blessings by an Elder or Elders using saliva or water, which is typically spit on the chest or palm of a person.

Tum

Tum (sacrifice) is done to cool a conflict, appeal to or consult with the spirits of the ancestors and/or Jogi regarding a naturally occurring problem facing the clan, or to prevent harm or bad weather. There are many different types of *tum*, with variations across clans, and for different reasons and purposes. Sacrifices usually involve sheep, goat or chicken.⁷¹ Increasingly in camps, cheaper animals are substituted for more expensive ones. For instance, in Acholi-bur, Elders reported that due to poverty, a hen was sometimes used to sacrifice in the place of a goat.⁷²

Tumu Kii

Tumu Kii is a sacrifice to appease to the gods for an abomination (*kii*) that has occurred. The various types of abominations result in different types of sacrifice. This involves specifically a goat, sheep, and herbs.

Riyo-tal

Mediation conducted by the Elders and Rwodi in times of conflict. People who are specifically involved in mediations are called Lupii (plural), or Lapii (sing). In the past before waging any war, Lapii were consulted for their approval. If support for the war was given, they would give olwedo (leafs) for protection – this is considered a blessing. In the current war, it is speculated that some Elders had given their blessings to Kony and this is why the war is not ending. Elders cannot undo a blessing once it has been given.

Ryemo Ojwee / Gemo

Ryemo ojwee or *Ryemo Gemo* is undertaken to ‘rid’ an area of *cen*. Organized by Elders and senior women at night, it involves the beating of calabashes, saucepans, doors and other general noise-making. It is believed that *cen* is afraid of the noise and will be driven out of the area towards the West (sunset). Women prepare “*lawinya* plus *moo yaa*” (shea butter), then

⁷¹ For differentiation of rituals that require a sheep *vs* a goat, see Caritas, Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Conflict Resolution*, Unpublished Working Paper, No. 14, 12 August, 2005.

⁷² Ladit Francis Ocitti, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

entertain the people with *acut* (a cultural dance for the women). The occasion is typically marked by drinking alcohol.

Moyo Piny / Tumu Piny

Tumu Piny or *Moyo Piny* loosely translated means ‘sacrifice’ and ‘cleansing’ of an area.⁷³ The ritual can also be termed as *Ryemo cen* (chasing away *cen*). This ritual of sacrificing a sheep is conducted by Elders to appease *Jogi* whenever there was a significant amount of *acena* (*cen* in the area). This can manifest in various forms: sickness, death and strange behaviour, for instance. The Acholi believe *cen* lingers in places where ‘bad death’ has occurred, such as forests (hunting expeditions that resulted in death, improper burials, traffic accidents and so on). In the context of the conflict, a high level of *cen* is found in sites of massacres.⁷⁴ After the ritual is completed, Elders and other participants such as *ajwaka* (diviner or witchdoctor) must walk away without looking behind them.

Yubu Kum

The ‘cleansing of the body’ ritual involves the transfer of *cen* from a person to an animal. The ritual has many variations. In one, a chicken is swung around a person. In another, a goat is speared by the person involved and if successful, the evil spirit is thought to be chased away. In still another version, the person steps on the body or blood of the sheep, as a sign of transferring the *cen* to the sacrificial goat.

Ryemo Jok

If, after doing all the necessary rituals to chase *cen* from a person, abnormal behaviour continues in a person, an *ajwaka* is consulted and asked to perform this ritual. The *ajwaka* is in charge of the entire ritual, and slaughters a goat or chicken and throws it into the site where the spirit thought to be causing the harm dwells such as rivers, wells or rock outcrops.

Lwoko pig wang

‘Washing of tears’ ceremony is conducted when a person had disappeared and was thought to have died, but returns to a family. *Luko pig wang* literally refers to washing away the tears a family shed in mourning the death of the person. Symbolically, it is to wash away ‘the thought of death’ that may manifest in a bad omen or can attract bad spirits to the family when the person returns. “This is because when the living mourn the dead, the dead may call you to join their world”.⁷⁵

Goyo-pii

The ritual involves variations, but generally a calabash of water is passed from Elder to Elder who cleans their hands in it. The water is either sprinkled over a person to provide a blessing or placed over the entrance of the hut and is dribbled over the person as they enter the door.

⁷³ *Tumu* or *moyo* are two terms with the same meaning (sacrifice) while *piny* refers to area or ‘the ground’.

⁷⁴ The researchers were able to document a *Moyo Piny* ceremony in Corner Kilak, Pader District (see Appendix 3). The camp had compiled an exceptional amount of *cen* due to its location next to a massacre site (from 1987); a grave of civilians killed in UPDF cross fire or randomly; and, the mass graves of reportedly up to 18,000 Holy Spirit Movement and National Resistance Army soldiers who died after an intense battle in 1987.

⁷⁵ Rwot Jolly Joe Loum, Interviewed in Kitgum Town, 19 May 2005.

Moyo-ret

This ritual involves a sacrifice for a person who was injured in an accident in order to appease the ancestors, prevent further illness as a result of the injury, and to facilitate recovery. Respondents gave the example of instances when this ritual was practiced in camps: in response to landmine injuries or huts that had collapsed causing injuries.⁷⁶ In the case of returnees, many return in poor health and with significant injuries, although the researchers could not establish if this ritual has been adapted to their circumstances.

Moyo Remo

This ritual is completed in order to prevent a reprisal blood feud after a murder takes place between two clans. According to Elders, *moyo remo* means the ‘cleansing of the blood’. The ritual involves the sacrifice of a goat in order to cleanse the blood that had poured from the killing, and to prevent the loss of more blood. In Corner Kilak, *moyo remo* was done on at least one occasion as a temporary measure to stop conflict between two clans after a murder had occurred between them. While they had initiated the process of reconciliation and established an amount for compensation, the final ceremony of *Mato Oput* could not be accomplished until further funds were raised. Thus the Elders explained that “the ritual was a temporary one amidst the prevailing conflict.”⁷⁷

Dwoko Ayoo

This particular ceremony is performed typically to reconcile a conflict between members of the same family or clan, in the belief that such conflict offends the ancestors and as a result, ushers in ‘bad spirits’ and brings misfortune. In some cases, it has been adapted when a person has returned from captivity in order to “restore hope, promote cleansing [of] evil spirits [and] cool people’s hearts [in the family and extended community]”⁷⁸ The ceremony is composed of several elaborate rituals. The ceremony begins with a ritual blessing by the Elder of the family using a spear (*tong*) and cow broom (*oywec dyang*) on which he spits and calls upon the ancestors to ‘sweep away all evil spirits’.⁷⁹ A special cock called a *latwol* (snake) is then swung around the head of the returnee⁸⁰ and his or her extended family, again calling on the evil spirit (*kipwola*) ‘go towards the setting sun’. The cock is then killed. In the third ritual, a goat is speared and the contents of the stomach (*wee*) is removed and smeared on the chest of the returnee and siblings of the returnee to ‘cool people’s hearts’ of any tension. The washing of tears ceremony is then performed, followed by a feast of the sacrificed goat and cock by all witnesses to ‘avoid the relapse of the evil spirit’. The bones of the animals are collected together. Elders drink *kwete* and blow the drink over the bones to also ‘cool them’. A celebration usually follows.

Gomo Tong

This symbolic ritual is not known to have been practiced since the 1980s, but respondents easily identified it. *Gomo Tong* (Bending of Spears) is a vow between two clans or tribes

⁷⁶ Ladit Francis Ocitti, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 May 2005.

⁷⁷ Ladit Oyaró, Interviewed in Corner Kilak camp, 18 June 2005.

⁷⁸ This ritual was witnessed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Kitgum Matidi sub-county on the 26 of January, 2002. The researchers are extremely grateful to IRC for sharing their report, quoted in this section.

⁷⁹ In Acholi, the saliva of an Elder is considered to be sacred and clean, and is often used to provide a blessing.

⁸⁰ This is done three or four times, depending on the sex of the returnee.

engaged in violent conflict to end hostilities. It is done both with *Mato Oput* and without, depending on the conflict. Elders from conflicting clans or tribes meet to discuss the source of conflict, develop prevention strategies and to warn the population to discontinue fighting. The mediator bends the spear to signify discussion is over. In the act of bending the spear, the spirits of both sides are evoked and promised killings would stop. If, without due cause, conflict started again, the tip of the spear would turn back against the aggressor.

Kwero Merok

This ceremony is performed after a conflict involving another clan, when a foreigner has been killed by returning soldiers; or, alternatively, when a dangerous beast has been killed.

Mato Oput

The ceremony of Mato Oput comes at the end of a long process of confession, mediation and payment of compensation to reconcile two clans after a murder has occurred between them. The ceremony itself has various forms across different clans, but common characteristics include the slaughter of two sheep which are cut in half and exchanged by both clans, and the drinking of the bitter herb Oput by both clans to ‘wash away bitterness’. The ceremony continues to be practiced to date, although it was learned that a number of cases continue to be pending due to a lack of resources required for the elaborate ceremony.

Cultural Revival

The re-establishment of Ker Kwaro in the 1995 Ugandan Constitution, together with the efforts of its leadership, has strengthened the cultural institution. However, the capacity of the institution remains weak after decades of conflict and colonial rule, and must still grapple with the challenge of representation and legitimacy.

In 1995, President Museveni formally recognized the role and function of traditional leaders throughout Uganda in the Constitution, reportedly as a move to both appease and place a check on the growing power and threat of the Buganda Kingdom.⁸¹ “When the idea reached Acholi,” stated Rwot Ojera, “it was most welcomed because it was seen as one way of uniting the tribe that had been so scattered by current insurgencies in the region....”⁸²

In 1996, the late *Rwot* David Acana I (of the Payira Clan) was nominated and appointed the new leader of the Acholi chiefs. “Everyone knew by virtue of birth *Rwot* Acana I should be the next *Rwot* of Acholi, a throne established by the Great *Rwot* of Payira.”⁸³ With the

⁸¹ According to *Rwot* John Edward Ojera (Patiko Pageya), Museveni re-institutionalized chieftdomships to seek some “regional and tribal balance after the re-installment of the Buganda Kingdom.” Interviewed in Gulu Town, 24 May 2005.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Rwot* Latigo Obwoc. Interviewed in Kitgum, 15 May 2005, formerly *Won Kom* of Kitgum, but removed from this office reportedly due to politics. This view was shared by *Rwot* Okello: “Rwodi [from Gulu, Kitgum and Pader] reached a consensus that Acana I be Paramount Chief because he hailed from the royal hierarchy of *Rwot* Awich”. Interviewed in Amuru camp, 31 May 2005.

support of the NGO ACORD and the Belgian Government, Elders held a long (and often contentious)⁸⁴ search for the lineages of the royal families of each clan throughout 1999. At the end of the year, *Rwot Moo* were formally identified, anointed and encouraged to re-organize.⁸⁵ Today, 52 chiefdoms are officially recognized.

Prior to his official coronation *Rwot* Acana I passed away, leaving the status of Paramount Chief, and position of *Rwot* of Payira unfilled. Reportedly, Payira clan Elders mobilized very quickly and anointed the late Chief's son, David Onen Acana II.⁸⁶ In August 1999, Acholi Elders and *Rwodi Moo* met in Gulu and elected *Rwot* Acana II as the *Lami Rowdi* (chief of all chiefs- paramount chief). *Rwot* Atuka Otto Yai Otinga (Lamogi Clan) and *Rwot* George William Lugai (Pajule Clan) – who also ran for the position of Paramount Chief – were elected Deputy Paramount Chiefs of Gulu and Kitgum-Pader respectively. According to all the *Rwodi* consulted in this research, the position of Paramount Chief was intended to be a rotating one every five years. However, the unity of the Acholi was considered paramount by respondents, and such a rotation was considered unnecessary at this time. All therefore suggested *Rwot* Acana II should remain in the post until the end of his life. Rotation, some argued, would make the position vulnerable to political manoeuvring and cause disharmony.

On January 17, 2005, His Highness the Paramount Chief was coronated by President Yoweri Museveni, drawing a large crowd of supporters. At the same time the Council of Elders was officially re-established. Today, the institution Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA or Ker Kwaro) consists of an Executive Council of 19 Chiefs and Elders, including a youth representative and two women, with intentions to broaden its base to include a larger number.⁸⁷ Members of the Executive meet periodically to determine areas of work for Ker Kwaro and reach consensus on cultural issues of concern. For instance, meetings are held periodically to discuss and move on cultural issues relating to the peace process and to return and reintegration. Members decided where and when communal rituals might be held to facilitate community harmony, even if these communities are now in camps. Reportedly, when key decisions are made, this is communicated to the Council of Elders of Acholi, who in turn communicate it to their respective clans, and in turn, this information is passed onto 'the people'.⁸⁸

The process of selecting Elders into Councils, however, was contested by many respondents. Previously clan members would elect Elders for certain traits. For example, they would take note of the individual's wisdom, brilliance, decision-making abilities and social contributions. As one informant noted "no election was conducted for Elders, but nomination was done based on people's trust in an individual".⁸⁹ Currently the basis of election often relies on

⁸⁴ The process was reported as a difficult one given that clans have been displaced or inter-mixed within camps.

⁸⁵ According to informants, the selection and anointment of a *Rwot* is the work of elders from 'a particular sub-clan' referred to as the 'anointers' who were charged with this responsibility by virtue of inheritance. Leadership training on traditional practices was also supported by ACORD.

⁸⁶ *Rwot* Acana I passed away on 20 July 1999. *Rwot* Acana II was appointed Chief on the 1st of August 1999.

⁸⁷ Membership in the Executive Council is based on nomination and appointment from the Council Elders and respected *Rwodi*, youth and women (by the Paramount Chief in consultation with the Council of Elders and *Rwodi*).

⁸⁸ *Rwot* Pyerino Opobo (Labongo), Interviewed in Kitgum, 19 April 2005.

⁸⁹ Ladit Oduny Samuel, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 2 May 2005.

money rather than age and wisdom.⁹⁰ Ladit Odong argued poverty has led to corruption, “because politicians come and play with people by giving them money or material things; hence they end up electing leaders who are not mindful of the people”. Formal politics was often referred to as a source of disunity in Acholi, prolonging the conflict. One example frequently cited was a Council of Elders currently opposed to the Paramount Chief. This same group is closely aligned with the National Resistance Movement (NRM), and has sometimes gone into the communities to mobilize people for purely political reasons.

The majority interviewed were encouraged by the initiatives of the KKA and viewed it as a stepping-stone in the revival Acholi culture. Elders interviewed identified three major strengths to KKA. First was its ability to re-install pride in the Acholi people, many of whom have lost all hope or belief in their traditions. Second was the potential of KKA to foster unity within Acholi-land and between Acholi and the rest of the country. Having a unified voice to represent Acholi perspectives was considered a vital link to the outside world. As Opira Hannington pointed out “[the] Paramount Chief takes the feelings of the people outside to the Hague.”⁹¹ Third is KKA’s facilitation and involvement in the peace process. This is not only through its dialogue with LRA commanders, but the rituals and cleansing ceremonies that are performed when children, youth, or commanders return home.

A few weaknesses and challenges of the KKA were also pointed out. Some informants requested that all sub-counties should be equipped with a KKA office in order to enhance the co-ordination of its activities and allow for more frequent meeting.⁹² Currently, the KKA only has one central office, which is located in Gulu Town. A few individual informants argued that the KKA was too political in its activities. Some argue that KKA members were working too closely with the Government, which prevents the institution from having a neutral stance as it is perceived as implementing Government initiatives.⁹³ However, this view was not widely shared and could not be fully substantiated by the researchers.

The generational gap means that the institution does have a tremendous challenge left in building the confidence of the youth in Acholi. At the same time, as Dolan points out, “...there is evidence of a backlash against youth as adults seek to recapture the power and status accorded to them under more traditional age hierarchies which the war has weakened, effectively blocking many youth initiatives.”⁹⁴ Indeed, in the research youth were frequently painted by Elders as a homogenous group with few moral or cultural values who “engage in heavy drinking and prostitution.”⁹⁵ Youth are thus faced with a negative label in addition to unprecedented burdens and threats.

Concerns over the representation in KKA have been raised. Although the Executive Council has two women and one youth representative, it is an institution of men who hold traditional views on appropriate gender and age roles. For example, during a consultative workshop hosted by the researchers in mid August, a few Elders revealed their frustrations with the

⁹⁰ Ladit Olanya John, Interviewed in Anaka camp, 2 May 2005.

⁹¹ Ladit Opira Hannington, Interviewed in Kitgum town, 18 April 2005.

⁹² Ladit Obwoya Wilson, Interviewed in Lacor camp, 18 April 2005.

⁹³ Ladit Ibok Jekeri, Interviewed in Kitgum Town, 23 April 2005.

⁹⁴ Chris Dolan, cited in ACORD, *Elusive Peace*, 2002.

⁹⁵ Ladit Ocitti Francis, Interviewed in Acholi-bur camp, 10 May 2005.

growing awareness of women and youth rights. At times they argued that the expansion of these rights threatened and prevented them from carrying out their “traditional roles”, such as disciplining a woman through beatings. This does not represent the majority of cultural leaders, but it does raise the concern that not all cultural norms or practices should be revived. How the institution will be able to adapt to changing gender and age roles will largely determine its resonance and legitimacy among the majority of the people they represent.

IV CULTURAL PRACTICES AND REINTEGRATION

“The Elders and Rwodi need to learn to work better with formerly abducted persons because one day what will happen if NGOs stop their activities? KKA will always be here, and therefore they need to uplift their activities.”⁹⁶

This chapter is organized into four parts. First, it presents the difficulties and challenges formerly abducted persons (FAP) encounter when returning to IDP camp settings. Second, the chapter examines some of the common ceremonies and rituals performed by Elders, *Mego* and *Rwodi* in camps to assist returnees with their psycho-social challenges at the family level. Third, it analyzes the communal efforts of Ker Kwaro Acholi to build the confidence of rebels still in the bush. Communal cleansing ceremonies are an effort to hasten return, and to promote the peaceful and healthy reintegration of returnees.

Finally, it explores the relationship between spiritual beliefs and traditional rituals of the Acholi and the LRA. It does so in order to highlight how cultural rituals might promote reintegration because of their resonance with rituals conducted in the ‘bush’. It also draws attention to the on-going challenges of building confidence among the LRA who hold very different religious beliefs to the Acholi, along with a deep suspicion of the ‘traditional’ policy of forgiveness. The purpose of each section in this chapter is to assess the on-going practices of cultural leaders in camp settings and towns to promote reintegration. It does so to illustrate how culture is being adapted to the current context, and sets a foundation for future approaches to traditional justice.

The Challenge of Reintegration

The process of reintegration is complicated by the challenges and difficulties encountered by both the returnees and community members in camps. These include: stigmatization and resentment; a general lack of economic opportunities; and insecurities in camp settings.

People whose children did not return do not want to greet the ones who have returned; it’s too traumatic [and because of this] I do not feel comfortable in the community.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Rwot Otinga, Atuka Otto Yai, *Roco Wat I Acoli*: Consultative Workshop to Discuss the Findings of the Study on Traditional Justice, August 12-13, GUSCO Peace Centre, Gulu District.

⁹⁷ Female returnee, displaced to Gulu Town, Interviewed in Gulu, ND.

Stigmatization and Resentment

In camps, returnees are frequently called names such as ‘rebel’, ‘Kony’, ‘children of the rebels’, ‘rebel wife’, or ‘chicken thief’. Half of the informants identified name labelling as their biggest challenge upon return. Name-calling does not only act as a barrier to reintegration, it also increases the levels of trauma a returnee experiences. It is destructive to their psychosocial recovery, as it constantly reminds them of atrocities they witnessed or committed in the bush. In fact, one informant noted that the worst part about being in the ‘bush’ was the punishment you receive when returning home.⁹⁸ Furthermore, stigmatization generates a sense of guilt for the returnee, which can trigger depression or even feelings and acts of revenge. If returnees continue to be viewed as rebels, they could eventually internalize this identity and act accordingly. Stigmatization does not only affect the returnee, but it also extends to returnees’ children. As one child’s mother noted, “Everywhere there is talk about me and my baby.”⁹⁹

In addition to name-calling, returnees are often accused of having *cen*, which is another form of social rejection from the community. Male and female returnees reported being told they had *cen*, particularly when they displayed signs of psychosocial trauma or made ‘mistakes’ in front of the community. This induces a sense of paranoia as returnees feel that their community is constantly watching them. In some ways, this is similar to their experience in the ‘bush’, where commanders would monitor everything abductees said or did. *Cen* is also used to keep a physical separation between returnees and other children. “[We] are not allowed to interact freely with the community because we are said to have *cen* which can harm the other children”.¹⁰⁰ Male and female returnees also reported being accused of murder, abduction and looting while they were in the bush. Yet despite this, very few cases of reprisal beatings or killings of returnees were reported.

Returnees are also socially ostracized through resentment, which is illustrated in various ways. For community members whose children have been abducted, but who have not returned home or who have been reported dead, often there is tremendous anger as to why their children were not lucky enough to come home. Commonly, returnees are blamed for the suffering in camps, since they are at times viewed as the ones responsible for directing the rebels to the communities. “Community members suffer much from the pain of killings and abductions, and so they blame those who return and use the word *cen* as a way of provoking them.”¹⁰¹

Returnees also noted that their communities were resentful for the assistance that they receive. One informant explained how he used money that was given to him through the Amnesty package to start a small business at his camp, but was harassed for this initiative: “the community points their fingers and tells us we are eating on the blood of the people we killed”.¹⁰² There is the perception that returnees are ‘better off’ than the rest of the community because they receive specific assistance that is entirely based on their ‘rebel’ experience. Community members often interpret this aid as a reward; some take it even

⁹⁸ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes). Interviewed in Lacor Camp, 14 April 2005.

⁹⁹ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes). Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 4 May 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 5 May 2005.

¹⁰¹ *Rwol* Justo Obito, Interviewed in Kitgum Town, March 2005.

¹⁰² Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Amuru Camp, 1 June 2005.

further by claiming that returnees are “prospering from the killings committed in the bush”.¹⁰³ It is important to recognize why some community members respond like this. The conditions in IDP camps in northern Uganda are below internationally agreed to standards and very often community members are in extreme need of assistance to rebuild what has been destroyed by the LRA.

Economic Challenges

Poverty, poor health care, and limited access to humanitarian assistance pose significant challenges to the ability of IDPs to realize livelihoods. Returnees identified food security as a major problem when returning home. One informant recognized the source of the problem as being “[the] failure to get food distribution by the World Food Programme [WFP] because our names take too long to get into the distribution lists.”¹⁰⁴ Distribution lists by WFP are not updated as frequently as they should be; yet numbers frequently fluctuate with the entrance of new people into IDP camps. The other alternative to collecting food is to access nearby fields and gardens; however, this is an extremely dangerous activity, and many children have been abducted or encounter the LRA when leaving their camps. The basic essentials of food, water, security and health are often inaccessible to returnees and IDPs. A recent study conducted by *Medicins Sans Frontiers* “showed that ten children below 12 years out of 10,000 die every day because of severe conditions in IDP camps.”¹⁰⁵ This finding conveys the conditions returnees encounter in their homes.

Breaking out of these conditions is extremely difficult, as there are very few options available. It is particularly difficult for returnees who often do not have the skills and educational background to enable them to find job opportunities. Returnees are in need of “catch-up” education programs and vocational skills training, as their schooling is interrupted by the years they spent in captivity. Very often when they return there are no resources to enrol them in school, or they have passed their schooling years. The researchers were not able to gather statistics, but it appears that because of poor livelihood alternatives, a significant number of male returnees joined the local militias and UPDF to survive. Many female returnees, especially those who return with children, lack some sort of income and parental support.¹⁰⁶

Cultural leaders presently play no role in supporting the economic reintegration of returnees. As Ker Kwaro is institutionally weak and lacks resources, it presently does not take part in any significant manner in reintegration. However, in a three year strategic plan that was developed with the assistance of the European Union, the institution plans to develop new income-generating alternatives for people living in camps. It will be important to follow and assess how cultural leaders play a role that compliments other initiatives in the region if and when this strategic plan is funded.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Amuru, 1 June 2005.

¹⁰⁵ The Monitor, June 23 2005.

¹⁰⁶ In many in-depth interviews with formerly abducted girls and young women who returned pregnant or with children, this stigmatization had led to exclusion from the family she returned to. In one case in Pajule, a pregnant 16 year old girl returned directly home only to be left to give birth by herself. Her relatives reportedly told her they hoped she would die during child birth.

At the same time, despite significant social and cultural challenges, many returnees have been extremely resilient. Some returnees have joined youth groups for income generation activities. Others have formed their own associations around the same goals, and to sensitize other members of the population. Any strategy to support reintegration, including a cultural approach, should build on the skills and resourcefulness of the returnees.

This includes, but is not limited to, *Kica Maber*, a group of returnees who organized themselves in order to provide training and employment opportunities to its members in Bungatira sub-county.¹⁰⁷ In another case, a group of young women returnees (with a small number of non-returnees) formed *Empowering Hands*,¹⁰⁸ which provides sensitization to the wider community through radio programmes. Anecdotal evidence gathered also suggested that returnees often use ingenious ways to start up their own small business as individuals, such as selling parts of their reintegration packages for start up capital. More research needs to be done to understand the ways cultural leaders could build on and support the coping and economic survival strategies of returnees.

Insecurity

Commonly the return and reintegration aspects of disarmament and demobilization operations occur in a post-conflict scenario or in a place where there is a ceasefire. This, however, is not the case for northern Uganda. The lack of proper protection in these camps is perhaps one of the most tormenting challenges for returnees. The same fears that these children had prior to abduction frequently resurface upon return. These worries will have developed into a more profound fear, since FAP know exactly what it is to be abducted by the LRA. They also know that if they are re-abducted, there is a high possibility they will be killed instantly if the LRA commander or fighters recognize that the ‘new’ abductee had previously escaped LRA forces.

Security threats do not only come from the LRA, but also from the UPDF. The UPDF is meant to act as the “security provider” in IDP camps, but it often acts as a major source of insecurity by beating, torturing, harassing, raping, killing, or stealing from civilians. A report focusing on internally displaced youth, “When All You Do Is Fear”, indicates that returnees were particularly vulnerable to UPDF abuses and were often targeted by them through name-calling and physical violence, especially when soldiers are under the influence of alcohol.¹⁰⁹ The lack of security provisions in camps makes it difficult for returnees to feel at home and recover from their psychosocial trauma.

¹⁰⁷ Supported by the Justice and Peace Commission.

¹⁰⁸ Supported by Peoples Voice for Peace and Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Gulu.

¹⁰⁹ Liz St Jean and Carla Suarez, *When All You Do is Fear*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC, Vancouver Canada. Forthcoming publication.

Young mothers and orphaned returnees are a particularly vulnerable category among returnees. Culture tends to discriminate against young returning girls and mothers. The breakdown of culture has left many orphans to face challenges on their own.

For children or youth who have lost one parent while in the “bush”, it is often difficult to re-integrate into a new family setting. Informants testified to the fact that they were often rejected by a new mother or father who had been gained during their time in captivity. For children who have lost both parents, it is not always possible to locate extended family members scattered across camps. While in the past extended families or the *Rwot* would care for orphans, in the camps today they are sometimes rejected by those families due to a lack of resources and stigmatization. As one informant stated, “[When] you come back fine only to find all your family members dead and you have no where to stay, you become a problem yourself because you have to keep changing places.”¹¹⁰ In other circumstances, orphaned returnees are handed off to caretakers and it was identified that these types of arrangements can be abusive.

Furthermore, young mothers are forced to support and raise their children on their own, as the father of her children often remains in the “bush”. For young mothers, re-marriage is difficult due to the stigmatization placed on the mother and her child or children. Given Acholi women are valued almost exclusively because of their fertility, the fact that women who were raped in the “bush” are accused of being barren has a significant impact; this strips them of their womanhood and social status of being wives or mothers.

Support to raise children that were conceived and born in the bush was identified as a major challenge by young mothers, especially since these women find tremendous difficulties re-marrying.¹¹¹ One woman, a mother of two children she ‘got from the bush,’ complained that when she got married, her two children were chased away because the in-laws did not want them. This prompted her to leave her husband. She now lives alone with her three children, two from the bush and another one from her husband at ‘home’.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Lokung camp, 19 April 2005.

¹¹¹ For instance, through an in-depth interview with a formerly abducted young woman in Purongo camp (Gulu District) (March 2005), the respondent was involved in a relationship with a young man and had given birth to his child. The father of the child was pressured by his family to leave her, as they argued she and the child had *cen* from the bush, leaving her to raise the child on her own.

¹¹² Returnee (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Amuru camp, 4 June 2005.

Within displacement camps, cultural leaders and women have adapted rituals to welcome the returnee home and in some cases, to help remove *cen* that is believed to lead to dangerous or abnormal behaviour. For the majority of returnees, this has had a therapeutic effect, especially if they had a good understanding of the rituals involved.

In camp settings, Elders, *Mego* and *Rwodi* have adapted traditional ceremonies and rituals in order to facilitate the healthy reintegration of returnees into dire camp settings. These rituals are considered central to prevent misfortunes that FAP might bring on return to the camp: “If [returnees] do not carry out such rituals, it brings *anyuu* – a collection of things that hinders the good life, like diseases, madness or even death [to] family members.”¹¹³ The rituals are also a means of atonement for the atrocities FAP were forced to commit. The following sections detail the types of rituals being used with returnees at the family and communal level.

The Adaptation of Cleansing Rituals to Returnees

Acholi cultural traditions involve cleansing rituals which vary in practice and sometimes in name from clan to clan, but which hold a common desire to cleanse a person, household or area from *cen* or bad spirits. In general, this cleansing is to battle or chase away illness, misfortune and death.

Interviews with returnees found that just over half (50 per cent) percent went through a family level ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremony before being welcomed back into the family home. Usually this is done at the entrance of the home to chase away anything bad encountered while in the bush. One Elder also described it as a message to the returnee that the door of the family is open, encouraging the returnee to pass through it and join the family again: “Stepping on the egg means that the relationship that once existed between a child and family has not yet been broken.”¹¹⁴ By reunifying the person and their family, the returnee is encouraged to contribute to the health and productivity of the community.

Another 31 percent of the returnees interviewed stated they had gone through additional rituals to that of ‘Stepping on the Egg’, such as *Yubu Kum* (Cleansing of the Body), *Goyo Pii* (Blessing with Water), or *Lwoko Pig Wang* (Washing of Tears).¹¹⁵ Of those, 16 percent of FAP underwent further rituals involving the slaughter of a goat when they returned home.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ladit Eromiya, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

¹¹⁴ Ladit Otto Opiyo, Interviewed in Amuru, 18 June 2005.

¹¹⁵ Note that this statistic incorporates those respondents who went through a communal cleansing ceremony or an “other” ritual.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter III, *The Decline and Revival of Acholi Culture* for a full description of the significance of these rituals.

Although these statistics might appear low in number there are several factors why the practice of cleansing is lower in number than the ‘Stepping of the Egg Ceremony’. Returnees identified at least three reasons why they are unable to practice cultural rituals in camp settings:

- a) Poverty was the most commonly stated reason. Some respondents stated they could not afford an egg, goat or other materials required for rituals;
- b) The parents or relatives of the returnee who could organize such a ritual are either dead or have rejected the returnee;
- c) The returnee or their family’s religious beliefs rejected such cultural practices, which are considered satanic. This is largely found to be the case for born-again Christians.

Still, it became apparent during in-depth interviews with FAP that these rituals can serve as an important form of therapy and healing. For instance, some have reported that nightmares stemming from their experiences of abduction were alleviated or disappeared altogether after undergoing a cleansing ceremony. One respondent “felt [his] mind was more settled and felt there was some life in [him], not like before when [he] was at the [reception] centre.”¹¹⁷

The researchers followed up a case study of a 13-year old girl in Lacor camp, Gulu, who had been through a cleansing ceremony. The ceremony was presided over by the Elders of the young girl’s clan, and officiated by the *Rwot*.¹¹⁸ It involved the Stepping of the Egg, Washing of Tears, sacrifice of a goat, and chasing of *cen* through transference to another slaughtered goat. The girl’s experience in the ‘bush’ and struggle after return was first narrated by members of her family before the Elders. She was then invited by the Elders to confess of her wrong-doing within a more private space of a hut. A communal blessing and feast followed the ceremony.

These ceremonies were performed because after returning from captivity, the young woman felt she was haunted by *cen*, manifest as nightmares, falling into ‘trances’, violent behaviour and disobedience. She, her family members, and immediate neighbours were interviewed two months after rituals to assess the impact of these rituals. All respondents noted a marked improvement in her symptoms and a more positive behaviour and attitude. The young girl herself stated she felt she was now a new person, and had actively returned to school and was engaged in domestic work and homework each night. For a more detailed account, See Appendix 4, Case Studies.

Caritas Gulu Archdiocese has also been involved in the documentation of rituals with returnees and has observed similar findings.¹¹⁹ In one case, a young man had been haunted by *cen* after returning home. The face of the girl he had killed continued to appear at night, and bring misfortune into his life. The ritual was organized by Elders and took a four day period. It involved confession and the practice of spearing a goat in ‘the bush’. A ritual

¹¹⁷ Returnee (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Amida camp, 19 April 2005.

¹¹⁸ Historically, Elders only held cleansing ceremonies, and the *Rwodi* did not attend. However, it was noted by researchers that *Rwodi* in some camps have become more active in witnessing cleansing with returnees.

¹¹⁹ See Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Coping in General and Coping with Traumatic Stress in Specific*, Unpublished working paper 17, April 2005; *Traditional Rituals for Returnees*, June 2004; Unpublished Working 18; and, *Traditional Rituals for Returnees*, Unpublished Working Paper 9, 16 June 2004. IRC has also done some documentation of rituals, available from the IRC Gulu office, and stored at the GDNF.

cleansing and sacrifice followed, then an elaborate meal. On the remaining three days, the young man accompanied a virgin girl¹²⁰ in her daily work tasks to “show that he was doing the work the woman he killed should have done”, and final rituals were then conducted. Caritas reported that since the ritual, the young returnee no longer suffers from debilitating symptoms and has been able to keep up with his studies.

These findings indicate that at an individual level, cultural ceremonies with strong support of the family and Elders can and do play an important role in facilitating the psychological reintegration of returnees. However, it has become apparent that the person undergoing the rituals needs to have an initial desire for these practices and must be aware of the procedures involved. Because some returnees no longer know their culture, it is critical they be provided education on these ceremonies if they are to work.

In fact, knowledge of the significance of traditional rituals plays a critical role in whether a FAP feels a change following a ceremony. 81 percent of FAP who understood the significance of traditional rituals felt a positive change after the ceremony.¹²¹ In contrast, out of those FAP who did not understand the significance, only 20 percent felt any positive change.¹²² Thus, there is a strong and direct correlation between FAPs` comprehension of traditional rituals and the impact of those traditional rituals. All of the above lends credence to the argument that FAPs should be more properly informed of the meaning behind traditional rituals, particularly as the majority of returnees undergo such ceremonies.

Elders have assisted in the mediation of conflicts involving FAPs and pass on general knowledge and counseling through visits. However, this currently is practiced on an ad-hoc basis with no set of written or transparent guiding principles from Ker Kwaro.

In some cases, FAP display anti-social or menacing behaviour – some have even resorted to violence, including threatening to kill a family or community member, beatings and in some cases, murder. The number of violent reprisals for such acts of aggression was not determined by the researchers, though it is estimated to be fairly low. Furthermore, respondents explained that such conflicts were resolved by ignoring the FAP (further alienation) or by chasing the returnee out of the camp (some FAP leave the community to return to the bush or join the UPDF). More constructively, it was found that a number of conflicts were resolved through counseling and mediation.

Some Elders and Rwodi have become directly involved in counseling returnees, listening to their ‘confessions’ or testimonies regarding their experiences while in captivity. Generally, returnees reported that the advice Elders gave them had a positive impact and helped them adjust to life in camps. As 38 percent of FAP report, these visits prove useful in the sense

¹²⁰ In Acholi tradition, virgins are considered pure, and often used in rituals and ceremonies “because they are innocent and clean from worldly sins.”

¹²¹ This discounts those who understood the significance but said they felt no change because they had not yet undergone the necessary ritual.

¹²² Note that these statistics only include returnees who provided a definitive “yes” when commenting on any changes; they do not include “N/A” responses.

that the returnee feels cared for and is given encouragement. Only 2 percent of respondents declared that a visit was not useful.¹²³ In some cases, returnees assert that the Elder or *Ryodi* was able to help them ‘change their attitudes’ and to turn their lives around. However, it should be emphasized this involvement appeared to be ad-hoc and on a case by case basis, occurring more frequently in cases where the returnee had an elderly relation.

Some Elders were involved in mediation of conflicts involving returnees in the context of the family or at school. Presumably because of the social respect afforded to them, Elders were requested by parents and teachers to become involved in resolving the disputes. They largely do so through consoling the returnee and informing them of traditional social norms and values. Because some children ‘grew up’ in the ‘bush’, it was reasoned, they did not know ‘how to act.’ These efforts at mediation had varying degrees of success and failure. In one case, a male returnee could not adjust to life in the camp despite the efforts of Elders and ended up joining the UPDF. In other cases, it was reported that the returnee responded well to the advice and attention given to them, and lived in relative harmony in the family and camp.¹²⁴ “The Elders... are the ones leading the community in forgiving the FAP [and] are doing a lot in reconciling, reintegration and return of the FAP and the LRA commanders.”¹²⁵ Community volunteers in Pajule who follow up FAP also agreed: “The Elders don’t speak to returnees that often, but it really helps them when they do talk, it changes their lives.”¹²⁶ FAP could view this as an official acceptance back into their communities since it is coming from cultural figures.

There is a lack of coordination between Ker Kwaro and reception centres regarding the process of reintegration. In particular, religious leaders and cultural leaders need to clarify their approaches and relationship on the role of culture.

To date, the only formal mechanism for monitoring the reintegration process of FAP is by rehabilitation centres such as World Vision, CARITAS-Pajule, GUSCO or Concerned Parents Association-Kitgum. The majority of these have trained community based Volunteers (CV) who are responsible for counseling returnees and monitoring their readjustment into camps. In a focus group discussion with CVs in Pajule, many elaborated on the role of cultural ceremonies, providing some insight into the importance and limitations of them in facilitating reintegration. It also highlights some of the tensions which exist between religious and cultural beliefs.

Despite strong CV commitment to FAPs and their training on psycho-social issues, their activities are severely hampered by the resources available to them. They operate on a

¹²³ The rest were not answered.

¹²⁴ According to one group interview with *Ryodi* from Pader District, when a returnee encounters a problem or displays signs of trauma, they have provided counseling to that family and child, including passing on traditional values and expectations to the formerly abducted child now that they have returned and are once again living within the community. If the case is “beyond their capacity”, they sometimes involve Elders or local councils in their area.

¹²⁵ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Lapule camp, 5 May 2005.

¹²⁶ Interview with CVs in Focus Group Discussion in Pajule Camp, 29 July 2005.

volunteer basis but receive a monthly lunch allowance of UGS 3,000. One of the results of this has been insufficient follow-up. When returnee respondents were asked if they had received any follow up from rehabilitation centres since they have returned home, only 13 percent they had.¹²⁷

A lack of resources has prevented the practice of rituals. CVs have recognized this resource gap and have requested support from reception centres, organizations working with FAPs, and cultural leaders at camps. Unfortunately, the responses have been limited. For example, CVs noted that in 2004 the most 'active' organization (AVSI) contributed the relevant resources to five FAPs through the materials needed for cultural ceremonies¹²⁸. Given the number of FAPs residing in camps and those in need of these ceremonies, this is extremely low. As a result of this CVs and FAPs have started resorting to religious rituals, such as individual or group prayer ceremonies, which are less expensive.¹²⁹ As one CV noted, "we prefer cultural ceremonies, they are most powerful, but we are using prayers because we don't have the requirements."¹³⁰

The research team also found that the information on cultural ceremonies provided at religiously-based reception centres is undermining and threatening to cultural beliefs. The majority of FAPs interviewed who went through World Vision and Rachele reception centres explained to the research team that they were specifically told not to participate in cultural rituals. Some respondents were warned that if they stepped on the egg they would be re-abducted, others were told that cultural activities were satanic, thus discouraging them from participating. Additionally, it was found that many FAPs were 'saved' at the centres.

Interviews with CV confirmed these findings and one stated that, "World Vision's policy does not support any cultural rituals and that they only advise them to do prayer ceremonies."¹³¹ Returnees are extremely vulnerable and susceptible to external influences when they initial return, thus, the timing to convert someone to a new religion should be carefully reviewed. It is also unreasonable that FAP are being discouraged from practicing cultural ceremonies and provided with false information about them, especially as research shows a positive correlation between the two. Despite this, the results of the survey found that FAP are undergoing more cultural rituals than prayer ceremonies¹³², at least in terms of the welcome home ceremonies ('Stepping of the Egg').

¹²⁷ It was not made clear whether the respondent was referring to follow up from rehabilitation centres or CVs that were trained by rehabilitation centres or other organizations, such as but not limited to, AVSI, CARITAS or UNICEF.

¹²⁸ Interview with CVs Focus Group in Pajule Camp, 29 July 2005.

¹²⁹ The financial challenges have become so severe that financial support from one organization to assist with FAPs has only allocated funding for prayer ceremonies for 2005. CVs informed the research team that they plan to hold a joint-cleaning-prayer ceremony that would include twelve children and their family members. The money given would provide food and drinks after the ceremony. This indicates that other non-religious based organizations are also starting to resort to less expensive reintegration ceremonies.

¹³⁰ Interview with CVs in Focus Group Discussion, in Pajule Camp, 29 July 2005.

¹³¹ Interview with CVs in Focus Group Discussion in Pajule Camp, 29 July 2005.

¹³² Please note that the research team did visit camps which had experienced communal cleansing ceremonies, which could have skewed these findings.

Communal Ceremonies to Promote Reintegration

Ker Kwaro has adapted ritual ceremonies at the communal level with returnees. Communal Cleansing Ceremonies have had a positive effect on the sensitization of the population, relief for returnees and the promotion of unity.

Since 2002, Ker Kwaro Acholi has adopted the ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremony to welcome back groups of returnees, introducing it at the communal level.¹³³ Communal cleansing ceremonies were originally envisioned as a first response to provisions under the 2000 Amnesty Act, section 9 (c) that requires the Commission to “consider and promote appropriate mechanisms of reconciliation in affected areas”. This provision includes a range of support to existing mechanisms – religious and secular. Traditional institutions are deemed to provide a “vital complementary role” to the provision of the Act.

Since 2003, more than 30 communal and family cleansing ceremonies overseen by traditional leaders have taken place, involving over 2,500 FAC and adults.¹³⁴ Communal cleansing ceremonies were started within camps and town centres as a means of addressing the impact of the conflict and forced displacement on traditional practices. As *Rwodi* from Pader District explained:

The issue of communal cleansing ceremonies came about because of the conflict and the magnitude of the problem associated with it...The people have lost their shrines (*keci*) and in Acholi these shrines are supposed to be in the original homestead or clan. The traditional rituals need money [but] our people cannot afford them. So we felt these communal ceremonies would help those who cannot organize it on their own.¹³⁵

The researchers witnessed in total 7 communal cleansing ceremonies at Layibi (August 2004), Awere (October 2004), Anaka (February 2005), Amoro (February 2005), Lukong (March 2005), the residence of His Highness in Gulu Town (April 2005) and Kilak Corner (June 2005). All the ceremonies witnessed shared similarities in terms of the following:

- The appearance of *Rwodi Moo* from different clans, led by the Paramount Chief of Acholi;¹³⁶

¹³³ According to some Elders and *Mego*, communal cleansing ceremonies and rituals have existed in Acholi for some time. These ceremonies are often used to ‘chase *cen*’ or *gemo* (a collection of bad omens’ from areas, or, when a mass of people are returning from a conflict. For instance, one Elder argued communal ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremonies were practiced in the past after a conflict had ended.

¹³⁴ This is a rough estimate, while some recording of the communal cleansing ceremony were kept by Ker Kwaro and their partner organizations (Luo Development and Catholic Relief Services), the records were incomplete and not compiled. The researchers attempted to compile this data – see Appendix 2 for locations and dates of confirmed ceremonies.

¹³⁵ Group interviews with *Rwot* Francis Okot Lateyet (Kabala clan), *Rwot* Odon (Omoacer clan), *Rwot* Owor Fostino (Paulo Pa Omon clan) and *Rwot* Oyo Martin Lakwang (Kadwera Clan), all from Pader District but interviewed in Kitgum, 3 May 2005.

¹³⁶ Originally, the communal cleansing ceremonies were performed at the initiative of different *Rwot Moo* across the three Districts, but eventually this was formalized to include a multi-clan approach.

- The attendance of Elders, Local Councillors (1-5), *Mego*, community members, local NGOs and UPDF;
- The ceremony of ‘Stepping on the Egg’;
- The participation of different musical and dance groups from within the camp;
- The communal sharing of food and drink among the *Rwodi*, guests and formerly abducted people;
- Speeches by *Rwodi*, Elders, LCs, and Colonel Otema in Gulu Town, the Deputy Paramount Chief of Gulu and Kitgum and, at the end, the Paramount Chief.

Outside of this, variants on procedures were witnessed. As the *Rwot Moo* of the area was responsible for organizing the ceremony, differences in approach are relative to his own particular vision of the ceremony.

Impact

It could be argued that communal cleansing ceremonies have gained a momentum and significance beyond that originally envisioned. Returnees often felt more accepted following a communal cleansing ceremony, and they were better able to communicate and socialise with community members. As one respondent claimed, following the communal cleansing ceremony, he “felt that people also loved them and were thinking about them yet they [had done] very many bad things.”¹³⁷ There is a “sense of belonging and acceptance by community.”¹³⁸ Communal cleansing ceremonies also put returnees’ minds at ease because they are able to realize that they were and are not alone in their experiences. They see that “there are many people who underwent [the] same problem.”¹³⁹ Some returnees also reported a decrease in nightmares afterwards, similar to the effects of family cleansing ceremonies.

In 26 in-depth interviews held with parents (15) and neighbours (11) of returnees who had gone through the Communal Cleansing Ceremonies, most noticed a positive impact on the returnees following the ceremony. Most observed alterations in social relationships, the returnees’ interactions with neighbours, friends and family members. Returnees who were solitary prior to the ceremony were now more sociable, they were better able to converse in a ‘normal’ manner, and aggressive behaviour tended to reduce or disappear. As such, the majority of respondents were in favour of communal cleansing ceremonies.

In addition to its healing properties, parents and neighbours also identified reintegration benefits of the CCC. As one respondent observed, “it instils in the child [that] she is not just a member of the family, but [also] that of the community in which she traces her origin.”¹⁴⁰ It is an opportunity for the returnees to witness firsthand acceptance by the community, which allows for better societal relations. In fact, one woman stated that all returnees should attend a communal cleansing ceremony and that a communal cleansing ceremony is, in some

¹³⁷ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Lacor Camp, 14 April 2005.

¹³⁸ Multiple returnees (names not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Anaka camp, 23 April 2005.

¹³⁹ Returnee (name not available for privacy purposes), Interviewed in Amuru camp, 2 June 2005.

¹⁴⁰ IDP (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Lacor camp, 15 April 2005.

ways, more important than a family cleansing ceremony because “it is a special way of communicating welcome of formerly abducted children.”¹⁴¹

Although the ceremony is centred on FAP, this feeling of belonging and unity spreads beyond the returnees to some of the community members who attend. The ceremony calls upon entire communities to bear witness, including local leadership, in this process of welcoming. According to one parent, “it is an occasion where the general community comes together and ascertains the return of one of their members. It is an opportunity for the general community to share benefits of uniting as members of the same clan. It also instils feeling of belonging to community.”¹⁴² Communal cleansing ceremonies are also a form of sensitization as they assist the community to accept and welcome returnees back home. In some ways it serves as a reminder to them that they are indeed a ‘community’, that they share the same Acholi culture and values.

Communal ceremonies were also viewed as an occasion to uphold the Acholi culture. Even in the few cases of ‘saved’ parents who did not believe in the ritual, they still felt that communal cleansing ceremonies are “good for traditional respect.”¹⁴³ Thus, one could argue that communal ceremonies are a way to revitalize traditional practices, which have been limited due to the conflict and displacement. The presence of His Highness David Onen Acana II and the *Rwot Moo* from the various clans marks an attempt to stand together as an example to local communities. In turn, this strengthens the leadership of cultural leaders, and fosters dialogue on questions of peace and justice.

Continuation

Communal ceremonies continue to grow in demand and size. Since 2002, requests for ceremonies from within different counties have become more and more frequent. The size of groups undergoing the process of cleansing has likewise successively grown in number, with the latest ceremony in Amuru involving up to 800 formerly abducted persons. Many of the participants voluntarily arrive the day of the ceremony – sometimes from miles away – to participate in the cleansing process. In one sample case, at least half of the returnees did not go through rehabilitation centres but straight back into the communities, and in total, 25 percent of FAP respondents reported that they went directly home. As a result, the cleansing ceremony may be the first form of ‘therapy’ for them.

Finally, and not unimportantly, the ceremonies are a form of communication to the remaining rebels and abducted children in the bush. In recent meetings between traditional chiefs, elders and the LRA (December 2004), the LRA identified three things that presented an obstacle to their return. The first related to government sincerity about peace talks, and the second was prosecution by the International Criminal Court. The third involved their fear of communities’ response to what they had done. Many of the rebel commanders have acknowledged that what they have done was a serious crime against their own people, and that reintegration will be very difficult because of this. The cleansing ceremonies are a

¹⁴¹ IDP (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Kitgum-Matidi, 19 April 2005.

¹⁴² IDP (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Lacor Camp, 13 April 2005.

¹⁴³ IDP parent (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Kitgum-Matidi, 19 April 2005; Also interview with IDP parent in Corner Kilak, 30 July 2005.

message – passed on through mediators and radio – that communities are willing to receive them back, and that the traditional leaders are going to be their guide to the justice and reconciliation process.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the communal cleansing ceremonies that will require clarification by Ker Kwaro. This includes clarifying the purpose of the Ceremonies, and how they will be followed up at the grassroots level in terms of restoration of relationships.

At the same time, a number of concerns were raised regarding the communal cleansing ceremonies that will require clarification by Ker Kwaro, particularly how these ceremonies will be followed up at the grass-roots level and in terms of endorsing truth and forgiveness – which is a message that is promoted through the ceremonies. Some Elders argue the ceremonies provide an avenue for returnees to be forgiven without having to repent and or to ask for forgiveness. Their concern is that these rituals will act as a substitute for traditional reconciliation processes. Others voiced concern that the ceremonies only took place in town, having not been aware of the number being conducted in camps.

Others argue that the ceremonies, while symbolic and important, only represent the desire of the cultural leadership, and not the realities of those people at the grassroots level. In other words, the ceremonies can be viewed as less meaningful at that level. Indeed, some FAPs reported that they continued to experience serious stigmatization in the camps. In only 26 percent of the cases studied was there any follow-up by the *Rwodi* and Elders with FAPs or their neighbours/friends to help reaffirm positive messages sent during the cleansing ceremonies.

These concerns are in part related to the need for a better ‘communication strategy’. During the consultative workshop, a number of participants stated that many persons who have never attended a communal cleansing ceremony mistakenly took it to be a Mato Oput Ceremony. Yet there are very important differences between the two (see Chapter V, Mato Oput and its Relevance to the Current Circumstances). Further, in casual conversations with donors, journalists and NGOs, many also expressed confusion regarding the role and function of the communal ceremonies. Some viewed it as a supplement for traditional justice. Yet such ceremonies are only a first step in a process towards traditional justice, and should be understood as such.

Finally, while the communal ceremonies were generally well received by many camp members and returnees, the researchers were sometimes told that there was also skepticism within the crowd. Again, this could be attributed to many factors, such as leadership in the camp, knowledge of cultural leaders and their roles, and finally, the fact that many camp persons were not informed of the purpose of the ceremony prior to it taking place.

While Ker Kwaro has acknowledged the difficulties facing returnee mothers, no official policy exists for how cultural initiatives might facilitate their reintegration, thus the problems they encounter are not supported in a cultural fashion.

Like nearly every society, rape in Acholi engenders stigmatization of the person violated. In Acholi, rape ‘in the bush’ is considered a deep cultural offence. Elders and Mego argued that cleansing ceremonies such as *tum* did exist for women in the case of rape, but they appear to be rarely practiced for this particular cause. The cleansing ceremony is often performed to relieve the psychological stress of rape, including the belief that rape in the bush will result in infertility among women. Barren women are considered ‘dead’ in Acholi culture, and alienation from social life as such. There is no equivalent cleansing or accompanying shame for men who committed the crime.

A number of Elders argued that a general cleansing included rape and it is unclear if a woman or girl would want a particular ceremony given the stigmatization associated with it. However, it is important to recognize the widespread phenomenon of rape during the course of the conflict:

Reportedly, the LRA considers girls to be suitable for marriage from the time of reaching sexual maturity, and girls from the age of as young as 10 can be married into sexual and abusive relationships with senior LRA leaders, during which they are forced to have children to populate the ‘new Acholi nation’. If girls are reluctant or refuse this role they may suffer rape and may even be killed as punishment for disobedience. Most LRA commanders and officers have multiple slave-wives, and Joseph Kony has been reported to have about 60 ‘wives’ himself.¹⁴⁴

Rape, sexual exploitation and violence by the Ugandan Army has been reported in camps, although it appears no body is formally counting or analyzing this form of violence.¹⁴⁵ So it is not possible to determine what motivates sexual and gender based violence, or to what extent it is an endemic, systematic practice. Nevertheless, in Acholi-bur, rape by UPDF was identified by one informant as one of the most pressing security concerns. He explained the implications of rape and sexual exploitation in the camp:

Women are lured by money [of soldiers] and desert their rightful husbands who are normally poor camp dwellers. Defilement of young girls [is another problem]. Many girls have taken to married life or prostitution at a very tender age. They are forced to get married or join prostitution in order to [provide food for their families]. At times, parents ‘sell off’ their daughters to people [with money]. They end up getting AIDS...¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ *Nowhere to Hide: Humanitarian Protection Threats in Northern Uganda*, Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda, December 2004, p 57.

¹⁴⁵ While the researchers did not document any reported cases of male-rape, it has been reported elsewhere that this has and does occur. Soldiers reportedly form ‘bend over’ crews to directly target and rape men or young boys.

¹⁴⁶ Name withheld for privacy purposes, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

According to tradition, women who change sexual partners are ostracized, and often labelled a prostitute. This social norm can be so strong that it sometimes means a woman may unite with a man who raped her, particularly if a child is born of the rape. It may also be one of the reasons why a percentage of young women returning from the bush with children are willing to reunite with their so called ‘husbands’ once they return. According to People’s Voice for Peace, an organization working with rape survivors of the LRA and the UPDF, most women want to pursue no formal justice, because they are the “fathers of their children.”¹⁴⁷ “Some may wish to remarry,” stated Margaret Tebere, “but the child produced by rape is ostracized [by the husband, or the husband’s family] and so these marriages often fail.”¹⁴⁸ It is sometimes believed that a child born of rape in the bush has *cen*, and will grow up to inherit the same violent tendencies of the man who ‘fathered’ him or her. Thus, another reason women may want to reunite with their ‘husbands’ from the bush or a rapist is the lack of any other social, economic, or, tragically, even protective alternatives. In sum, issues dealing with customary marriage and children require greater guidance by cultural leaders if cycles of stigmatization are to be broken.

The LRA

Although intermixed with elements of Christianity and Islam, the LRA practice many of the same ritual practices and beliefs of Acholi culture. This suggests such cultural practices could have a positive healing effect on returning rebels and abductees themselves, although this needs careful handling by cultural leaders. The report findings suggest that cultural leaders have built some confidence with the LRA, but that more needs to be done to reconcile violent differences between them.

In order for a ritual to have an impact, one needs to understand and believe in it. This was underscored by one returnee’s neighbour, who stated that “the effects of staying in the bush is determined by what the child was doing while in the bush and their belief in getting affected [by traditional rituals].”¹⁴⁹ The researchers attempted to examine the cultural and spiritual aspects and aspirations of LRA commanders in order to analyze how cultural leaders are attempting to counter these tactics and hasten sustainable return and reintegration.¹⁵⁰

According to informants, the Holy Spirit drives the continuation of the conflict. Former rebels stated that LRA Commander Joseph Kony claimed that the Holy Spirit of the Trinity communicates directly through him, and is powerful enough to overthrow the Government

¹⁴⁷ Margaret Tebere, Interviewed in Kanyagoga, 23 February 2005.

¹⁴⁸ This was also reported to be the case in 2 in-depth interviews with formerly abducted young women who are mothers in Parongo,

¹⁴⁹ IDP (name is unavailable due to privacy purposes), Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 11 May 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Information provided in this section is derived from 31 in-depth interviews with formerly abducted persons. Except for interviews with commanders, the names, location and dates of interviews are not referenced in this section of the report.

of Uganda. Kony is reported to have several spirits which enter him, although these were referred to be of “another world,” that is, not Acholi. However, former commanders were reluctant to divulge information regarding Kony’s spirits, or claim to be confused or not know about them.¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, speculations about the origins and nature of Kony’s spirits abound and a number of informants referred to the concept of *Jok* to describe them. Originating from the Palaro clan in Odek, some Elders believe that Kony acquired his *Jok* (in this sense, spiritual power) from his grandfather who died as he was carrying a small rock on his head while crossing the River Aswa.¹⁵² Reportedly, Kony found the rock and *Jok* entered him. Others argue Kony’s *Jok* derived from the rock outcrops in Aswa, while still others suggest the *Jok* possessed first Kony’s brother and, upon his death, was transferred to Kony. Perhaps the most commonly known story about the origins of Kony’s *Jok* is that he derived them from his cousin, Alice Auma, former commander of the Holy Spirit Movement which ended in 1988.

A number of rituals and cultural items appear in LRA practices. For example, the majority of FAPs interviewed reported that soon after abduction they underwent a cleansing ritual that involved smearing *moo-yaa* (shea butter) on the chest which could not be washed for three days for men, four days for women. Persons undergoing the ritual had to walk with bare chest during this time. Reasons for this initiation ritual were to remove the “civilian way of life” from abductees, or “so that if someone escapes, he or she can be easily traced, identified or caught.” In Acholi culture, shea trees are sacred, and its butter is used for blessings and the anointment of chiefs.

According to several interviewees, *cen* did follow fighters returning to base camps and required rituals similar to Acholi to cleanse them. Former LRA Commander Michael Opio described one ritual involving the slaughter of two sheep that resembles *Yubu Kum* rituals in Acholi. In it, the one sheep was burnt to ashes and disregarded, the ash considered to contain the essence of *cen*. The other was slaughtered and placed across a hole which soldiers would round and then step on. In doing so, any *cen* within the soldier was released into the dead sheep. Instruction is then given for each member to enter a river to cleanse them of *cen*. Afterwards, one had to move without looking back until they reached their home in the bush.¹⁵³

New comers to the LRA were also thought to have *cen*, and the initiation ritual was to cleanse them of this. Every month, each person in one girl’s battalion were submerged in water (3 times for boys, 4 times for girls) to cleanse them of any *cen* or evil spirits they may have possessed. Blessings were also given before going into battle by sprinkling water on

¹⁵¹ Former LRA Commander Michael Opio, on the other hand, disagrees Kony has any *jok*. ‘He only talks about God’, implying his power is derived directly from the Holy Spirit, not Acholi Gods. Former LRA Commander Kamdulu differentiated between *tipu marac* and *tipu maleng* (the Holy Spirit), although expressed that it was difficult to always tell the difference between the two.

¹⁵² Rivers and rocks or rock outcrops are places where *Jok* are believed to be concentrated, according to traditional Acholi culture. Hence many people avoid rivers and rock outcrops in fear of encountering an evil or bad *Jok*.

¹⁵³ Prayer rituals were also held for persons with *cen*.

soldiers to build their confidence. While for a different purpose to that of Acholi culture, these rituals are also found in Acholi-land.

However, there are a number of LRA practices which significantly contradict Acholi culture. For instance, newcomers to the army were often forced to sleep or eat with the dead. They reported being forced to eat without being allowed to wash their hands after ‘killing,’ and forced to cook using a *panga* that had also been used to kill human beings. All of these acts are deep abominations of Acholi culture, and a great offence to the ancestors. They could be interpreted as a means of quelling any desire of the abducted to escape and return home (where shame and stigma is too great). However, they are also potentially a form of integrating new members into the LRA belief system that understand the Acholi as morally corrupt and therefore, no longer human beings deserving cultural respect.

There is also great deal of intermixing of culture and religion in the LRA. In the bush, preachers, or *lupwonye dimi*, teach the LRA about the gospel and the Holy Spirit with the goal of training each person to conduct prayers. Before commencing an attack, and upon return from one, prayers are conducted by the LRA. The Holy Spirit is prayed to each time a person escapes, to ask for the person to return. Upon the death of a member, prayer ceremonies and burial rites were also observed.

According to one group of returnees, Kony was a ‘seer’ who could predict the future with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Kony was described as being able to predict attacks, attempted escapes, or betrayals. Claiming the Holy Spirit commands him, Kony will take actions to thwart any danger or betrayal that he predicts will happen. If the Holy Spirit predicted danger, rituals were undertaken to ward off offensive attacks. For example, in Sudan, one girl reported that she was told to step on the *wee* (ruminant) and blood of a freshly slaughtered sheep “to stop opposition fighters from pursuing them on return.” Fasting and tying palm leaves to their hands was practiced to ward off attacks. Going into battle, a number of returnees reported they tied stones to their wrists to protect them from bullets.

After returning from battle in Uganda, returnees reported that they were told never to look back to Uganda to avoid being followed by *cen*. The practice of ‘not looking behind’ is also a frequent last act after a ritual is performed in Acholi culture. Other returnees reported that both good and bad *Jok* existed in the LRA belief system, and were used as a way to discipline behaviour. The LRA were forced to follow strict codes of conduct. If broken, the person in question was punished not only physically, but the *Jok* would hasten injury or death during battle. Adultery, sex during a woman’s menstrual cycle, or eating during a fasting period are examples of abominations, insulting the Holy Spirit and resulting in sickness, injury or death on the battlefield. Like former rebel commanders of the Holy Spirit Movement, Alice Lakwena then, LRA injuries or death on the battlefield was often blamed on violations of the codes of conduct outlined by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, the relationship between the top commanders and Acholi Elders and *Rwodi* is complex. While deeply suspicious of the Acholi people, particularly Elders, Kony and others are said to respect certain Elders and Chiefs. In December 2004, Kony called the Paramount

¹⁵⁴ Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, Oxford, James Currey, 1999.

Chief of Acholi to ask for a meeting between LRA and their ‘forefathers’ before any official meetings took place with the Chief Mediator Betty Bigombe. This meeting took place, and the Paramount Chief provided counsel to the rebels to discontinue their attacks on civilians.¹⁵⁵ Commanders have met other chiefs on a number of occasions and have released their wives and children to them in good faith.¹⁵⁶

However, after the failed peace talks in 1994, Kony is said to have viewed Elders as having betrayed him and the LRA. He therefore instructed his company to no longer respect or trust Acholi Elders.¹⁵⁷ This rift was recently reiterated by an unidentified former commander at the Paraa retreat of Acholi leaders:

Then on the war, let us look at it truthfully. Was it started by Kony? I want to say to you, that before I came here for this meeting; I hated all of you. I hated you all because you have been cowards. At the beginning of the war many supported it. But later you all turned away without giving guidance to the ones who had remained in the bush. That is what I term as cowardice.¹⁵⁸

After the people began to comply with the UPDF’s military campaign, Kony also extended his distrust to the Acholi people. Hence, mass abductions, mutilations, massacres and ambushes were seen as justified and part of Kony’s Holy war to terrorize people. The reconciliation talked of today in Acholi, then, is one between the LRA and the Elders who reportedly turned their backs on Kony. Many proverbs and claims are made in Acholi to this end. Additionally it sheds light on the fact the Acholi leadership have played their own part in the conflict and, through their diverse efforts at talks, confidence building, amnesty and promoting forgiveness, they all play an important role in laying the foundation to end the conflict. This is a delicate and complex process.

Finally, Finnström¹⁵⁹ has argued that the discourse of reconciliation in Acholi potentially further alienates LRA leadership, rather than builds their confidence in returning home. As implied in the Amnesty Act and Acholi traditional justice, there is a need to admit guilt and to be forgiven by the offended party. LRA leaders continue to resist any wrongdoing but instead emphasize their political agenda which Acholi leaders continue to abandon.¹⁶⁰ Support by the Government of Uganda to traditional institutions and practices, and the unanswered questions regarding how traditional justice would extend nationally may further fuel suspicions. All of this begs the question, how far can a purely ‘neutral’ cultural approach to peace and justice go to address the political differences which so bitterly divide parties to

¹⁵⁵ Commanders who later surrendered reported that the LRA celebrated the coronation of the Paramount Chief of Acholi in the bush on 17 January 2005, recognizing they now had a ‘true leader of the Acholi.’

¹⁵⁶ For instance, in Pajule, Rwot Owyak and Rwot Lugai brought out over 100 rebels in 2003.

¹⁵⁷ Brigadier Kenneth Banya, the “mastermind” of LRA tactical strategies and himself an elderly man, stated that Kony had a high level of mistrust Acholi elders. Interviewed in Gulu town by MindsetMedia, October 2004.

¹⁵⁸ Name of commander withheld, found in George Omona, *Together we can make a difference: Report of the Paraa Meeting, July 2005*. P. 13

¹⁵⁹ S. Finnström, “Reconciliation grown bitter? Amnesty, Ritual and the War in Northern Uganda”, *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, forthcoming 2005.

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that many informants were less concerned with the timing of truth telling, arguing traditional justice could not, nor should not be rushed, because it was important for persons to come to the self-realization of their wrong doings.

this conflict? Despite the evident contradictions, future policies on justice and reconciliation would be ill-informed if the cultural and spiritual dimensions of this conflict were not taken into consideration.

V MATO OPUT AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE CURRENT CONTEXT

*Culture is dynamic.*¹⁶¹

In the 1997 report by Dennis Pain, *The Bending of Spears*, the process and ceremony of *Mato Oput* was identified as an important component to fostering justice and peace in Acholi-land.¹⁶² Much speculation has arisen since the publication of Pain's report on whether or not *Mato Oput* even exists, what exactly it is, and its applicability to the current circumstances. The purpose of the current report is to foster further discussion and examination of these issues.

The following chapter is divided into two main sections. The first part of chapter V attempts to clarify what *Mato Oput* is in terms of a process and ceremony. An analysis of its continued practice in camps today is offered, drawing out lessons learned about the process from a case study in Pajule camp, Pader District. In part two of the chapter, an examination of whether or not *Mato Oput* can be adapted to fit the current circumstances is debated, highlighting both the difficulties in adapting the process, and the possibilities it holds.

Mato Oput

Mato Oput is both a process and ritual ceremony to restore relationships between clans in the case of intentional murder or an accidental killing.

The process and ceremony of *Mato Oput* is undertaken only in the case of intentional or accidental killing of an individual. The ceremony involves two clans bringing together the perpetrator and the victim in a quest for harmony. This communal involvement points to the fact that one person's crime affects the clan as a whole. Everyone lives in co-existence.¹⁶³ *Mato Oput* is a long and sophisticated process that begins by separating the affected clans, mediation to establish the 'truth' and payment of compensation according to by-laws.¹⁶⁴¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Latim Garrison, Interviewed in Gulu Town, ND.

¹⁶² Dennis Pain, *The Bending of the Spears: Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda*, London: International Alert and Kacoke Madit, 1997.

¹⁶³ Whether or not *Mato Oput* was done in both the case of homicide and manslaughter was a contested issue among respondents, and it is possible this varies from clan to clan. Documentation of cases of *Mato Oput* by the researchers revealed it was indeed done in both instances. Of the 50 cases documented, all involved a male perpetrator; either female perpetrators are uncommon or the ritual is not deemed necessary.

¹⁶⁴ By-laws varied from clan to clan; however, Ker Kwaro has recently attempted to unify the by-laws regarding compensation. This includes 16 cows for an intended murder, and 10 cows for an accidental murder.

¹⁶⁵ See Also a description of traditional justice in Hovil and Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later: Traditional Justice in Northern Uganda*, 2005, p. 11-19.

For instance, immediately following a murder or manslaughter, relations between families are completely cut off. This is highly significant in communal cultures where food, water, land, and social relations are shared between families of respective clans and chiefdoms, including marriage. The interruption of these relations was variously called a ‘cooling off period’, a ‘ceasefire’ and ‘a period of cooling bitterness’ by Elders. They also explained the period of separation was to ‘avoid immediate revenge,’ suggesting it was a way of mediating the escalation of the conflict.¹⁶⁶ The researchers noted that the intensity of hatred increased with the nature of killing. Intentional killings created more tensions than accidental ones, and required different amounts of compensation. Additionally, it was noted that killings which occurred during times of war did not require *Mato Oput*. The ceremony is only performed if the death was not provoked.¹⁶⁷

Emphasis was often placed on the perpetrator’s initiative to admit his or her role in the crime. “This must be completely voluntary or not done at all” said Ladit Latim.¹⁶⁸ “If a person does kill and does not confess, he [or she] will be haunted and suffer from psychological stress, fear and nightmares.” Pressing him further on the question of justice in the face of involuntary confession, the informant stated only that in time “the truth will reveal itself.” That is, the spirit of the dead would bring misfortune in the form of nightmares, sickness and even death in the family of the guilty party until confession is made and rectification is sought. In the cases recorded by researchers, more than half took place in the 1960s and 1970s, but were not completed until post-2000. The reasons given for this are the long periods of time accorded to the perpetrator to submit to justice voluntarily, and the time it may take for mediation and raising the amount of compensation.

Ladit Latim described the process of shuttle diplomacy of *Larii Tal* (mediator – usually an Elder):

One person trusted by both parties plays shuttle diplomacy [between the two families] and decides when it is possible to talk without temper. [At the appropriate time], the case is taken to the *Rwot* and a neutral venue is fixed. The two sides are invited to speak. The offended side will present their terms and demands, and once the offending side agrees to the compensation, the family or clan works to raise the compensation....A date is fixed for the *Lapid Kwo* [negotiator of the compensation] to receive the compensation and an *ajwaka* is harkened to raise the dead [whose] spirit determines which person in the offended clan will receive the compensation.¹⁶⁹

According to the Elders, the affected families and extended relations are involved at all stages in the establishment of the facts. Should either of the parties wish to withdraw,

¹⁶⁶ Group interviews with *Rwot* Francis Okot Lateyet (Kabala clan), *Rwot* Odon (Omoacer clan), *Rwot* Owor Fostino (Paulo Pa Omon clan) and *Rwot* Oyo Martin Lakwang (Kadwera Clan), Pader District, 3 May 2005.

¹⁶⁷ This point was emphasized at the consultative workshop: *Mato Oput* does not apply to deaths on the battlefield, where presumably that battle was sanctioned by the Elders as just. Given this definition, Elders did not reach a consensus on its applicability to the current conflict, and circumstances of death in it – discussed below. Notes from *Roco Wat I Acoli: The Consultative Workshop*, August 12-13, 2005. By Elizabeth Ayot.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Ladit Latim, Gerrison. Personal Secretary to His Highness *Rwot* Acana II, February 11, 2005, Gulu Town.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Ladit Latim, Gerrison. Personal Secretary to His Highness *Rwot* Acana II, February 11, 2005, Gulu Town.

counselling takes place and more time is allowed to pass until the person(s) involved are ready. Once the process has begun, it can only be ended when all parties are satisfied with the account of what has happened, including reflection of the perpetrator on the motives for his or her crimes, the circumstances in which it was committed, expression of remorse, and the payment of compensation. The amount of compensation generally follows the by-laws, and is raised through the contributions of clan members.

The *Mato Oput* ceremony was defined as the ‘final act which concludes the process of reconciliation following a killing,’¹⁷⁰ and resolves the bitterness and ill that follows from it. Thus, the process of *Mato Oput* also addresses a ‘spiritual dimension’, as it was believed that the spirit of the dead remained restless with bitterness and consequently brought misfortune to both the perpetrators and offenders, in addition to the disunity caused amongst clans. The *Mato Oput* ceremony involves an elaborate series of symbolic acts to restore unity between the injured parties.

However, some Elders argued that the whole process of *Mato Oput* was not formally completed until the life lost was replaced with a new one. Historically, a young girl from the offending clan was given as compensation to the victim’s clan for marriage. The first-born child as the result of that marriage was given the name of the person killed. However, this practice was eventually replaced by giving cows or money for the exclusive purpose of brideprice. The person receiving brideprice can marry a woman of their choice, although they are still required to give the name of the deceased to the first born.¹⁷¹ According to one informant, once the new family was well established, the brideprice is returned to the original clan members, and *Mato Oput* is complete.

The Mato Oput Ceremony fosters reconciliation between the two clans. While the process leading to the ceremony is similar across different clans, the ceremony itself varies widely. There is need for further documentation of these differences if Mato Oput is to be applied communally by Ker Kwaro in the context of the new conflict.

According to the Elders interviewed, the following ritual acts are carried out in most *Mato Oput* ceremonies.¹⁷² Variations in interpretation of the meaning are described below:

¹⁷⁰ Ladit Latim, Quoted in Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Conflict Resolution*, Unpublished Working Paper 13, 3 November 2004, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ If the baby is not given the name of the deceased, it is believed that the deceased will complain: “if I were still alive I would have children by now.” The new child is considered to be the child of the person that died.

¹⁷² For further details on rituals within the ceremony, see Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, *Traditional Ways of Preventing and Solving Conflicts in Acholi*, Unpublished Working Paper, January 2005.

The Mato Oput Ceremony

Beating of the Stick: The beating of the stick seems to be broadly symbolic of the restorative motivation for a *Mato Oput*, although it was more specifically defined by Elders in various ways: a) The stick symbolizing the ‘next person’ who would be killed in revenge, which the mediator stops the families from doing; b) The beating of the stick symbolizes the “anger, bitterness” which could lead to fighting and acts of revenge if not mediated;¹⁷³ c) The beating of the stick illustrates to the spirit of the murdered person that he or she is cared for; a mediator symbolizes that without mediation, more death would have followed through revenge killings; d) In another account, the stick symbolizes the ‘truth’, described as important to restoring justice.¹⁷⁴ After beating the stick, the offending side runs away, symbolizing the acceptable guilt of the murder.

Slaughter of the Sheep and Goat:¹⁷⁵ The sheep, supplied by the offending clan, is a symbol of the *cen* that haunts the clan whose member has committed murder or manslaughter. In another account, however, the sheep was said to symbolize humility, because a sheep is a humble animal.¹⁷⁶ The *laroo* (goat), supplied by the injured clan, is a symbol of unity, signalling that the injured clan is willing to forgive and reconcile. The sheep and goat are cut in half, and the opposite sides are exchanged among the two parties. In one account, the sheep and goat represent the two parties prior to *Mato Oput* (separate entities), and the cutting and mixing symbolize the uniting of the two parties.¹⁷⁷ The mouths of the sheep and goat are held together to prevent them from ‘crying’ out during the slaughter, which would be a bad omen.

Eating Spoiled Boo: *Boo mukwok* (spoiled *boo*, or local greens) is a sign that tension existed long enough for food to become spoiled. Eating the *Boo mukwok* symbolizes that the clans are ready to ‘*Mato Oput*’ (reconcile) after such a long time.

Drinking of the Bitter Root: *Oput* (bitter root) is a symbol of the bitterness that exists between the two clans. Drinking of *Oput* by both parties symbolizes the washing down of bitterness in people’s hearts, acting as a ‘medicine to cure the bitterness’. Participants drink while kneeling down, with their heads bowed and hands clasped behind their back in a show of respect to the murdered person. In another account, hands were clasped behind backs to convey sincerity of never wanting to fight again.¹⁷⁸ A representative of each party drinks at the same time from the calabash. Before drinking they *yoko wic* (literally ‘knocking heads’) to symbolize that where “heads have been separated before, they are now united.”

Eating of the Liver: In the process of the ceremony, the *acviny* (liver) of the sheep and goat are cooked and eaten by both parties. In humans, the liver is thought to be the place where all bitterness is stored, or variously the source of life, where all ‘blood is stored, and

¹⁷³ *Rwot* Mathew Ajao, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, May 11 2005

¹⁷⁴ Ladit Eromiso Odora, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

¹⁷⁵ In some clans, two sheep are required and cannot be substituted for a goat.

¹⁷⁶ *Rwot* Andrea Binyi Pesa II, Interviewed in Amuru, 31 May 2005. *Rwot*, 74 years of age, was also an *Atekere* until being anointed chief in 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Ladit Okello, Eromiya, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Father Carlos, Justice and Peace Commission. Interviewed in Gulu Town, 26 May 2005.

blood is the source of life and the unifying factor of all clans'. The liver of the sheep and goat are eaten by both parties to illustrate that their blood has been mixed and united through the goat and sheep. The eating of the liver also symbolizes the washing away of all bitterness stored in the blood of the human liver. In one account, the eating of the liver also symbolizes 'kweyo *cviny*' (calming down the conflicting parties by the mediator).¹⁷⁹ *Okutu Lacac/lacaa/lacaro* is the instrument used to feed the liver to each of the parties.¹⁸⁰ *Okutu Lacac* symbolizes that tensions existing prior to *Mato Oput* would be ignored from that day forward. Another interpretation was that the thorns symbolized the thorny relationship between the two clans, resolved upon completion of the ceremony.¹⁸¹ Yet another account is that a thorn is used instead of hands, because the hands of the murderer are considered unclean and would contaminate the food.¹⁸²

Eating *Odeyo*: Consuming *Odeyo* (what remains of a saucepan, used for mingling) is one of the last rituals of the ceremony. It is thought to free the involved parties to eat together again.

Eating of Food: Eating of all the food prepared for the day is an important part of the *Mato Oput* process. No food should be taken home afterwards, or the *Mato Oput* will not be considered to be complete. Finishing the food symbolizes no tensions or bitterness is left between the two clans.

Mato Oput continues to be practiced in camp settings throughout all three Districts of Acholi-land. Through recording of the oral history of informants, the researchers were able to partially record 50 cases of Mato Oput, taking place between 2000 and 2005. In one in-depth case study, it was found that the aspects of truth, compensation and ritual were considered central elements of the process.

Mato Oput Case Study: Pajule Camp, April 4, 2005

Background

The researchers were able to document a *Mato Oput* ceremony in Pajule camp, Pader District, and through in-depth interviews with participants, record the process leading to the ceremony, and in doing so, assess the impact of it. The case study is illustrative of some of the contradictions and challenges of carrying out *Mato Oput* in camps today, and highlights the variations from a *Mato Oput* also witnessed by researchers in Pabo camp, Gulu District.

¹⁷⁹ Ladit Eromasio Odora, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

¹⁸⁰ *Okutu* is a type of white thorn; *cac* means to ignore.

¹⁸¹ Ladit Sisto Acire, Gem-Onyot. Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005.

¹⁸² Ladit Eromasio Odora, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 10 May 2005; Ladit Mathew Okot, Interviewed in Lapule, Pader, 3 May 2005.

Researchers witnessed the *Mato Oput* ritual in Pajule on April 4th 2005, which was the final part of the reconciliation process between the Palenga and Paluo clans.¹⁸³ In 1977, sons of each respective sub-clan had been drinking together at a local brewing establishment when an argument broke out. 'O' of Paluo shot a stone using a catapult into the stomach of 'D' of Palenga, who died some days later in hospital.¹⁸⁴ The accused then was arrested and tried in a court of law in Kitgum, but was released one year and five months later. The presiding judge recommended that 'O' reconcile with the harmed family of the Palenga sub-clan.

Several years after arriving home, tragedies befell the home of 'O' and those of his relatives. Two of 'O's brothers died in road accidents, as did five of his children and one of his co-wives from a swift illness.¹⁸⁵ Elders within the sub-clan met to identify the cause of the tragedies, determining that the spirit of 'D', manifest as *cen*, had entered 'O's home.

Immediately following the killing, relations between the Palenga and Paluo clans were completely severed by Elders in order to prevent revenge. The two sub-clans did not eat or drink together, nor would they share the same water points, buy from each other's market stalls, or exchange greetings. However, threats were often issued against the Paluo clan, and it was feared a revenge killing would soon follow. Given this combination of factors, a local *ajwaka* was consulted by the family of the perpetrator, who recommended that compensation to the injured sub-clan be paid. At that point, a message was dispatched to the Elder in charge of compensation, requesting a ruling on the amount of compensation to be paid. According to the Elder, it was determined that eight cows should be paid to the Palenga sub-clan. The compensation was reported to have been paid in two instalments. Six were provided in 1987, followed by two more in October 2004. Tensions remained among both clans until materials were secured for holding the final ceremony, *Mato Oput*.

The Ceremony

The ceremony took place at a 'neutral place' along a path away from the homes of the two clans. Prior to the *Mato Oput*, members of the two clans, including the respective families involved, sat at separate homesteads talking amongst themselves as the Elders prepared for the ceremony. The following family members were attended from the injured clan: parents; brothers; sisters; one child of the deceased; as well as extended family members. On the other side, the murderer, his wife, sister, son, and extended family were present. Four ritual performers – two men and two women – were involved in carrying out the ceremony. Two came from each clan.

The ceremony began with the 'Beating of the Stick'. A *layibi* (stick used for opening the granary) was held between the two across the path by the male performer. He explained to each party who were located at either end of the path to hold up long thin sticks and approach the centre as if they were to attack one another. The men were told to yell insults

¹⁸³ Readers may also want to consult Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, Traditional Coping in General, Unpublished Working Paper 17, 5 April 2005 which is a record of the same *Mato Oput*.

¹⁸⁴ Initials will be used to refer to the actors involved in the *Mato Oput*, 'O' represents the offender and 'D' represents the deceased. Names are withheld for privacy and confidentiality purposes.

¹⁸⁵ A swift or sudden illness resulting in death was frequently referred to by respondents as the result of *cen*.

at each other and the women to wail in mourning. This was done three times, the traditional number used for a male.¹⁸⁶

Once this was completed, the ritual performer asked representatives of the Palenga clan if they accepted the guilt and had compensation, to which they replied in the positive. He then told the representatives of the Paluo clan to go back to their people and tell them they had accepted the compensation.

In the next stage, a brown sheep was brought by the perpetrators' family to the midpoint of the path as a sign of "being humble and asking for forgiveness." The offended clan then brought a black goat, a sign of "accepting the forgiveness sought." The family's Elders came and each cut the sheep and goat respectively in half, presenting one side of each to the other family. The livers were then removed by the female ritual performers and cooked.

In the meantime, the minced *oput* – the bitter root – was mixed with raw *waragi* in a calabash. In a clay bowl, the blood of the goat and sheep were mixed with a local brew called *kwete*. This was then poured into a calabash with the *oput*. Three representatives of each side then approached the calabash, where each knelt with their hands behind their backs. A female ritual performer then facilitated the Knocking of Heads three times for each set of representatives, who then drank from the calabash three times. Once all representatives had done this, the rest of the bitter drink was shared until it was completely finished, a person from each clan taking a turn.

The two sets of representatives were then fed the roasted liver of the sheep and goat. The female performer used *laca* (thorns) to raise the liver to the mouth of each representative three times before they chewed it from the tip of the thorn. In the flat basket (winower or *odero* in Luo) where the livers were placed, a cow's skin was placed. The skin represented how a proper burial should take place – each body should be wrapped in a cow's skin.

The women of the two families then cooked the sheep and goat and prepared vegetables and brew away from the family home – to avoid bringing 'bad spirits' home. The meat of both the sheep and goat were mixed and cooked together. As this was being done, the Elders and chiefs spoke to the two families, warning them of the serious results of murder and to stop any future hostilities.

When the meat of the animals were cooked, the female performers then brought it to the circle of people sitting, carrying the meat in one bowl, and the heads of the animals in a new clay pot. The meat was moved to the mouth of each person three times, before it was consumed. The female performers did the same with the heads of the animals.

The skulls or jaws of the sheep (in this case, a sheep and a goat) are given to each family to take home for safekeeping. These are to serve as reminders to the family of the bitterness that follows such an act, the legacy of which can pass from generation to generation.

¹⁸⁶ In this case, the murder victim was a male. In the case of a female murder victim, the number would be four.

Two more rituals followed. The ‘Eating of Spoiled Boo’, a meal prepared with *boo* (greens) and *sim sim* paste, left to spoil. Again, *boo* was taken to the mouth three times before being consumed. All rituals were completed as the representatives knelt. When they finally rose from kneeling, they were not to touch the ground. Finally, the *Odeyo* (‘Scratching from a Saucepan’) ritual was prepared. The female performers scratched the remains from the saucepan and people were then invited to feast on the remaining meat and food.

Once the ritual of *Mato Oput* had been performed, “no one should speak of the crime again” and a celebration followed. This involved the two afflicted parties feasting on the remains of the slaughtered animals and drinking together as a symbol of their reunion.

Two Months Later

On July 27th and 28th 2005, the research team visited affected family members from the Palenga and Paluo clans to assess the impact of *Mato Oput*. During the follow-up interviews conflicting responses regarding the details of the crime, amount of compensation, and restoration of relationships were observed. Contradictions were found between the clans and among the family members. However, and despite these discrepancies, the follow-up interviews also provided insight and understanding to the core principles of *Mato Oput*. Both clans placed tremendous attachment to certain outcomes, such as removing bitterness, *cen*, and mourning and putting the spirit of the dead to final rest.

A Twist of Events

There are various explanations for the discrepancies found among respondents. First, the researchers discovered that the mediation process of *Mato Oput* had been limited, as it did not involve all relevant family members; thus resulting in different interpretations of the truth and leaving some individuals unsatisfied with the process and end results. Second, there was a lengthy period between the crime, mediation, compensation and ceremony. This meant there was also a long period of grievances between the two clans. The lack of documentation of the entire process coupled with a dependency on memories may have produced these different versions.

Truth

Given the fact that the killing occurred in 1977, it is not entirely surprising that the details of the crime were somewhat inconsistent. At times certain family members from each clan presented different versions of the crime. For example, ‘O’ (the offender) noted that his late brother had also been involved in the killing, although no one else identified his involvement. Additionally, ‘O’ also claimed that he was defending himself and that is why he killed ‘D’ (the deceased), whereas all other respondents had different interpretations of the nature of the crime.¹⁸⁷

Different accounts were also given as to how ‘D’ was killed. Some claimed that ‘D’ was hit on the back of the head, while others stated that a fracture in his nose is what eventually led to his death. However, it is important to recognize that there was a mutual consensus

¹⁸⁷ Interview with ‘O’, Pajule camp, 27 July 2005.

regarding who the main perpetrator was and how the fight broke out, which are ultimately the most vital details of the crime.

Furthermore, the sister of 'D' also presented a different description of the crime. She claimed that the murder was premeditated and motivated by money – a totally different view than any other informant. This may be due to the fact the sister had been very young at the time of the crime, 16, and married at 18, thus “she [no longer knew] what went on in her parents' home”. This raises the concern that female siblings who marry may not be involved in the process of establishing the truth or process of mediation.

Confession

All parties agreed that a confession took place in the presence of both families and the Elders and *Rwodi* involved. However, the perpetrator did not personally confess to each family member. This was perhaps to allow the presence of mediators when tensions were still high. Nevertheless, as the sister of the deceased expressed, “it would have carried more weight if the family who harmed us had organized themselves to come and confess and to ask for forgiveness. They did it in front of others [the mediators] [because] they were told to. They could have seen our reaction,” she continued, “if we were ready to forgive or revenge.”¹⁸⁸

Preventing Revenge Killings

Both parties to the *Mato Oput* process underscored the important role Elders played in preventing a revenge killing or other violence from occurring. Apparently, even before the deceased was properly buried, the offended clan raided the homestead of the offending clan, looting and burning huts. Elders intervened and established the ‘cooling off period’. Respondents noted that tensions within the drinking places still flared up from time to time over the unresolved murder, and so it was noted by the father of the deceased that at least now, after the ceremony, no one had to worry about “further killings”¹⁸⁹

Compensation

Clashing narratives regarding the amount and terms of compensation were found by the researchers. These differences were not only noted among the two families, but also between family members from both clans. Within the offending family, the versions provided were as follows: ‘O’ claimed that he had paid the full amount of compensation after he came out of prison, which was 10 cows and UGSH 70,000.¹⁹⁰ However, ‘O’s wife, son and twin sister stated that the compensation had been paid, but it was 10 cows and UGSH 100,000.¹⁹¹

In contrast, ‘D’s family’s version was as follows: while the mother and father in separate interviews both agreed the amount to be paid was 7 cows (6 cows plus 1 cow for the mother – traditionally the mother receives one cow for the tears she has shed), ‘D’s cousin knew a different version and his sister didn’t know the amount at all. Finally, a central mediator of *Mato Oput* also presented a different account for compensation, by claiming that the compensation had been 16 cows; this differed from the other narratives.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with sister of the deceased, Pajule camp, 28 July 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with father of the deceased, Lapule camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with ‘O’, Pajule camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹¹ Interviewed in Pajule camp, 28 July 2005.

In separate interviews with the mother, father and sister of the deceased, the importance of paying the compensation in full was repeatedly emphasized. The cow to be paid to the mother had not yet been paid according to their version, prolonging bitterness. However, all family members interviewed emphasized that the most important aspect of compensation was how it should be used. Virtually all participants agreed that at least four cows and some money had been paid, but that the cows had been stolen in a Karamojong raid. Only some money remained of the compensation. Until this money was used by a male member of the clan to pay brideprice, and until that marriage resulted in a birth of a child with the name of the deceased, *Mato Oput* would not be complete. As the father stated, only then will the events be “completely forgotten”. This illustrates the importance placed on the cycles of life and death in Acholi, that in order to reconcile with a wrongful death, new life must emerge.

Restoration of Relations

Attitudes and feelings towards the restoration of family ties and the extent of reconciliation were also paradoxical. Respondents belonging to the offender’s family all claimed that the ‘bitterness’ between the families had ended and their relationship had been restored. This was measured by the type of interactions between the two families. For example, they claimed that warm greetings and visitations were paid by both families, which is a sign of peace and unity. The men from both clans had started drinking at the local bars, while the women pay visits to each other as well as to funeral ceremonies.¹⁹² The younger generation is also busy catching up for lost time – children were found playing together while the youth began to court and develop relationships with members from the Palenga clan.¹⁹³

In contrast, the family members of the deceased expressed some hostility towards ‘O’s’ family, possibly explained by the lack of inclusion in the *Mato Oput* mediation, the lack of a personal confession and apology from ‘O’, and the outstanding compensation that was promised upon the ceremony. The mother refused to interact with ‘O’ and his family until she received a personal apology and the compensation was paid in full. The father would at least exchange greetings, but was not interested in any further interaction. The younger cousin said relations had been fully restored, while ‘D’s’ sister also expressed great angst for being excluded from the process once she was married into a different clan. She stated that during the ceremony she cried for her lost brother and the decades of bitterness that followed, but felt reprieve that at last this could be put behind her. However, she still expressed scepticism about the sincerity of the offender based on his behaviour since the ceremony. While she now exchanges greetings with the clan, she noted the killer himself has yet to initiate a greeting with her: “The killer does not greet me. I don’t want to greet him unless he does so first. It is up to him to initiate, to see how it has affected me. To see if I had a good response or not; if my greeting is poor he could forward the case to the *Rwodi* for more consideration.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, for the sister, it was important the killer appreciate how she and her family felt towards him, to care if they felt reconciled or not.

¹⁹² Interview with a chief mediator, Pajule Camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹³ Interview with son of the offender, Pajule Camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹⁴ Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 28 July 2005.

Lessons Learned

Despite these inconsistencies, perhaps the most useful knowledge gained from the follow-up interviews was the attachments that were placed on certain reconciliation principles. The offending family stressed a great amount of relief in the absence *cen*, which had previously tormented various family members. As the son of the offender stated, “before [*Mato Oput*] I had *cen* and felt very unhealthy. It would fall on me and I became so aggressive and I wanted to fight anyone. I would feel so sick because I was reminded that I needed to pay for the bloodshed. This started happening when I was very young, but since *Mato Oput* it has no longer occurred.”¹⁹⁵ *Cen* had resulted in various deaths and sicknesses in the family, and since the ceremony it had been removed.

The importance that was shared regarding fears was also insightful. ‘O’ and most of his family members also expressed a tremendous fear of revenge from ‘D’s family. When respondents were asked to identify the most successful aspect of *Mato Oput* all of ‘O’s family mentioned the ‘removal of bitterness’ as one the most important results. Many also expressed that they previously felt tremendous sadness for not being able to live ‘freely’ within their community and that they felt ashamed when they previously encountered ‘D’s relatives. It was not until they were able to sit together and share food (during the ceremony) that they began to feel more comfortable in their own environment. This is important, as it illustrates the importance that Acholi culture places on public acknowledgement and forgiveness.

In the Paluo clan, all agreed that they went to the ceremony with ‘the spirit of forgiveness’. While the father and mother still wanted the full compensation, the sister and cousin both expressed a sense of relief and release of bitterness during and after the ceremony, “we felt something was released, that we were untied” stated the cousin.¹⁹⁶ And as the sister reflected of the ceremony, “I recognized this was the day and time for putting it behind me. I accept [my brother] is gone and cannot be brought back....a grudge has been lifted, I have forgiven and forgotten.”¹⁹⁷

The offended clan likewise emphasized the spiritual importance of *Mato Oput*. Emphasis placed on the full payment of compensation was placed on the need to complete the process of *Mato Oput*, that is, the marriage and production of a baby with the name of the deceased. As the sister stated, “if compensation has been fully paid, then my brother’s spirit is resting.”¹⁹⁸

Observed Restrictions with Mato Oput Practices

General lessons about the difficulties with the current *Mato Oput* were also observed. First, women from both clans played a minor role in the mediation process. They were not consulted when gathering the evidence, and as a result, some individuals are unsatisfied with the entire process. Additionally, important factual information and knowledge that was known by the women was not included in the ‘truth-finding’ period. Women did participate more in the actual ceremony of *Mato Oput*, as either witnesses, participants or officiators.

¹⁹⁵ Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹⁶ Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 27 July 2005.

¹⁹⁷ Interviewed in Pajule Camp, 28 July 2005.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

However, the women of the offending clan were not involved in the process of mediation, and appeared to feel unable to intervene in this process. As the mother observed, “men should deal with these things.” Yet if left up to men, the danger remains that women will not fully enjoy the process and benefits of *Mato Oput*.

Second, the chief mediator also identified some challenges of the mediating parties. He argued that at times Elders who are involved in mediations and belong to the offending clan are challenged and attacked when trying to mediate with the offended clans. Previously, Elders mediating *Mato Oput* were perceived as neutral, even if they belonged to the offended clan, but this is no longer the case. This also speaks to the deterioration of respect for Elders. The chief mediator requested that a robe be distributed to Elders who play these roles as this would “mark that they are peacemakers and this way the offended clan would not refuse to talk to them.”¹⁹⁹ He claims that he has experienced this type of incident on four different occasions when attempting to mediate conflict; at times the violence escalated and individuals initiating the fights were arrested. Elders are also impaired by the lack of resources available to them. The mediations of conflicts such as *Mato Oput* are undertaken on a voluntary basis. Elders are often requested to attend *Mato Oput* ceremonies that are far away, but are at times unable to access these due to the lack of transport or resources.

Third, the lack of resources not only constrains Elders but also individuals who have pending cases for *Mato Oput* ceremonies. The mediator was able to identify nine cases of *Mato Oput* which were not completed due to lack resources. People living in displacement camps simply do not have access to income-generating activities or resources and thus are not able pay compensation. Support from family or clan members has become limited since the majority of relatives are challenged by the same levels of poverty, coupled with low levels of communalism to raise the necessary funds. This is a major obstacle requiring closer attention, as this case study revealed that compensation and the final ceremony of *Mato Oput* are instrumental to the strong unity and cohesion of Acholi-land.

Fourth, researchers found that there is a general lack of documentation in *Mato Oput* ceremonies. As a result, the younger population is unaware of what *Mato Oput* entails, until they experience it for themselves. Despite this lack of knowledge, it was interesting to find that they recognize the importance of *Mato Oput* results.

Finally, it is important to note that there are differences in the ways *Mato Oput* are practiced among clan members. The researchers were invited to witness a second *Mato Oput* ceremony on 3 August 2005 in Pabo camp, Gulu District. While the process leading up to *Mato Oput* was more or less the same, the ceremony itself was vastly different. For instance, the ceremony began with a general cleansing of the area using a white hen, followed by the slaughter of two sheep, pulling out of the wee, and the exchange of the knives used to kill each one. The *Oput* was mixed with the blood of the two sheep, but rather than drinking the mixture, one representative from each clan took a sip (with hands behind backs and on their knees) and then spit out the *Oput* on either side of the calabash to represent the down-pouring of blood. The offender confessed his wrongdoings and asked for forgiveness. The two representatives (the killer and the father of the deceased) then shook hands, vowing

¹⁹⁹ Interview with chief mediator, in Pajule Camp on 27 July 2005.

“Today we accept we shall reunite. All foods will be shared between us.”²⁰⁰ The ceremony was then over, and the feast was prepared and eaten. Few women from either clan were present, in contrast to the Pajule *Mato Oput*. The wide variation reaffirms the need for a systematic documentation of *Mato Oput* practices and ceremonies throughout each of the different camps and town areas of Acholi-land.

Adapting Mato Oput to the Current Circumstances

While the Amnesty Act and the ‘policy of forgiveness’ may work to end the conflict, they need to be complimented by further processes to promote reintegration and restoration of social relations.²⁰¹ The confession, mediation and compensation process, as well as the reconciliation ceremony, *Mato Oput*, is typically viewed as the most relevant instrument by advocates.²⁰² This section explores the perspectives of *Rwodis*, *Megos*, and Elders on whether *Mato Oput* can be used to address crimes committed during the conflict, and to rebuild social trust and restore relationships.

The majority of respondents argued that Mato Oput could not be adapted straightforwardly to play a role in realizing justice in the current circumstances. This was due to two primary reasons: 1) reconciliation cannot be fostered until the conflict ends; and 2) the specific requirements of Mato Oput do not immediately translate to the scope and scale of the present conflict.

The majority of *Rwodi* interviewed were hesitant to adapt *Mato Oput*, stating that it was not possible with current *Mato Oput* procedures. In order for *Mato Oput* to be successful, the perpetrator’s clan must reconcile with the victim’s clan; this cannot occur unless the perpetrator can identify whom he/she killed. Without the victim’s identity, the perpetrator is unable to: first, confess his/her crimes; second, ask for forgiveness from the victim’s clan; or third, pay compensation to the victim’s clan. These three components are central to the success of *Mato Oput*, but are often impossible to achieve in the case of LRA crimes.

Due to the scale and nature of the conflict, perpetrators are often unaware of the victim’s identity or clan. The LRA moves around the three districts of northern Uganda (as well as eastern Uganda and southern Sudan), therefore abducted children and youth are often unfamiliar with the persons in the villages, counties and districts in which they were forced to attack. Additionally, many LRA atrocities, including murder, are committed on roads against passing civilians who are either commuting on foot or in vehicles. In these cases, origin of the victim in addition to location of the crime is unknown to the perpetrator, and so these victims are even harder to track down. As *Rwot* John Edward Ojera stated, “the

²⁰⁰ Observation notes, Pabo Camp, 2 August 2005.

²⁰¹ Hovil and Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later: Traditional Justice in Northern Uganda*, 2005.

²⁰² CSOPNU, *The International Criminal Court investigation in northern Uganda*, briefing paper, 1 February 2005, csopnu@yahoo.com

conflict is so big, and [there are] so many deaths, so it is hard to identify and relate who is responsible for each death.”²⁰³

Moreover, *Mato Oput* cannot address all the crimes committed in Acholi-land because not all the perpetrators involved in conflict are Acholi. Other cultural groups in Uganda have differing perspectives on attaining justice and reconciliation. The LRA have abducted children from neighbouring districts, such as Madi, West Nile, Teso, Lango and Southern Sudan. These districts each have different ethnic groups and cultural beliefs: it is unknown if all share the same principles and beliefs as those found in *Mato Oput*. Further, it is important to recognize that not all offences committed throughout the conflict are committed by the LRA; the UPDF are also responsible for some of these atrocities. This further complicates matters as the soldiers in the UPDF come from cultural groups across Uganda.²⁰⁴ In addition, crimes committed by UPDF soldiers fall under a separate, national legal jurisdiction in which traditional justice mechanisms do not apply (unless the UPDF is an Acholi).

The majority of the *Rwodi* interviewed agreed that many of these crimes are not the responsibility of the individual committing the crime, since the orders come from high-ranking LRA commanders or institutions (UPDF). Therefore, reconciliation would depend on the desire of the commanders or institutions who authorized these atrocities to reconcile and admit responsibility for their orders rather than the individual themselves.²⁰⁵ If the people behind these atrocities are not interested in pursuing peace, then *Mato Oput* cannot occur. *Rwot* Andrea Binyi Pesa took this argument one step further by claiming that due to the hierarchical structures of the UPDF and LRA, individuals do not feel a connection to, or responsibility for, these crimes.²⁰⁶ *Mato Oput* can only occur when a sense of guilt and responsibility are assumed/recognized by the perpetrator.

Lastly, the scale and ongoing nature of the war also creates problems when adapting *Mato Oput* to the conflict. Although exact figures are unknown, a core component of the LRA remains in the ‘bush’. Until all these people come out and return home, northern Uganda will remain at war, and *Mato Oput* will be unable to create sustainable peace.²⁰⁷ What is more, the types of atrocities committed in this conflict are new to the Acholi culture. Some *Rwodi* stated in a group interview “the type of crimes committed was unheard of previously in Acholiland,”²⁰⁸ and therefore confusion may arise as to what type of compensation is needed to reconcile. Others claim that it would be impossible to compensate for these types of crimes, due to the amount of suffering that has been caused.²⁰⁹

Thus, the majority of interviewees noted difficulties with the adaptation of *Mato Oput* to the current conflict, due to problems with the components of confession and compensation. It is important to note that the same *Rwodi*, *Mego*, and Elders interviewed agreed that the LRA should be forgiven without a confession. This indicates that the same final outcome of *Mato*

²⁰³ *Rwot* Ojera John Edward, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 24 May 2005.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Rwot* Arop Poppy Paul, Interviewed in Kitgum Town, 20 March 2005.

²⁰⁶ *Rwot* Andrea Binyo Pesa II, Interviewed in Amuru, 31 May 2005.

²⁰⁷ *Rwot* Justo Obita, Interviewed in Kitgum Town, 18 April 2005.

²⁰⁸ *Rwot* Francis Okot Lateyet, *Rwot* Odon Lira II, *Rwot* Owor Fostino, *Rwot* Oyo Martin, *Rwot* Lakwanf Olanga and *Rwot* Terasisto Anania Aryeng, Interviewed in Pajule, 3 May 2005.

²⁰⁹ *Rwot* Mathew Ajao, Interviewed in AcholiBur, 12 May 2005.

Oput is desired for the former LRA, but it needs to be accomplished through practical means. In addition, a strong desire to restore broken Acholi relations has been noted throughout most interviews with cultural leaders, once again suggesting that the outcomes *Mato Oput* produce be established in some way for the war.

While ‘the truth’ is desirable, respondents were opposed to the idea of forced confession or a Truth Commission. Rather, a process that allowed traditional justice to take its course was preferred.

*Lack of confession is not the problem because those that refuse to confess will be followed by the consequences of their actions, and they will have to confess eventually.*²¹⁰

Many respondents thought the LRA should be encouraged to confess at some point. The act of confession can demonstrate to the general population that the returnee accepts his or her wrongdoings and is genuinely asking for community forgiveness. This, it is argued, will in fact assist in the reconciliation process, because the community will now believe that the returnees have truly returned to the fold. It was also viewed as beneficial to all returnees; it was pointed out that a confession can act as a psychological release, alleviating feelings of guilt and trauma, which is particularly necessary for child returnees.²¹¹

However, for eighty-six percent of the respondents interviewed, LRA returnees should not be compelled to confess wrongdoings. Many argued that a forced confession would be considered meaningless and insignificant.²¹² Traditionally, the time was allowed for the truth to unfold. Beyond establishing truth, the purpose of confessions is to show repentance, and thus, it must operate on a voluntary basis. Thus, *Mato Oput* can only be applied if the offenders are legitimately willing to repent and admit their guilt.²¹³ It was repeatedly noted by informants that *Mato Oput* is an extremely long process, taking place between years or even decades. It should be kept in mind that while former commanders may reject *Mato Oput* now, they may feel compelled to abide by it in the future.

Another concern regarding forced confession is that it could lead to an increase in tension, revenge and, ultimately, further conflict among the Acholi people. It would “bring problems... the worst thing to know is who killed your son or daughter.”²¹⁴ Moreover, as

²¹⁰ Banya, Angelo. *Roco Wat I Acoli: Consultative Workshop*, Gusco Peace Centre, Gulu District, 12-13 August 2005.

²¹¹ *Rwot* Jolly Joe Loum, Interviewed in Lacor camp, 18 April 2005, and *Rwot* Opobo Pyerino in Kitgum, 19 April 2005.

²¹² In contrast, the few respondents who believed that the LRA must confess before they are forgiven claimed that returnees would not receive genuine forgiveness from the community unless the truth is established, which can only occur through confessions. Further, confessions will also help the Elders understand what happened while they were in the ‘bush’ and can therefore perform ceremonies accordingly. Ladit Opira Hannington, Interviewed in Kitgum, 18 April 2004.

²¹³ *Rwot* Andrea Binyi Pesa II, Interviewed in Amuru, 31 May, 2005.

²¹⁴ Ladit Olyana John, Interviewed in Anaka Camp, 24 April 2005.

one Elder stated, the “gravity of suffering... is so rampant and beyond accusation [that] asking [the LRA] to confess is unrealistic.”²¹⁵

For LRA remaining in the bush, initiating a confession process would make forgiveness conditional, which will discourage LRA from leaving the bush.²¹⁶ In many cases, particularly for LRA commanders, confession is no longer a disclosure of personal actions but an act of ‘finger-pointing.’ According to one Elder, “commanders point at collaborators and think it’s a confession.”²¹⁷ Instead of serving as a repentance of guilt, confession now involves laying blame on others, negating its traditional purpose, which is an admission of self-guilt.

One suggested solution is that returnees confess privately to Elders; this would also facilitate knowledge of which rituals are required for FAPs.²¹⁸ Indeed, the first burden of confession appears to be private, within the community, as a healing process, perhaps because the majority were forced against their will. The survey illustrated that 86 per cent of formerly abducted children and adults ‘confessed’ – that is, told of their experiences in the bush, of violence committed by them and against them, to a friend, reception centre employee, family member or Elder. This, it was argued, could lead to *Mato Oput* or other rituals in cases where the perpetrator and victim know one another.

Despite the fact that Mato Oput cannot be easily adapted, traditional justice is regarded as a critical process in the restoration of relationships. Ker Kwaro Acholi must begin to examine seriously what form such an approach would take.

There are different interpretations of the components of Mato Oput, this shows that the Elders are not unified. However the principle of Mato Oput is the same....²¹⁹

Traditional justice promotes unity and restoration of relationships, and therefore, is an important foundation to build on in the aftermath of this bloody conflict. In fact, it could be argued that traditional justice as a process is already being initiated within camps between individuals. Traditional cleansing ceremonies – ‘Stepping on the egg’, ‘Washing of tears’, and *tum* (sacrifice) – help facilitate reintegration, and stimulate the process towards reconciliation. But these must be considered a first step only, and are not sufficient for reconciliation in the community.

To date, no documented cases of *Mato Oput* have taken place with a former LRA commander and / or a formerly abducted person. Two cases of *Mato Oput* involving former commanders were reported to have occurred in Pajule in 2003, and in Acholi-bur in 2003.

²¹⁵ Ladit Oduny Samuel, Interviewed in Gulu Town, 2 May 2005.

²¹⁶ Ladit Phillips Odur, Interviewed in Anaka Camp, 24 April 2005.

²¹⁷ Ladit Komakec, Interviewed in Goan Quarter, 4 May 2005.

²¹⁸ Ladit Opira Hannington, Interviewed in Kitgum, 18 April 2005.

²¹⁹ Ladit Ojok Ojara, . *Roco Wat I Acoli: Consultative Workshop*, Gusco Peace Centre, Gulu District, 12-13 August 2005.

However, researchers could not confirm the events or details from first-hand participants or witnesses. Further research is required to determine how such individual cases could be applied elsewhere.

Furthermore, the mechanics of adapting traditional justice still need a great deal of work. Indeed the researchers were left with more questions than answers. For instance, different rituals and by-laws exist for different crimes. Which rituals and by-laws would extend to different levels of war crimes? Certain types of atrocities committed in this conflict may have no precedent, such as abductions or mutilations. A legal analysis is required to finely differentiate these levels and categorize the crimes involved. This would need to be followed by a cultural analysis which would develop and assign the proper types of rituals according to the crime(s) committed. Additionally, there is a need to identify the various groups and individuals involved in perpetrating crimes, when the appropriate course of action is needed. This includes high rank commanders, lower rank fighters (the abducted) and the UPDF. The various actors, their different levels of involvement in crimes, and the various ethnic groups involved are all factors which complicate this process.

In order to initiate a process of traditional justice, the confidence of a number of groups would have to be built in the process itself.

First, the cultural leaders would need to gain the confidence and trust of the affected communities, a heterogeneous group of displaced men and women, youth, formerly abducted young men and women, the disabled, orphans and young mothers. Again, Ker Kwaro should be viewed as having attempted to take initial steps of reaching out to people through Communal Cleansing Ceremonies. In camps where cultural leadership is strong, the revitalization of cultural practices with returnees also acts as a form of sensitization. A need for local dialogues on the question of justice and reconciliation is nevertheless imperative to ensure any approach is fully understood and owned by the people of Acholi.

The greatest obstacle may be the conditions and the environment people return to in camps where the majority of people are living in abject poverty. There is some hope with the influx of reintegration packages brought into Gulu and Kitgum from the World Bank in June 2005. In addition, some income generating projects have been created under the Northern Ugandan Social Action Fund (NUSAF) to try to address this problem. Yet both leave much to be desired. Reports of some commanders receiving resettlement packages 2, 3 or 4 times, and of the exploitation of returnees in newly established projects under the leadership of former commanders present critical ethical challenges. Ker Kwaro needs to play a leadership role in addressing these issues if the confidence of communities is to be built.

Finally, neighbouring communities must also be included in any process of rebuilding relationships in Acholi, indeed as it must include the whole country. While the Government of Uganda has recognized the authority of Ker Kwaro, and even begun to transfer some money through the Districts, a policy on national reconciliation remains far from being well articulated. Moreover, it is well known that certain actors in the Government and UPDF

actively work to undermine confidence-building measures, further challenging the rebuilding process. To what extent these actors can be brought into the development of a free and open state is a question outside the scope of this research, but one that must be answered.

VI CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

*[I]t is...critical, even while the conflict is on-going, that society becomes engaged in debate about what Ugandan society will look like once the conflict does, in fact, end. Indeed, it will serve no-one's purposes to be faced with the end of the conflict and have no idea about how to proceed.*²²⁰

This chapter briefly reviews the key findings of the report, before turning to its recommendations. It is a critical time in Acholi history and for the Ugandan Government, people and international community. In order for any form of justice or reconciliation to be sustainable, it must be defined by those most affected by the crisis. This requires knowing as much about local beliefs, norms and practices as it does about international laws and lessons learned. It requires providing room and space for Acholi and Ugandans to dialogue and decide questions regarding forms of justice, who should be subject to justice, how to best foster social trust and sequencing. Finally, it requires a careful examination of how the current debate potentially creates a false dichotomy between local and international approaches and the sequencing of justice versus peace. This report illustrates, for example, that traditional approaches are being adapted and in some instances, cleansing ceremonies and other rituals are already setting the foundation for justice. Without further dialogue and critical research and reflection on the future of Uganda, arguments about the best form of justice or timing cannot be definitely answered in the best interests of the war affected, nor serve as a guide to move beyond the current crisis of war and impunity. The time to start thinking and talking about justice, reconciliation and peace is now.

Conclusions

Acholi Justice

The majority of the Acholi people continue to hold sophisticated cultural beliefs in the spirit world, which greatly shape their perceptions of justice and reconciliation. *Jok* and ancestor spirits guide the Acholi moral order, and when a wrong is committed, they send misfortune and illness (*cen*) until appropriate actions are taken by Elders and the offender.

Through lengthy interviews with cultural leaders, it was explained that *cen* (vengeance of the spirit world) is sent when a wrong against the dead has been committed. The phenomenon of *cen* illustrates the centrality of relationships between the natural and supernatural worlds in Acholi, the living and the dead, and the normative continuity between an individual and the community. With the exception of born-again Christians and Moslems, the majority of Acholi interviewed believe in the phenomenon of *cen*.

Traditional justice in Acholi is restorative. Informants identified the following aspects of traditional justice as the most important: trust, a voluntary process, truth, compensation and restoration. The voluntary nature is linked to the desire to avoid *cen*. Traditional justice was described by respondents as a collective and transparent process that once took place in

²²⁰ Hovil and Quinn, *Peace First, Justice Later*, 2005, p. 21.

open courts, with specific roles for Elders and representatives of Royal Clans according to the offence committed. These traditional open courts have been taken over in the present day by Local Courts under the administration of the state. However, traditional justice practices continue to be pursued by Elders in order to restore relations within the community. It is important to note that cultural leaders do not view traditional justice to be above the law, but rather complementary to it.

Ker Kwaro and the Revival of Acholi Culture

Traditional practices, norms and values have been greatly affected by the on-going conflict, diminishing the role and status of cultural leaders, the transmission of culture to the next generation, and increasing the burden of women and girls in camps. Despite this, traditional rituals and ceremonies continue to be practiced in camps, albeit at a significantly reduced level. In some cases, they have been adapted to adjust to poverty levels.

The re-establishment of Ker Kwaro in the 1995 Ugandan Constitution, together with the efforts of its leadership, has strengthened the cultural institution. Ker Kwaro has modified ritual ceremonies to provide for changing circumstances, such as the Communal Cleansing Ceremony. This has had positive effects on the sensitization of the population, relief for returnees, and in unity and confidence building. However, Ker Kwaro remains weak after decades of conflict and colonial rule, and must still grapple with the challenge of representation and legitimacy.

Still, their efforts to unite and provide leadership to their people should be matched by further reflection and analysis for their potential to contribute to the future of Acholi and Uganda.

Return and Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Persons (FAPs)

The process of reintegration is complicated by the challenges and difficulties encountered by both the returnees and community members in camps. These challenges include stigmatization, resentment, insecurities in camp settings, and a general lack of economic opportunities. Young mothers and orphaned returnees are a particularly vulnerable category among returnees. Acholi society tends to discriminate against young returning girls and mothers. While Ker Kwaro has acknowledged the difficulties facing returnee mothers, no official policy exists for how culture might facilitate their reintegration, thus the problems they encounter are not supported in a cultural fashion.

Within displacement camps, cultural leaders and women have adapted rituals to welcome returnees home and in some cases, to help remove *cen* that is believed to lead to dangerous or abnormal behaviour. For the majority of returnees, this has had a therapeutic effect, especially if they had a good understanding of the rituals involved. Elders have assisted in the mediation of conflicts involving FAPs and pass on general knowledge and counseling through visits.

Although intermixed with elements of Christianity and Islam, the LRA practice many of the same ritual practices and beliefs of Acholi culture. This suggests such cultural practices could have a positive healing effect on returning rebels and abductees themselves, although this needs careful handling by cultural leaders. The report findings suggest that cultural leaders

have built some confidence with the LRA, but that more needs to be done to reconcile differences between them.

A major challenge remains the lack of coordination between Ker Kwaro and reception centres regarding the process of reintegration. Welcoming or cleansing rituals are currently practiced on an ad-hoc basis with no set of written or transparent guiding principles from Ker Kwaro. In particular, religious leaders and cultural leaders need to clarify their approaches and relationship on the role of culture in welcoming FAPs back to the camps.

Mato Oput and its Relevance to the Current Context

Mato Oput is both a process and ritual ceremony to restore relationships between clans in the case of intentional murder or an accidental killing. The *Mato Oput* Ceremony fosters reconciliation between the two clans. While the process leading to the ceremony is similar across different clans, the ceremony itself varies widely.

Despite these differences, *Mato Oput* continues to be practiced in camp settings throughout all three Districts of Acholi-land. Through recording of the oral history of informants, the researchers were able to partially record 50 cases of *Mato Oput* that took place between 2000 and 2005. In one in-depth case study, it was found that the aspects of truth, compensation and ritual were considered central elements of this practice. While admission of guilt and ‘the truth’ are vital to a successful process, respondents were opposed to the idea of forced confession or a Truth Commission. Rather, a process which allowed traditional justice to take its course was preferred.

The majority of respondents argued that *Mato Oput* could not be adapted straightforwardly to play a role in realizing justice in the current circumstances. This was due to two primary reasons: a) reconciliation cannot be fostered until the conflict ends and, b) the specific requirements of *Mato Oput* do not immediately translate to the scope and scale of the present conflict.

Despite the fact that *Mato Oput* cannot be easily adapted, traditional justice is regarded as a critical process in the restoration of relationships. In order to initiate a process of traditional justice, the confidence of a number of groups needs to be built, starting at the level of grass-roots communities. Ker Kwaro Acholi must begin to examine seriously what form such an approach would take.

Recommendations

Participants at the Consultative Workshop agreed that Acholi culture was in decline, and in need of revival, particularly for youth. Ker Kwaro Acholi and its supporters should embark upon a cultural revival through the recommendations below, which should be supported by donors and the Government of Uganda in all three Districts of Acholi.

Participants at the workshop agreed that Elders, *Mego* and *Rwodi* need to increase their presence, involvement, and activities within the communities in order to promote reintegration and to foster social cohesion and confidence within camps. By doing this, Acholi will learn to rely upon and have confidence in their own leaders, rather than depending on NGOs or other external actors.

Recommendations for the Establishment of a Commission

Despite the common view that *Mato Oput* was not easily translated to present circumstances, the processes entailed in traditional justice approaches were regarded as critical to promote restoration of relationships. The consultative workshop recommended that a Commission on Reintegration and Restoration be established to further investigate the possibilities of adapting traditional justice.

1. The Commission should be an independent, non-partisan and neutral body with representative Board Members from cultural groups, civil society, the legal community and the Amnesty Commission.
2. In order for traditional justice to play a more significant role, the Commission, with significant input from Ker Kwaro, will need to research, analyze, develop and implement a policy that elaborates how traditional justice could help compliment the Amnesty Act and foster restoration and reintegration. The policy should also state a clear definition of traditional justice, and elaborate the various processes it intends to pursue. Corresponding by-laws and rituals for different categories of crimes, and recognition of different levels of accountability will need to be clearly stated in this policy. The appropriate time for initiating the process must also be stated in this policy.
3. The Commission should investigate and clarify the relationship between transitional justice, the national legal system and codes, and finally, the International Criminal Court and international legal conventions.
4. A series of meetings in each district should be held to build the knowledge and capacity of Elders, *Mego* and traditional leaders about the terms of reference of a Commission. There, the findings of this research should be shared, and scope of the Commission defined and owned by Acholi leaders.
5. A series of grassroots-level dialogues between KKA, Amnesty and communities affected should be held in at least 5 sub-counties in each of the three Districts to solicit from people what they desire in terms of traditional justice and from the Commission. These dialogues should compliment the Committees of Elders, *Mego* and *Rwodi* in camps on the value, practices and history of traditional justice and rituals. The findings should be reflected in the final policy of the Commission.
6. The Commission should work closely to coordinate with the Government of Uganda, the Amnesty Commission, the International Community, religious leaders and other civil society actors to ensure complimentary and integrated approach to reintegration and restoration. It should have an external relations officer.

7. Confidence building measures among the population, the LRA and Government of Uganda should be pursued in tandem with KKA efforts to revive cultural practices and traditions. This could include mainstreaming or creating new radio programmes, posters and flyers, or more creative approaches such as dance, song and drama.
8. The Commission should support and draw upon the proposed information management system at Ker Kwaro, and continue to monitor the impact and assess the potential of traditional justice approaches.

Recommendations to the KKA

1. Introduce and support radio programs that sensitize the community to acceptance of persons returning from the bush and counselling communities on the difficulties they face.²²¹ Support existing programmes such as Empowering Hands, which have already begun sensitization on the radio. Highlight the cultural importance of accepting young mothers and orphans home.
2. Establish a committee that solely focuses and works on reintegration issues. The committee should:
 - a. Adapt a broad-based approach where returnees are not the sole focus of work, thereby creating unwanted new divisions in camps. Communities should not feel like their struggles are being left out, nor that they are not as valued as the returnee.
 - b. Meet with returnees about the conditions of the camps and the importance of culture to reintegration, including information and knowledge about cultural ceremonies. To this end, Elders, Mego and *Rwodi* will need psycho-social training to improve their activities with FAPs; assistance with record-keeping; and a method of assessing the improvement of relations within communities towards returnees.
3. Continue to hold Communal Cleansing Ceremonies (CCC) in camps in which it is requested. To strengthen the process, the KKA should:
 - a. Create and widely disseminate a policy that clarifies the purpose and intentions of the ceremonies, and how this differs from traditional justice processes. This should have an educational element, explaining the ceremonies and the symbolism behind them. Prior to CCC, Elders and *Rwodi* should meet with communities to fully explain what will take place and why it is happening.
 - b. In camps where returnees were not able to participate in the CCC, the *Rwodi* and Elders should organize a local one. This could be the start of decentralizing the CCC process.
 - c. CCC should be followed up by Elders and *Rwodi* in meetings with the community, to discuss what issues continue to face both returnees and the communities. To do this, the KKA needs to develop a systematic follow up policy with returnees. This should

²²¹ The sensitization approach should avoid un-intentionally increasing tensions by appearing to favour the plight of returnees

be coordinated with other implementing actors, such as religious leaders, reception center employees, and community-based volunteers.

4. Develop a policy and by-law to address the 'identity' crisis of children born in the bush, and customary laws regarding marriage and children that relates to returnees.

Recommendations to the UN and NGOs

1. Better co-ordination between relevant NGO actors involved in reintegration programmes to foster and support KKA's cultural activities.
2. Assistance provided for returnees should avoid making it appear as if they are materially better off than the community members. An integrated approach that includes all community members is desirable. In particular, the current system of reward to former commanders needs to be reviewed for how it privileges this group and potentially, exploits FAP and divides the existing communities of the war affected.
3. Rehabilitation Centres should adequately prepare returnees for the difficulties they will face when returning to camp settings.
4. Returnees need to be registered under WFP distribution lists more rapidly, and this would require rapid/emergency verifications.
5. The role of Community Volunteers (eg. Counsellors) needs to be strengthened and better supported, making links to cultural institutions.
6. Meet with the KKA in order to clarify the purpose and role of cultural approaches to reintegration. Support the cultural leaders to visit returnees in rehabilitation centres. Coordinate follow-ups, and desist from disseminating information that installs a sense of fear in returnees regarding traditional rituals and ceremonies. This could be facilitated through the establishment of a working group that meets periodically and maps out achievements, failures and the way forward.

Recommendations to Donors

1. Consider creating a flexible Trust Fund with Ker Kwaro Acholi that could be used in order to support cultural activities and ceremonies. While rituals and ceremonies typically came from the clan or communities involved, the impoverishment of the camps today makes the practice extremely difficult. A modest contribution to requested ceremonies from Ker Kwaro could greatly enhance the ability of local Rwodi and Councils of Elders to facilitate them.
2. Assist in the planning, monitoring and technical processes of KKA.

Recommendations to the Government of Uganda

1. Support the establishment of the Commission on Restoration and Reintegration.

2. Support the capacity of Ker Kwaro Acholi, continued documentation and facilitation of communal ceremonies.
3. Ensure all policies regarding reintegration and justice is reflective of the cultural perspectives of Acholi.
4. Support the continued development of cultural curriculum for educational institutions in Acholi.
5. Continue to build the infrastructural and administrative capacity of Ker Kwaro Acholi, through opening of offices in Kitgum and Pader Districts and continued support to the Paramount Chief.
6. All donor support that is targeted for returnees and their communities should consult with KKA and seek to compliment initiatives to build a long-term sustainable programme.

General Recommendations

The Cultural Ministry of Ker Kwaro Acholi should be strengthened to embark upon a cultural revival. Under this Ministry, activities in camps and throughout Acholi could be planned and coordinated, including the collection of documentation to be recorded. Programmes could include:

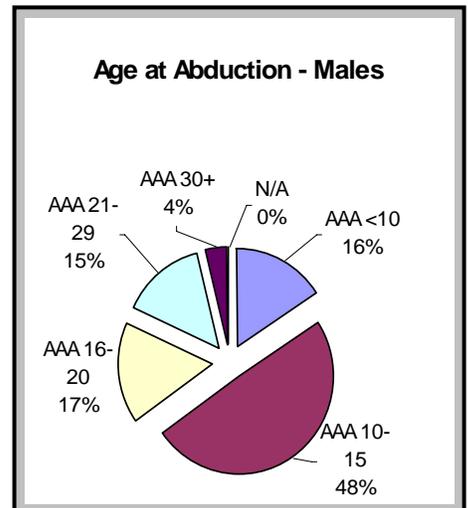
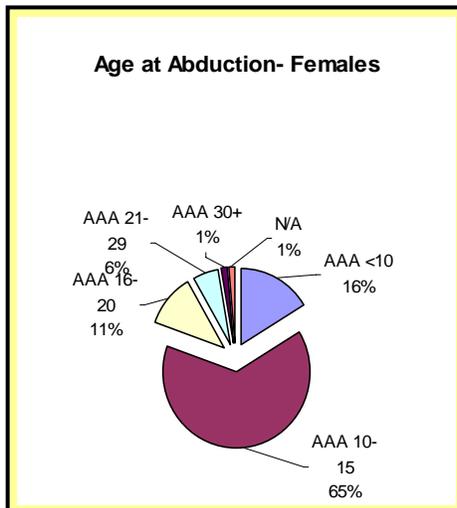
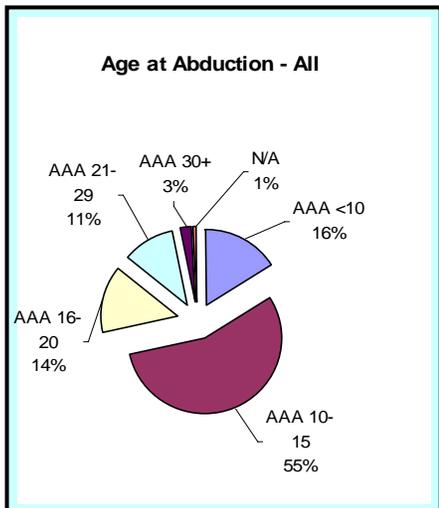
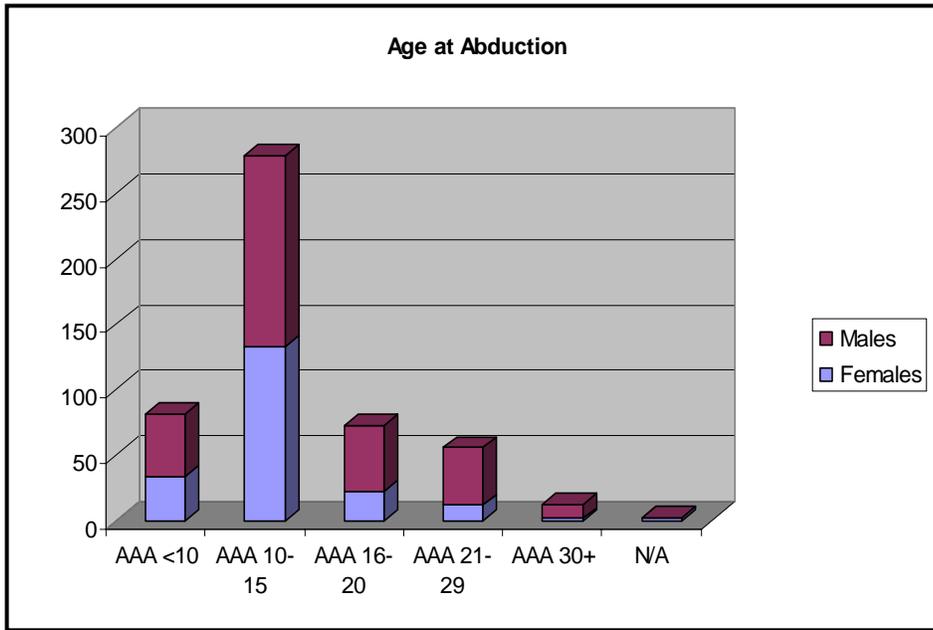
1. Establishing a cultural committee in each IDP camp. This committee would hold the responsibility for organizing a version of '*wang-oo*' sessions and teach youth about traditional practices, norms and ceremonies. As a result it would empower Elders and *Rwodi* by giving them more legitimacy to guide people and set the cultural laws.
2. Developing a decentralized information management system. Resource persons could train youth cultural focal points in camps to work with Councils of Elders and *Rwodi* in documenting traditional rituals that are practiced, and pending rituals in the camps. This information could then be compiled monthly and sent to the cultural centre (under construction with the assistance of donors) in Gulu where researchers and Ker Kwaro could use the data for analysis and planning purposes. The goal would be to determine the differences across clans, the impact of the camp settings on cultural practices, and to assess how to strengthen such practices.
3. Introducing inter-camp cultural competitions as a means of raising awareness on the importance of Acholi culture. Cultural competitions in camps could be organized with youth and supported by Elders and *Mego*. Each camp could select a group of youth that would perform either a cultural dance or lesson through drama. These could then be performed at a cultural gala, with a modest award to the group that wins, such as cultural costumes, trophies etc.

4. Strengthening the transmission of Acholi culture through schools, university programmes, pamphlets, posters and radio.
5. Constructing cultural centres in Kitgum and Pader districts where currently no such centre exist.

GRAPHS

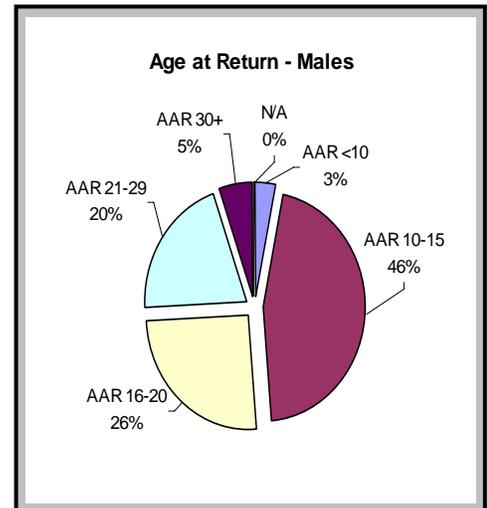
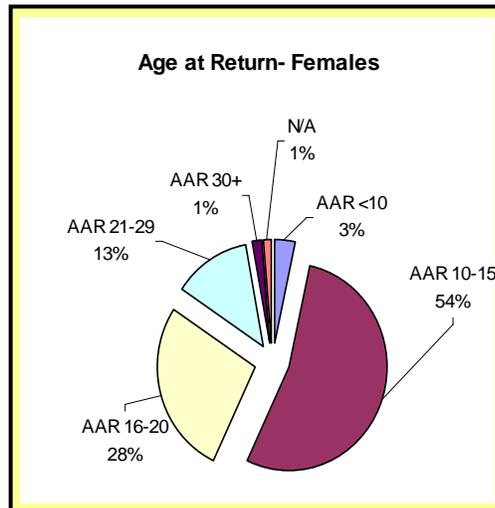
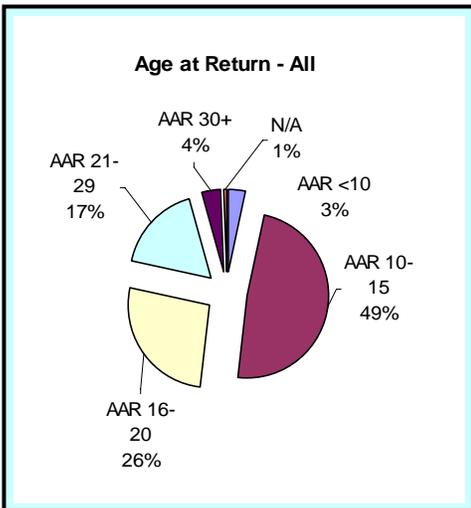
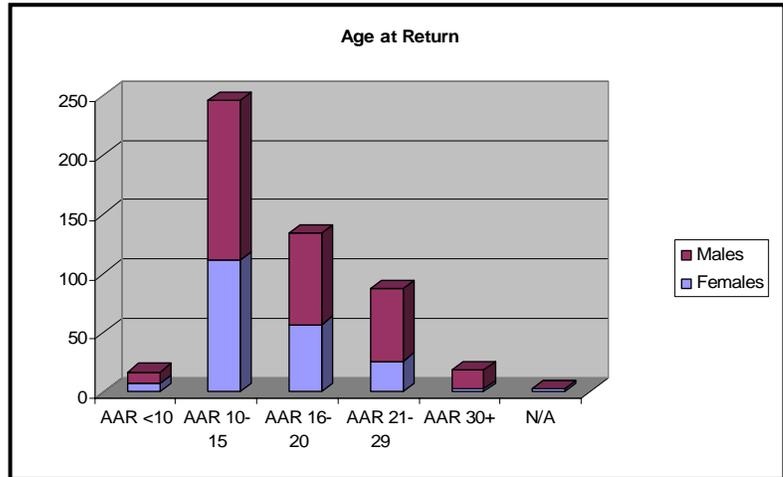
1. Age at Abduction

AAA – average age of abduction
 Based on Data collected with 506 Persons
 299 Males, 207 Females.



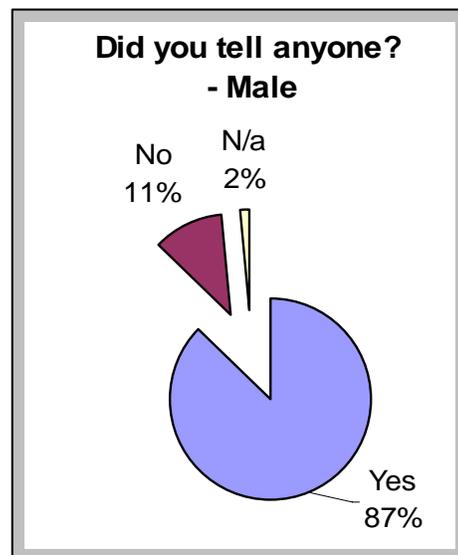
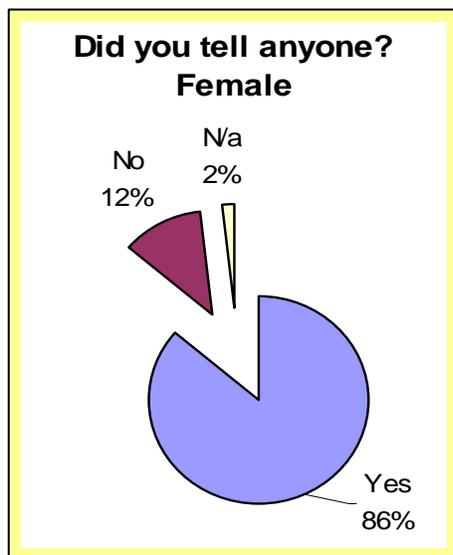
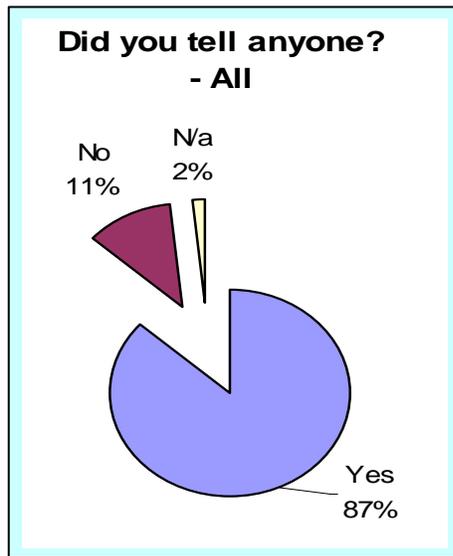
2. Age of Return

AAR – Average Age of Return
 Based on interviews with 506 Persons
 299 Males, 207 Females.



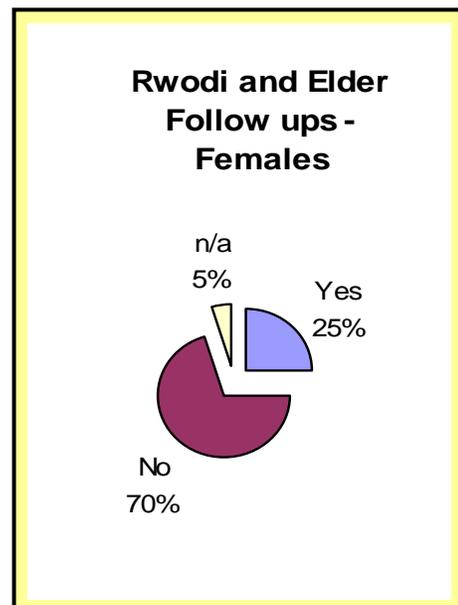
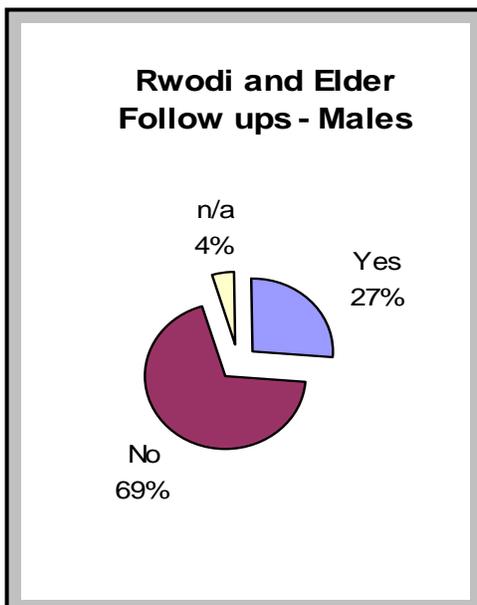
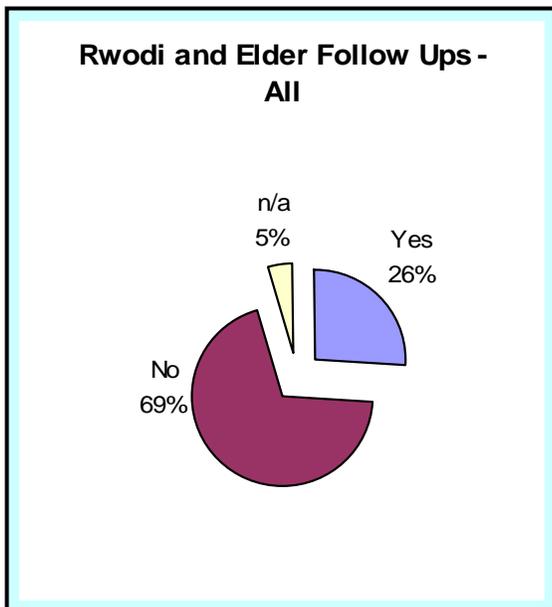
3. Did you tell anyone of your experiences / what you did?

Did you tell anyone?	All	%	Females	% Category	% Females	Males	% Category	% Males
Yes	439	87%	178	41%	86%	261	59%	87%
Family Member	397	78%	166	42%	80%	231	58%	77%
Other	181	36%	67	37%	32%	114	63%	38%
No	58	11%	25	43%	12%	33	57%	11%
N/a	9	2%	4	44%	2%	5	56%	2%
All	506	100%	207	41%	100%	299	59%	100%



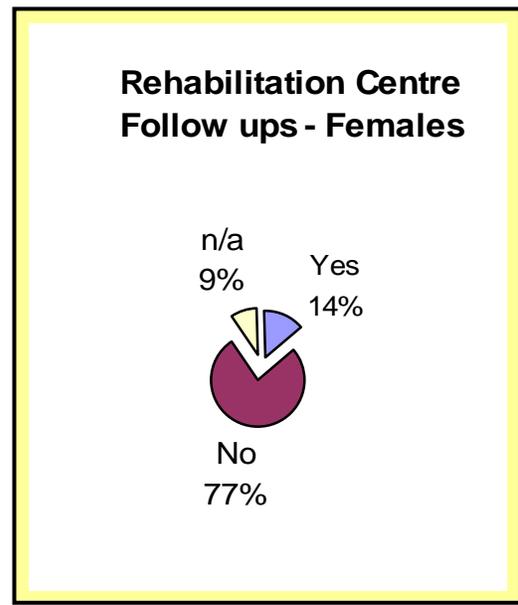
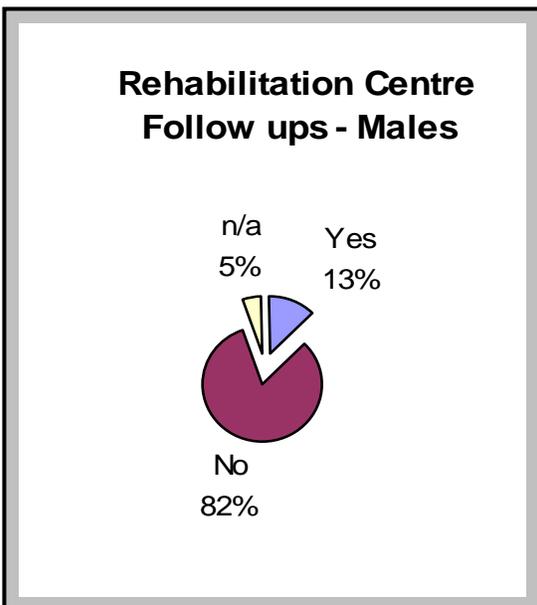
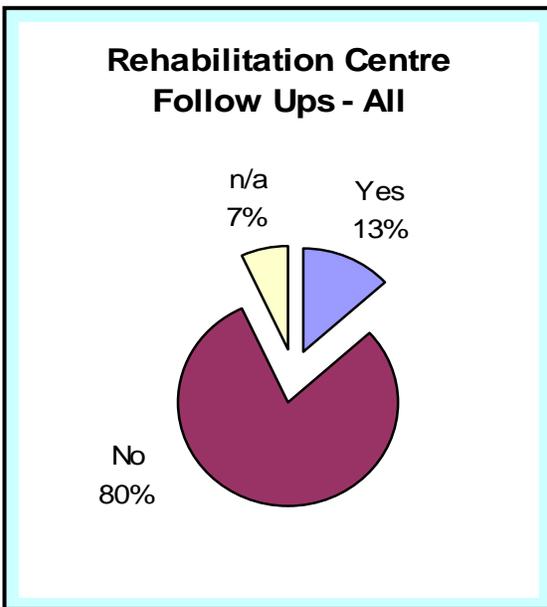
4. Follow ups by Rwodi and/or Elders

Follow ups by Rwodi and/or Elders	All		Females			Males		
	Count	%	Count	% Females	% All	Count	% Males	% All
Yes	132	26%	52	25%	10%	80	27%	16%
No	351	69%	145	70%	29%	206	69%	41%
n/a	23	5%	10	5%	2%	13	4%	3%
All	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



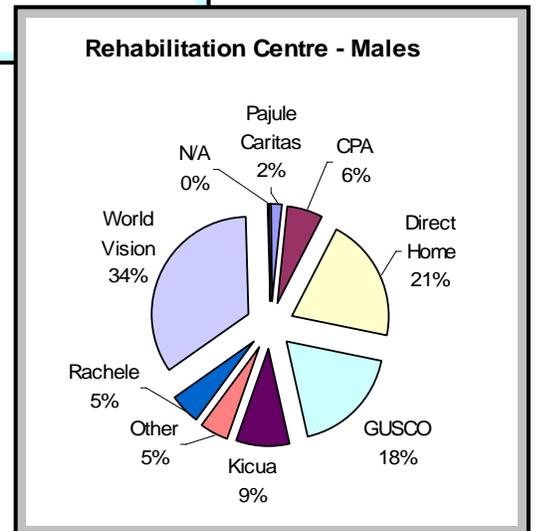
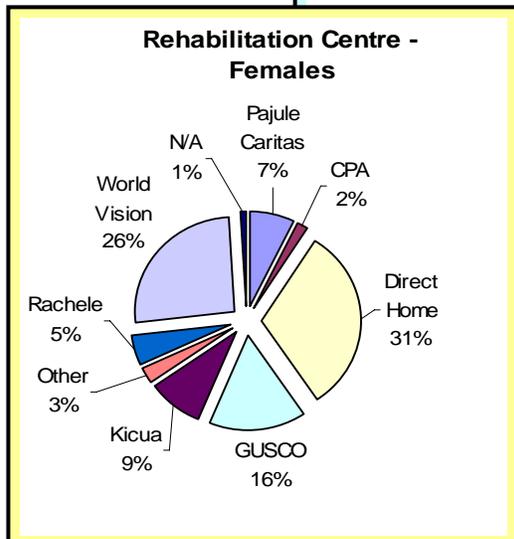
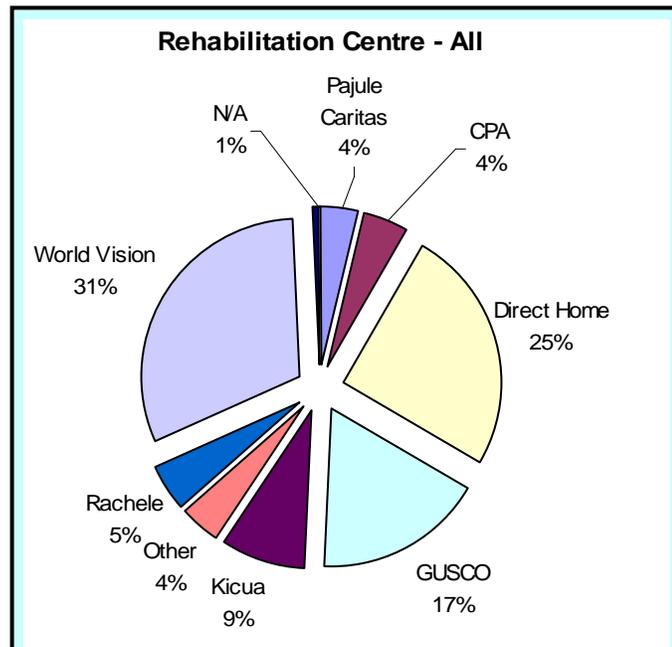
5. Follow ups by Rehabilitation Centres

Follow ups?	All		Females			Males		
	Count	%	Count	% Females	% All	Count	% Males	% All
Yes	68	13%	30	14%	6%	38	13%	8%
No	403	80%	158	77%	31%	245	82%	48%
n/a	35	7%	19	9%	4%	16	5%	3%
All	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



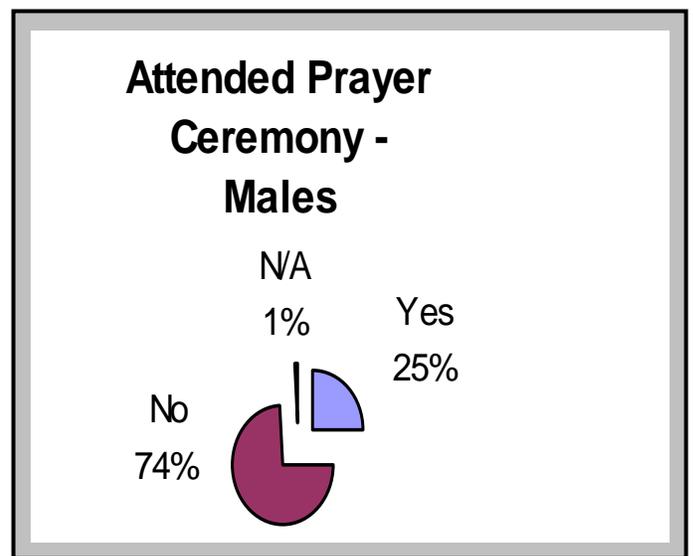
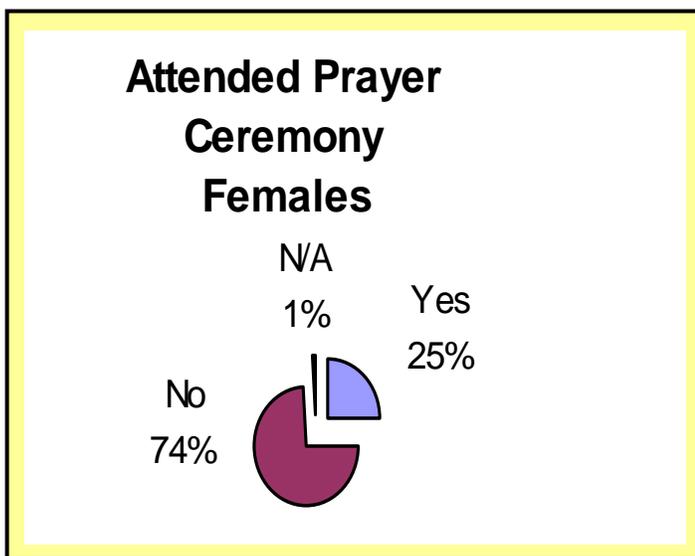
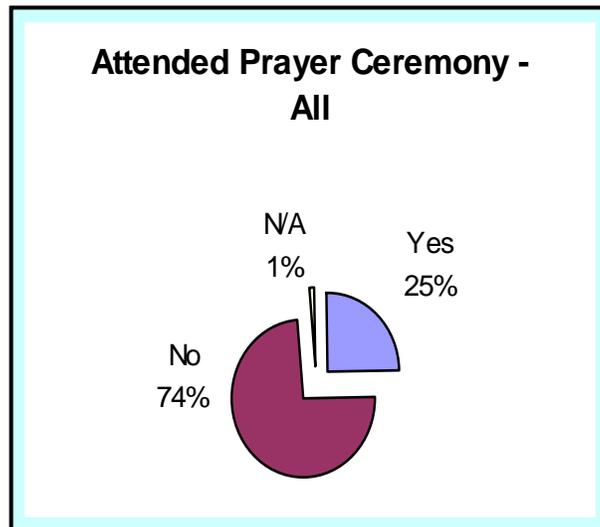
6. Rehabilitation Centres Attended by Returnees

Rehabilitation Centre	All	%	Females	% Females	% All	Males	% Males	% All
Pajule Caritas	20	4%	15	7%	3%	5	2%	1%
CPA	22	4%	4	2%	1%	18	6%	4%
Direct Home	127	25%	65	31%	13%	62	21%	12%
GUSCO	87	17%	33	16%	7%	54	18%	11%
Kicua	44	9%	18	9%	4%	26	9%	5%
Other	20	4%	6	3%	1%	14	5%	3%
Rachele	25	5%	10	5%	2%	15	5%	3%
World Vision	158	31%	54	26%	11%	104	34%	21%
N/A	3	1%	2	1%	0%	1	0%	0%
Total	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



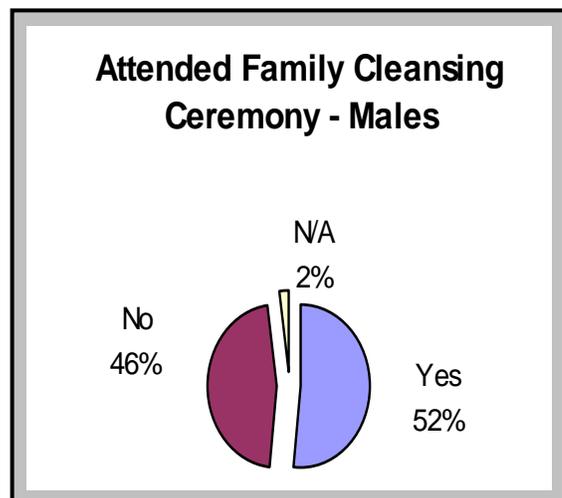
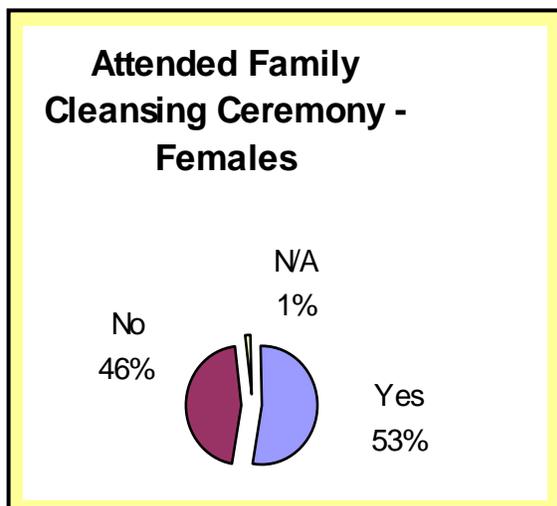
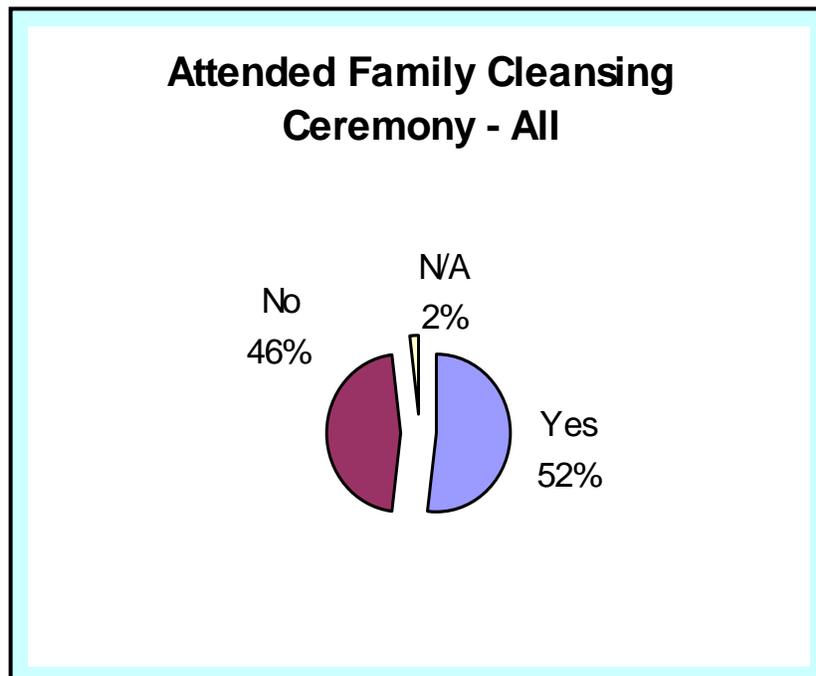
7. Participation of FAP in Prayer Ceremonies

Attended a prayer ceremony	All	%	Females	% Females	% All	Males	% Males	% All
Yes	126	25%	52	25%	10%	74	25%	15%
No	376	74%	153	74%	30%	223	75%	44%
N/A	4	1%	2	1%	0%	2	1%	0%
All	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



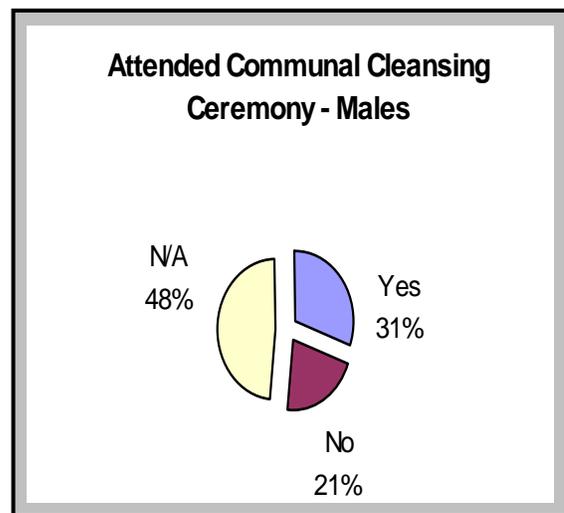
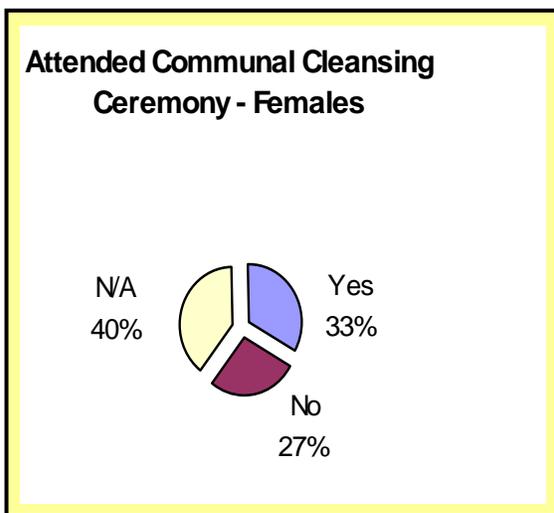
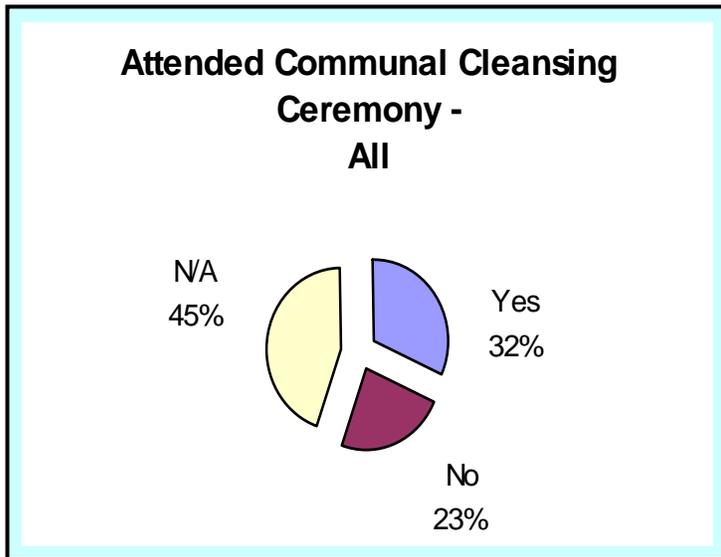
8. Participation of FAP in Family Cleansing Ceremonies

Attended a family cleansing ceremony	All	%	Females	% Females	% All	Males	% Males	% All
Yes	262	52%	108	53%	21%	154	52%	30%
No	235	46%	96	46%	19%	139	46%	27%
N/A	9	2%	3	1%	1%	6	2%	1%
All	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



9. Participation of FAP in Communal Cleansing Ceremonies

Attended a communal cleansing ceremony	All	%	Females	% Females	% All	Males	% Males	% All
Yes	161	32%	69	33%	14%	92	31%	18%
No	118	23%	56	27%	11%	62	21%	12%
N/A	227	45%	82	40%	16%	145	48%	29%
All	506	100%	207	100%	41%	299	100%	59%



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Records of Mato Oput 2000-2005

The researchers asked each respondent if they had ever participated in a Mato Oput ceremony between 2000-2004, and if they had, attempted to collect as many details of the case as possible. Most of the testimonies were oral, and memory was often faded for the respondent. In one case in Pajule, the *Ateker* had a written record, although this was missing was the exact date of the ceremony.

A number of pending cases were also brought to the attention of the researchers. In Anaka, 8 cases have fulfilled all requirements but the ceremony; in Pajule, nine cases are pending a ceremony. Both suggested there are not enough resources to carry the ceremony to its completion at this time.

A more systematic information management is greatly required.

Name of Respondent	Date of Killing	Type of Killing (manslaughter, intended, other, involved family member)	Location	Clan1	Clan2	Clan 3	Date of Mato Oput Ceremony
Ladit Mwa Mark Ojema	2001	Manslaughter (of uncle)		Lukome			2004
Rwot Justo Obito				Koch	Cwa		April 2005
Ladit Okello Munu J.B.		Land dispute - fear of murder arising from dispute	Lamit Liba				2004
n/a		Manslaughter		Inter-clan (no clan specified)			2004
n/a		Manslaughter		Amuru	Pawel	Ogorupii	2004
Ladit Obal Mario		Incest leading to suicide	Gulu	Lacor Abuga			
Rwot Olanya Terasisto		Homicide		Awo-leek			2004

Rwot Olanya Terasisto		Manslaughter		Awo-leek			2004
Ladit Anywar		Manslaughter		Pajule	Koyo	Paluo	2005
Rwot Mathew Ajao		Accidental killing of male friend		Gem	Pagol		2004
Rwot Mathew Ajao	1997	Accidental killing of Elder by boy		Paibwore	Parakono		2001
Ladit Mathew Okot	1976		Pader	Koyo	Palwo		October 2004. delayed due to lack of money
Ladit Mathew Okot		Manslaughter		Akurukwe	Payira	Lamogi	Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000-2005
Rwot Arop Poppy Paul		Matricide, over affair with man from Paibwo		Paibwo	Pamolo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Ladit Okech Raymond	1965	Manslaughter (of uncle)		n/a			Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Ladit Sisto Acire	1965	Murder (matricide)		Gem	Onyot	Paibore	Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Okot Matthew (Elder)		Killing	Pajule	Koyo	Palwo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1976	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Koyo	Palwo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1973	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palenga	Palwo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1967	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pajaa	Pajaa		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1970	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Labwor	Pader		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1975	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Gem	Pagol		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1961	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pajaa	Gem		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1980	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Lamogi	Koyo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000

Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1970	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palabek	Palwo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1971	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Oryang	Palenga		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1966	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Paiwula	Pader		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1975	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pagol	Palenga		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1955	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Koyo	Lukaci		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1970	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palwo	Paibwore		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1977	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Madi opei	Gem		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	2001	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pagol	Paiwula		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1980	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pugole	Pader		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1990	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palwo	Pagol		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1966	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Labwor	Palwo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1972	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pakeyo	Pajaa		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1955	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pagol	Pajaa		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1977	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Oryang	Ngekidi		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1978	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palenga	Palenga		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1988	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Pader	Paiwula		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1976	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palwo	Palenga		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Samuel Anywar Diima	1970	Killing	Pajule/Lapul Sub-county	Palugar	Pagol		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000

Rwot Mathew Ajao	1989	Killing	(interview held in Acholibur)	Lukwor	Okuti		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Mathew Ajao	1999	Killing	(interview held in Acholibur)	Gem	Pagol		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Rwot Mathew Ajao	1997	Killing	(interview held in Acholibur)	Paibwore	Parakono		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
n/a		Killing	Acholibur, Pajule parish	Gem	Pagol		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Researchers	1977	Killing	Pajule	Palenga	Paluo		Exact Date Unknown, but between 2000
Researchers	-	Killing	Pabo	Gaya Paumu	Odre		August 2005

Appendix 2 - List of Communal Cleansing Ceremonies by KKA

The list of communal cleansing ceremonies below was compiled with the assistance of *Ker Kwaro Acholi*. Missing are records from Luo Development Initiative, which was not able to avail its records to the researchers.

The ceremonies below include a *Moyo Piny* and two Reconciliation Ceremonies, which were not included in the final count of Communal Cleansing Ceremonies but included here to illustrate how KKA has begun to adapt other ceremonies to a communal level.

Key

MP – Male Participants

FP – Female Participants

MR – Male Returnees

FR – Female Returnees

IR – Infant Returnees

CCC – Community Based Cleansing Ceremony

FCC – Family Based Cleansing Ceremony

#	Ceremony	Location	Date of ceremony	Clan 1	Clan 2	MP	FP	MR	FR	IR	Reason for ceremony	Interviewee	Notes
1	CCC	Kitgum-Lamwo-Palabek Kal	August 22, 2004			8	1				Case of general community "dirt"		Rituals facilitated by Caritas PSSP Gulu
2	CCC	Kitgum-Lamwo-Palabek Kal	August 25, 2004			7	2				Showed PTSD related symptoms		Rituals facilitated by Caritas PSSP Gulu
3	Reconciliation Ceremony	Pader - Aruu - Lapul	August 22, 2004	Koyo	Palwo	81	9				Killing		Rituals facilitated by Caritas PSSP Gulu

18	CCC	Pader Lapul Mission B	June 26, 2004					77 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
19	CCC	Gulu Ongako Kweyo	July 10, 2004					90 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
20	CCC	Gulu Bardege Kanyagog	August 7, 2004					40 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
21	CCC	Gulu Layibi	August 13, 2004					44 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by LIU
22	CCC	Gulu Bungatira Coope	September 4, 2004					26 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
23	CCC	Kitgum Town Oryang	September 7, 2004					65 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
24	CCC	Gulu Lamogi Awer	September 27, 2004					378 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by LIU
25	CCC	Gulu Bobi Palenga	October 2, 2004					170 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS/IOM
26	CCC	Gulu Anaka Paduny	January 5, 2005					130 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by UNDP
27	CCC	Gulu Amuru Pagak-lapongo	January 13, 2005					801 F&M			Rwodi Acholi	Funded by CRS
28	FCC	Gulu Atiak	no date					2 F&M			Rwot Puranga	Funded by IOM
29	FCC	Gulu Puranga Acet	no date					2 F&M			Rwot Atiak	Funded by IOM
30	FCC	Kitgum Labongo Amida	no date					1 F/M			Rwot Koch	Funded by IOM
31	FCC	Pader Pajule	no date					4 F&M			Rwot Pajule	Funded by IOM

Appendix 3 - List of interviews, meetings and camps in the study

Interviews

20 Rwodi

#	Respondent	Title	Place	Date
1	Rwot David Onen Acana II	Paramount Chief of Acholi	Gulu town, Gulu District	June 21, 2005
2	Rwot George William Lugai	Rwot / Deputy Paramount Chief Of Acholi	Gulu and Pader districts	March 21, 2005 and July 28, 2005
3	Rwot Otinga, Atuka Otto Yai	Rwot / Deputy Paramount Chief Of Acholi	Gulu town – Gulu district	March 30, 2005
4	Rwot Francis Oryang Lagony	Rwot Koch	Gulu town – Gulu district	July 24, 2005
5	Rwot Francis Lateyet	Rwot	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 3, 2005
6	Rwot Jolly Joe Loum	Rwot Amida	Kitgum - Kitgum district	April 18, 2005
7	Rwot Latigo Obwoc	Rwot Gem	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 15, 2005
8	Rwot Justo Obita	Rwot Koch-Amida	Kitgum town - Kitgum district	April 18, 2005
9	Rwot Arop Poppy Paul	Rwot Labongo Pagen	Kitgum town - Kitgum district	April 20, 2005
10	Rwot Opobo Pyerino	Rwot Oryang	Kitgum (Amida)	April 19, 2005
11	Rwot Andrea Binyi Pesa II	Rwot Pagak	Amuru – Gulu district	May 31, 2005
12	Rwot Samuel Anywar Dima	Rwot Pagol	Pajule/Lapul - Pader district	May 3, 2005
13	Rwot Mathew Ajao	Rwot Paibore	Acholi Bur - Pader district	May 11, 2005

14	Rwot John Edward Ojera	Rwot Patiko-Pageya	Mican – Gulu district	May 24, 2005
15	Rwot Okello Pautino	Rwot Toro	Amuru – Gulu district	May 31, 2005
16	Rwot Peter Ojigi	Rwot		June 13 - 17, 2005
17	Rwot Odon Lira Ii	Rwot	Pajule/Lapul- - Pader district	May 3, 2005
18	Rwot Owor Fostino	Rwot	Pajule/Lapul- - Pader district	May 3, 2005
19	Rwot Oyo Martin Lakwang	Rwot	Pajule/Lapul- - Pader district	May 3, 2005
20	Rwot Gwa Charles	Rwot	Corner Kilak - Pader district	June 13, 2005

20 Mego

#	Respondent	Title	Place	Date
1	Anek Cira	Mego	Lacor camp – Gulu district	April 12, 2005
2	Kitara Marcelina	Mego	Lacor camp – Gulu district	April 12, 2005
3	Kotansia Oguru	Mego	Pajule/lapul- - Pader district	April 30, 2005
4	Odong Evaline	Mego	Acholi bur - Pader district	May 11, 2005
5	Margaret Oyugi	Mego	Acholi bur - Pader district	May 11, 2005
6	Ajulina Pinyoloya	Mego	Amuru camp - Gulu district	June 4, 2005
7	Alum Pelisena	Mego	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
8	Atim Nighty	Mego	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
9	Akech Martha	Mego	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
10	Aweko Albina	Mego	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
11	Acayo Alice	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 25, 2005
12	Abwono Rose	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 25, 2005
13	Akello Carolina	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 25, 2005
14	Ayet Doreen	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 25, 2005
15	Mary Oloya	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 26, 2005
16	Acayo Clementina	Mego	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 26, 2005

17	Abwot Dorothy	Mego - prominent (women's desk elders' forum)	Labourline - Gulu district	May 26, 2005
18	Margaret Tebere	Mego – prominent	Gulu town – Gulu district	April 20, 2005
19	Mego Kutansia Atoo Oguru	Mego - executive member of KKA and women representative for Kitgum and Pader	Kitgum town – Kitgum district	April 30, 2005
20	Mrs. Aol Betty Ocan	Mego		May 12, 2005

44 Elders

#	Respondent	Title	Place	Date
1	Oweka Yutiko	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
2	Odupo Owak Justine	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
3	Mark Ojema	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
4	Jackson Opiro	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
5	Okech Raymond	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
6	Okello Munu J.B.	Elder	Kitgum town – Kitgum district	April 21, 2005
7	John Moro	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 10, 2005
8	Ocitti Francis	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 10, 2005
9	Okello Eromiya	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 12, 2005
10	Francis Otika	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 12, 2005
11	Sisto Acire	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 13, 2005
12	Eromasio Odora	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 13, 2005
13	Adonga Alfred	Elder	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 14, 2005
14	Opiyo Otto	Elder	Amuru - Gulu district	June 1, 2005
15	Okumu Yotwolo	Elder	Amuru - Gulu district	June 1, 2005
16	Ojok Jurubabel	Elder	Amuru - Gulu district	June 1, 2005
17	Oneka Gabriel	Elder	Amuru - Gulu district	June 2, 2005
18	Oneka Gabriel	Elder	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
19	Mathew Okot	Elder	Pajule/Lapul - - Pader district	May 3, 2005
20	Obwoya Wilson	Elder	Acholi bur - Pader district	May 11, 2005
21	Opira Hannington	Elder	Kitgum (Amida) – Kitgum district	April 18, 2005

22	Teberino Okeny	Elder	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 30, 2005
23	Ismail Amone	Elder	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 4, 2005
24	Opio Bruno	Elder	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 4, 2005
25	Onyok Aquiline	Elder	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 4, 2005
26	Anywar Mark Ocan	Elder	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 4, 2005
27	Ogik Stephen	Elder - LC3 secretary for disability	Gulu town - Gulu district	April 19, 2005
28	Odong John	Elder	Gulu town - Gulu district	April 19, 2005
29	Okumu Francis	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 23, 2005
30	Odur Philips	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 24, 2005
31	Okullo Valentine	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 24, 2005
32	Kidega Anyaka	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 24, 2005
33	Olanya John	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 24, 2005
34	Okello Onyec	Elder	Anaka camp - Gulu district	April 25, 2005
35	Oduny Samuel	Elder	Acholi inn – Gulu district	May 2, 3005
36	Ibok Jekeri	Elder; LC1 chairman	Westland – Kitgum district	April 23, 2005
37	Komakech Leander	Elder	Goan quarters- Gulu district	May 4, 2005
38	James Ikeda	LCIII Chairman	Corner Kilak – Pader district	June 13, 2005
39	Ongwee Penderiko	Elder and Camp Leader	Corner Kilak	June 13, 2005
40	Obonyo Jackson	Elder	Corner Kilak - Pader district	June 13, 2005
41	Olal Lagil Adio	Elder and former rebel commander	Corner Kilak - Pader district	June 13, 2005
42	Oyaro Joseph	Chief elder in charge of conducting rituals	Corner Kilak - Pader district	June 13, 2005
43	Latim, Gerrison	Elder and PA to the Paramount Chief of Acholi	Gulu Town – Gulu District	March 15, 2005 and June
44	Ojok, Ojara	Elder, Board member of HURIFO	Gulu Town – Gulu District	February 16, 2005

24 partners

#	Respondent	Title	Place	Date
1	Nokrach William	Head of psychosocial Department AVSI - Kitgum	AVSI office	April 23, 2005
2	Aciro Agnes	Prog. Officer - Caritas	Pajule/Lapul - Pader district	May 4, 2005
3	Philip Okin	Prog.officer – UNDP	Pajule/Lapul - Pader district	May 28, 2005
4	Akwero Betty Omuk	Deputy prog. Coordinator – ARLPI	ARLPI office – Gulu district	May 30, 2005
5	Father Carlos Rodriguez	Religious Leader (Justice and Peace Commission)	Resource centre (mission)	May 26, 2005
6	Bishop John Baptist Odama	Archbishop of Gulu Catholic Diocese	Gulu town – Gulu district	May 27, 2005
7	Bishop Onono Onweng	Bishop of Northern Uganda diocese	Gulu town – Gulu district	May 24, 2005
8	James Nyeko	Program Officer – ARLPI	Pajule/Lapul - Pader district	May 5, 2005
9	Bishop Mcbaker Ochola	Vice chairperson- arlpi	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 29, 2005
10	Michael Oruni	Admin. World Vision	World Vision Rehabilitation Centre - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
11	Nyero Fred	Ag. program Coordinator Kicwa - Kitgum	Kicwa office - Kitgum district	April 19, 2005
12	Oyet Simon	Center administrator CPA - Kitgum	CPA office - Kitgum district	April 19, 2005
13	Oruk Denis	Centre administrator-World Vision	World Vision Rehabilitation Centre - Gulu district	April 12, 2005
14	Charles Nelson Okumu	Director for the vulnerable groups and conflict resolution and conflict management, NUSAF	Gulu town – Gulu district	June 29, 2005
15	Mr. Odoki	district technical officer	Gulu town – Gulu district	June 30, 2005
16	Okema Emmanuel	ARLPI program officer	Gulu town – Gulu district	June 26, 2005
17	Mr. Martin .o.	Programme coordinator, I.R.C. Kitgum	Kitgum town - Kitgum district	
18	Shiek Musa Khelil	Kadhi of acholi sub-region Muslim community	Gulu town – Gulu district	

19	Esther	Project officer - amnesty commission	Gulu town – Gulu district	February 23, 2005
20	Sister Pauline	CRS	Gulu town – Gulu district	March 9, 2005
21	Denis Oruk	World vision	Gulu town – Gulu district	April 12, 2005
22	Okot Francis	Research assistant - psychosocial support program caritas	Gulu town – Gulu district	May 16, 2005
23	Empowering Hands	PVP	Gulu town – Gulu district	February 23, 2005

5 camp leaders

#	Respondent	Title	Place	Date
1	Okeny Okema John	Camp leader	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
2	Okwera Stephen	Camp leader	Lokung camp - Kitgum district	April 5, 2005
3	n/a	Camp leader-acholi bur	Acholi bur – Pader district	May 10, 2005
4	Okwera Walter	Camp leader-lacor camp	Lacor camp - Gulu district	April 13, 2005
5	Lubanga-Mayubu Nickson	Camp leader	Amuru – Gulu district	June 2, 2005

Meetings

#	Date	Meeting	Location	Purpose	Participants
1	May 6, 2005	Rwot Meeting	Gulu	consultative meeting to obtain views from Rwodi in district	Rwodi and stakeholders
2	April 30, 2005	KKA meeting	Kitgum	Dialogue	over 50: Rwodi and elders in Kitgum district
3	May 1, 2005	ICRC, 15 elders, Rwodi	Kitgum	ICRC to give information on their activities and plans to traditional leaders	
4	May 2, 2005	Rwodi and Chiefs of Pader District	Pajule and Lapule Sub-county	Exchange of ideas on origin of war, traditions for time of war, ways to end the war	

5	June 29, 2005 - July 1, 2005	ARLPI workshop		Achieve solutions to challenges facing returnees; examine impact of Amnesty	ARLPI, Stakeholders, Over 40 returnees, including commanders
6	June 3 - 5, 2005	Acholi Youth and Chiefs: Addressing Practices of The Acholi Culture of Reconciliation	Gulu	Inter-generational dialogue between youth groups and elders about traditional Acholi reconciliation practices and how to apply them today	50 Kitgum youths, 12 Kitgum chiefs, 92 Gulu youths, 27 Gulu chiefs, 66 Pader youths, 19 Pader chiefs

Internally Displaced Persons Camps

Gulu District

1. Alero
2. Amuru
3. Anaka
4. Awer
5. Lacor
6. Laybi
7. Palenga
8. Pabo
9. Parabongo
10. Unyama

Kitgum District

1. Amida
2. Kitgum Matidi
3. Labuje
4. Lokung
5. Palabek

Pader District

1. Acholi Bur
2. Corner Kilak
3. Pajule
4. Lapul
5. Awer

Appendix 4 - Case Studies

Family Cleansing Ceremony, Lacor, Gulu

'K' (female) was abducted by the LRA when she was nine years old. She escaped during a cross-fire and returned to her mother and sister when she was 11. At the time of the cleansing ceremony, 'K' was 13. While in the bush, she was forced to kill others, and engage in LRA rituals to 'give them courage', including being forced to eat with corpses. She was 'given to a big man' while in captivity, which she described as very painful. Since her return, 'K' suffered from trauma in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, withdraw and disassociation. On one occasion during such a state, she picked up a knife and attempted to kill her sister. She often entered such states when asked to prepare food by her mother, or would become extremely angry and withdrawn after being requested to do domestic chores. She attempted to go back to school, but found it difficult to concentrate. She was teased by other children, who sometimes called her "Kony" or "*dwong pacu*".²²² Teasing would sometimes result in rows and physical fighting.

'K's mother brought her on several occasions to meet *Rwot* Peter Ojigi of Alokolum, currently residing in a displaced camp in Lacor. With the counsel and advice of Elders, it was decided to hold a cleansing for the girl to:

- 1) officially welcome her home with the "stepping of the egg ceremony";
- 2) cleanse her of the "bad feelings she had" by slaughtering a goat;
- 3) chase away the bad spirits (*cen*) that haunted and tormented her with the slaughtering of a second goat; and,
- 4) restore her to good health through the *goyo-pii* ceremony (the washing of tears), where her family had mourned her as dead.

The ceremony took place at the home of *Rwot* Ojigi and was attended by clan Elders and 'K's extended family.²²³ The community contributed modest food and drink and the women worked together to prepare the foodstuffs. Otherwise, the *Rwot-Mo* approached the Paramount Chief of Acholi to request for resources to buy the goats, where the family was unable to raise the funds. After deliberation and consideration of the facts at the Palace, this request was granted, as sometimes is the case in extraordinary circumstances and when funds are available.

²²² *Dwong Pacu* is the name of the radio programme on Mega FM that calls on rebels to return home from the bush.

²²³ Approximately 20 Elders attended, as did 'K's mother and sister, aunts, uncles, grandparents and a representative of 'K's father who had passed. Two Westerners – the Canadian researcher and a Canadian photographer – recorded the event with the help of a female translator, and one female, Lwo-speaking researcher. As is customary in Acholi culture, we were warmly welcomed at the ceremony, and encouraged to feel free to ask as many questions as we could think of. We took part in the ceremony, including the 'confession' session the returnee requested we be present at.

'K' arrived with her mother with a shaved head.²²⁴ The ceremony began with the blessings of Elders and welcome speeches by Rwot Ojigi who would act as a witness to the process. The mother, uncle²²⁵ and grandparents of 'K' were requested by Elders to describe to her why this ceremony was requested. During this, they discussed what had happened to 'K' in the bush, and her behaviour since she had returned home.²²⁶ The eldest of Elders conducted the 'Stepping of the Egg' ceremony, followed by the slaughter of the first goat. The second goat was black – thought to be the colour symbolic of *cen*. Elders called upon the ancestors to chase away *cen* to the West as the goat was circled around 'K' three times. It was then slaughtered using a panga. As both animals were cooked over an open fire, the Elders and Rwot took 'K' into the hut for 'confession'. In the privacy of the Rwot's hut, 'K' described what had happened to her and what she took part in. 'K' requested all the male Elders to leave when she came to the topic of rape, and only wanted to confide in 'the visitors'. The Elders respected this request.

After confession, each person in attendance was served the cooked goat with a good helping of millet bread in groups of 4-5 persons. The Elders were served first, followed by Elder women and then youth and the researchers present.²²⁷ The ceremony was ended with the washing of tears ritual, and a celebration followed.

The researchers followed up 'K's case two months later to determine the impact. According to interviews with Rwot Ojigi, 'K', her mother and several neighbours, there was a noticeable difference in 'K's mental state and social interactions. She reported that she no longer suffered from the signs of trauma she had prior to the ceremony, and that she no longer saw those "funny pictures that used to appear" and could now "think straight". She and her mother stated that when asked to do domestic chores, she accepted to do so without becoming angry or argumentative. While children at school continued to tease her and call her names, and while this continued to be painful, 'K' reported she was reasoned in her response. "I can give up what people say about me". 'K' attended school more regularly and reported her grades had improved significantly (in a separate interview her mother stated that 'K' now does her homework at night, which she used to refuse to do'. She also said that while relations with her immediate neighbours had improved in general, they still called her abnormal, which surfaced painful memories for her. Still, interviews with her neighbours revealed they were willing to admit a positive change in 'K's behaviour. Finally, 'K' reported that the cleansing ceremony and tum had chased *cen*. "The ritual helped me...I feel I am a new person...It [is] not the same as world as before...I believe strongly I had bad *cen*".

²²⁴ It is customary in a cleansing or purification ceremony for the subject to shave their heads, presumably a symbol of a fresh start.

²²⁵ 'K's father had been killed, and his brother stepped in to represent him at the ceremony as is customary in Acholi tradition.

²²⁶ The Elders asked if 'K' had been raped, something all the women present – not least 'K' herself – were visibly uncomfortable with, and to which her mother did not answer. Nor did 'K's mother publicly discuss the role her daughter had played in 'killings' in the bush. This, however, were discussed more freely in the privacy of the *Rwot's* hut, during which period 'K' was to confess what had happened to her and what she took part in. 'K' requested all the male Elders to leave when she came to the topic of rape.

²²⁷ The women, youth and researchers sat on mats, while the Elders and *Rwodi* sat in chairs in a semi-circle. All faced each other.

While 'K' appeared to be psychologically stronger, her economic and physical security circumstances continue to pose significant challenges. 'K's family struggles to raise her school fees, and are uncertain if she can continue in school. The family lives in a small room in the trading centre. Her mother, sister and herself do odd jobs for income, such as carrying jerry cans of water. Her mother also digs in other peoples gardens for income, and sometimes she requests 'K' to assist her. 'K' continues to refuse to go and dig. She told the interviewer she feared re-abduction while digging, and was certain that if this happened, she would be killed by the LRA. 'K' also reported that when there was not enough income, they would sometimes go hungry, but otherwise she was 'happy at home, not like before'.

'K' and her mother developed a good relationship with the Rwot, and visit regularly to report on 'K's progress. *Rwot* Ojigi also went twice to the home of Kevin to do follow-up, and see how K was doing. He states that 'K' and her family now have a second home at his home.

Moyo Piny – Corner Kilak, Pader

In June 2005, one of the researchers traveled to observe a *Moyo Piny* ritual in Corner Kilak, Pader District that was organized by Elders and supported by Ker Kwaro Acholi.²²⁸ Created in September 1997, the internal displacement camp in Kilak Corner is composed of 13,870 persons (7,355 females and 6,515 males), with a very high degree of inter-clan mixing.²²⁹

Background

According to the camp leader and Elders, Corner Kilak had always been a battleground between the rebels and the Ugandan Army. The first serious battle occurred between the National Resistance Army (NRA, now the UPDF) and the UNLA (Ugandan Army under former President Tito Okello, who fled NRA into the North) in 1986, leaving an unknown number of people dead, the majority of whom were believed to be civilians. In 1986, the NRA again fought in Kilak Corner, but this time with rebels led by Alice Lakwena. According to the informants, approximately 18,000 persons were left dead.²³⁰

The researcher was physically shown some of the mass graves that were within the relative safety of the camp by the *Rwot* of the area, together with two other *Rwodi* and two Elders. In this particular area, civilians were made to dig their own graves before being hacked to death with hoes.²³¹ The graves were distinguishable by depressions within the soil

²²⁸ Another Moyo Piny ceremony was witnessed and recorded in a report by IRC in Omiya Anyima (Kitgum) following a battle between LRA and UPDF resulting in a high number of casualties in December 2003.

²²⁹ According to consultations with the camp leader, there are approximately over 100 clans living in Corner Kilak camp. The following were mentioned though not comprehensive: Koyo, Palwo, paipul, larii, wol roda, pagol, wol langwiny ker, amor, wol labwo, lukor, kilak, parvec, abiya, paican, lukec, pulung, bolo, lukwor, lukaci, wol kaworokiri, paibwore, lubele, lalwo, bol lamac, gem, pagaya, acuru, laboye, madi, lamogi, awila, kal, and so on.

²³⁰ The researcher was given access to a partially composed list of names of persons killed in this battle that had been compiled by surviving relatives and stored at the office of the LC III.

²³¹ It was unclear whose remains they were, or who had done the massacre.

overgrown by grass. Human remains such as bones were visible. It was suggested that of the seven graves shown to the researcher, 5 to 10 civilians were buried.²³² According to research notes “many other bodies were left to rot around the area without any form of decent burials because of the too many dead bodies to bury, especially those from battles.”

According to the Elders *cen* had possessed the area because the *tipu* (spirits) of those who were killed innocently are annoyed, begging the need for a ritual to appease them and end a cycle of violence in the camp. *Cen*, it was argued, had intensified in the area, causing mass suffering and death. “Since many deaths were associated to the gun, many of our children are dying the same way. [UPDF] soldiers are shooting and killing each other, [as well as] civilians for no reason,” reported one informant. According to one of the Rwodi, “My son was shot dead [by a soldier] in my compound one morning in 2003 for no reason.” The soldier who killed his son immediately “turned the gun and shot himself dead.”²³³ This example is illustrative of a wider phenomenon of *cen* in the camp. On inquiry into the three major security concerns of people in the camp, the camp leader reported the following: 1) rebel attacks²³⁴; 2) the beating and murder of civilians by the UPDF with impunity,²³⁵ and, most recently 3) *cen*.

According to the UPDF Camp Commander, soldiers have begun shooting into the air at night, thinking that they see rebels. “On waking up we usually expect a sign of battle or see dead bodies all over the camp, but it is amazing as soldiers end up battling *cen*”. One afflicted UPDF soldier reported that he began firing one night at what he thought were rebels, moving with guns through the night.” By morning, there was no evidence that any rebels attacked the camp.

During the researcher’s three night stay in Corner Kilak, such incidents were witnessed and his/her notes are worth quoting at length:

Over the last three days a case of cen which occurred in the area involving a UPDF soldier.... I was sleeping in the camp when all of a sudden I was awakened to the shouts and alarms of women, men and children accompanied by banging of doors, calabashes, and gallons among other objects. I was really scared as I couldn't explain what was happening. Was it a rebel attack? Or a fight? But amazingly, only civilians were involved. This started at 1 a.m. and stopped at around 3 a.m. in the morning. On asking people in the morning what had happened, I was told there is a soldier in the camp who turns into a cat scratching and biting the people terribly at night. One child was seriously scratched while another woman was bleeding so seriously, reportedly bitten by the cat. I witnessed the injuries and they were evidently serious. When I asked one Elder about it, he told me this is cen: “This cen got into the soldier sometime back and will keep haunting the people”....I went on to ask why the shouting and beating the calabashes. One Elder, Ladit Ikeda (the LCIII chairman of the area) said that beating and shouting is a way of “ryemo cen” (chasing away cen). That cen that comes in this form can be scared away by making loud noises. At times this category of cen can be referred to as “gemo”. Ideally “gemo” is a collective name for any sign of bad omens that comes among people. According to him, even the Ebola virus that first came in Acholi region in 2000 was first

²³² Due to insecurity, it was not possible to visit the site of the mass grave that reportedly holds up to 18,000 bodies, known as *Ulele*.

²³³ Suicide is a taboo in Acholi.

²³⁴ The last rebel attack resulting in mass abduction was in 2002, but reportedly people in the camp still live in fear of attack.

²³⁵ The majority of crimes reported by the camp leader and Commander to the researcher were security and/or soldier related.

perceived as “gemo”. I remember the first time Ebola virus came in Gulu District, people made a lot of noise drumming and beating doors, calabashes and anything they came across to chase away the cen seen as a “gemo”.²³⁶

According to Ladit Okello, the *Moyo Piny* ritual held on June 13th was organized in order to cleanse the area of *cen*, and cease the cycle of death. “We wanted an end to suffering and bloodshed between soldiers and civilians,” added Ladit Ongwec. To him, such rituals were preventative, and a means to “avoid death associated with the gun”.

The Ritual

On Tuesday, 14th June 2005 very early in the morning, a small group of elders from Corner Kilak met to offer a sacrifice to the Jogi in response to the large amount of *cen* in the area.

Stage I - Making Agat

Agat are words spoken by the designated Elder to mark the beginning of the ritual. In Corner Kilak, the Elder, Ladit Joseph Oyaro spoke in front of a gathered crowd of people and to the Gods. Holding the sacrificial sheep, he said, “Today you (the sheep) are going to die not because you are guilty but because we want an end to the kind of death our people have undergone up to now. So Gods accept our sacrifice as a sign of humility and harmony portrayed by the sheep that we bring before you today. We want to witness the last blood shed in this sacrificial sheep today.” According to Ladit Obonyo, making an *agat* in the past was a form of prayers the elders make whenever they were consulting the spiritual world through sacrifices. Prior to life in the camp, elders used *agat* whenever there were no rains, poor harvests, or diseases.

Stage II - Dragging of the Sheep

After the *agat*, the eldest of the Elders dragged the sheep around Elders who were sitting in a circle to symbolize that all the Elders in the clan are witnesses of the death of the sheep. The eldest Elder drags the sheep around the others because culturally he is considered the closest to the spiritual world.

The sheep was then dragged to the place where it was to be slaughtered, a location in the bush (*olet*). This ritual is at times called “*ywayo cen*” directly translated as “dragging *cen*”. The sheep is dragged away to *olet* so that it (*cen*) stays away from the camp. No person should touch the sheep, lest the *cen* be brought back to the camp.

Stage III - *Neno i dyel*

Neno i dyel (seeing the inside of a goat) follows the dragging of the sheep. This is a process which is done by a *laneno* (an expert who knows how to “see” the inside of a goat). Seeing the inside of a goat is done to find out the source of misfortunes and to identify solutions to prevent future instances of *cen* in a preventative manner.

A male goat was dissected using a spear after making an *agat*. The same words are said as for the sheep, as well as the following words “Today also we come before you to “open” the goat and see what troubles will come our way. We want you (Gods and ancestors) through the goat to come up with a final solution to our problems”.

²³⁶ Recorded in Corner Kilak and filed as Week 10, Corner Kilak, June 2005.

The spear and a male goat were used in this ritual specifically because the community needs defence (symbolic of a spear and the one who uses it). After dissecting the goat, *olwedo*, *moo yaa* and *opobo* were “smeared” on the liver of the dead goat. *Olwedo* is used because there is need for peace and this leaf is a symbol for peace in Acholi. *Moo yaa* is the oil from a tree called *yaa*. The oil in Acholi is used as a symbol of cooling situations or bringing situations to calm. According to the *Rwot Gwa*, this is the reason why we have *Rwodi Mo* (literally, anointed Chiefs). They are supposed to create peace and bring situations to a calm end. Lastly, *opobo* – a slippery branch from the tree *pabo* - is used to smooth the situation. After these items were smeared on the liver of the goat, it was roasted and then eaten by the Elders present for the ritual. The eating of the liver symbolizes a cleansing of those who digest it.

After the eating of the liver, the intestine of the goat was removed and washed clean to allow the *laneno* to have a clear view of the “situation” inside the goat. According to the Elders, *laneno* can tell by looking through the intestine any misfortunes that might befall the area in the near future, and what steps were required to reverse the misfortune. Such information reportedly appears to *laneno* in the form of a vision.

In this ritual, the *laneno* learned that the LRA rebels were not far from the camp and were planning an attack. In his vision, he was told to sacrifice a “coloured” hen (black, grey plus yellow feathers known in Luo as *lalik* or *olike*) to drive away the rebels’ intentions of attacking the camp.²³⁷

After the reading of the intestines, the next step was to remove what is called *pol* (layer found between the skin and the flesh of the sheep), the ribs (*langet*), and liver of the goat (*acwiny*). The liver was cut into proportional pieces to the number of Elders and then roasted by the “youngest” of the elders and fed to the rest.²³⁸ After this, the remains of the goat were prepared and eaten with millet bread (“*kalob*”) - the traditional food of Acholi that is often used in all rituals and traditional occasions. The bones were gathered and “*kwete*” (a local brew made of sorghum or millet flour) was drunk in order to mark the end of the ritual. Elders spat the *kwete* over the bones in order to ‘cool’ the bones and wash away any death that may follow. “If there is to be death ‘let it be natural’.

²³⁷ At the time of writing, the Elders continued to look for such a hen.

²³⁸ This is a sign of respect. Culturally, the youngest is supposed to feed elders, and likewise, is supposed to eat only after the elders have eaten. According to the elders, it’s the hierarchy adapted since the “younger elders” are still far from the spiritual world.

Appendix 5 - Examples of Kiir

Generally, one elder, *Latum kii*, or *Ateker*, is designated to organize rituals at the village level within a clan to address the following forms of *kiir* (abominations)²³⁹:

- Denying food to someone in need. Should this act result in death of the person in question, *cen* will manifest. 'Food in Acholi was...crucial for human co-existence, such that the denial of food was considered a very evil act.'²⁴⁰
- Throwing food, a bowl or money at a person in anger. The curse affects one's livelihood and health until a ritual is conducted.
- Domestic quarrels between husbands and wives were identified as one of the most common cases of *kii* in camps that require rituals. Examples of quarreling included: If a wife beats her husband using a mingling stick; Eating ash (*moko baru*) as a way of expressing annoyance or frustration with a person; Locking a wife or husband out of the house in anger; burning down the family home in anger after a spousal quarrel; throwing money or food at a spouse in anger; refusing to eat food prepared by a wife; breaking a cooking pot in anger. In the case of domestic quarrels it is believed a 'bad spirit' has come between the husband and wife. A blessing is required to chase away ill that manifests as a result of the quarrelling, and a sacrifice is necessary to chase away the spirit.
- During a marital conflict, a wife may hit her groin, a symbolic gesture that indicates she will no longer have sexual relations with her husband. This is considered a serious abomination which may result in infertility and requires an 'immediate' *tum* (sacrifice) of a she-goat to appease the spirits. Given the serious social ramifications of infertility, this *kii* also indicates a disciplining of women to serve the sexual urges of men without question.
- Beating a child while they are responding to 'nature's call.
- Abnormal births (twins, born with extra fingers, abnormal features) require a particular ritual which varies from clan to clan. However, the umbilical cord is generally kept in a pot at the family *abila* (shrine) to chase away 'bad *jok*'. Persons with abnormalities are considered to be far more vulnerable to *jok*.

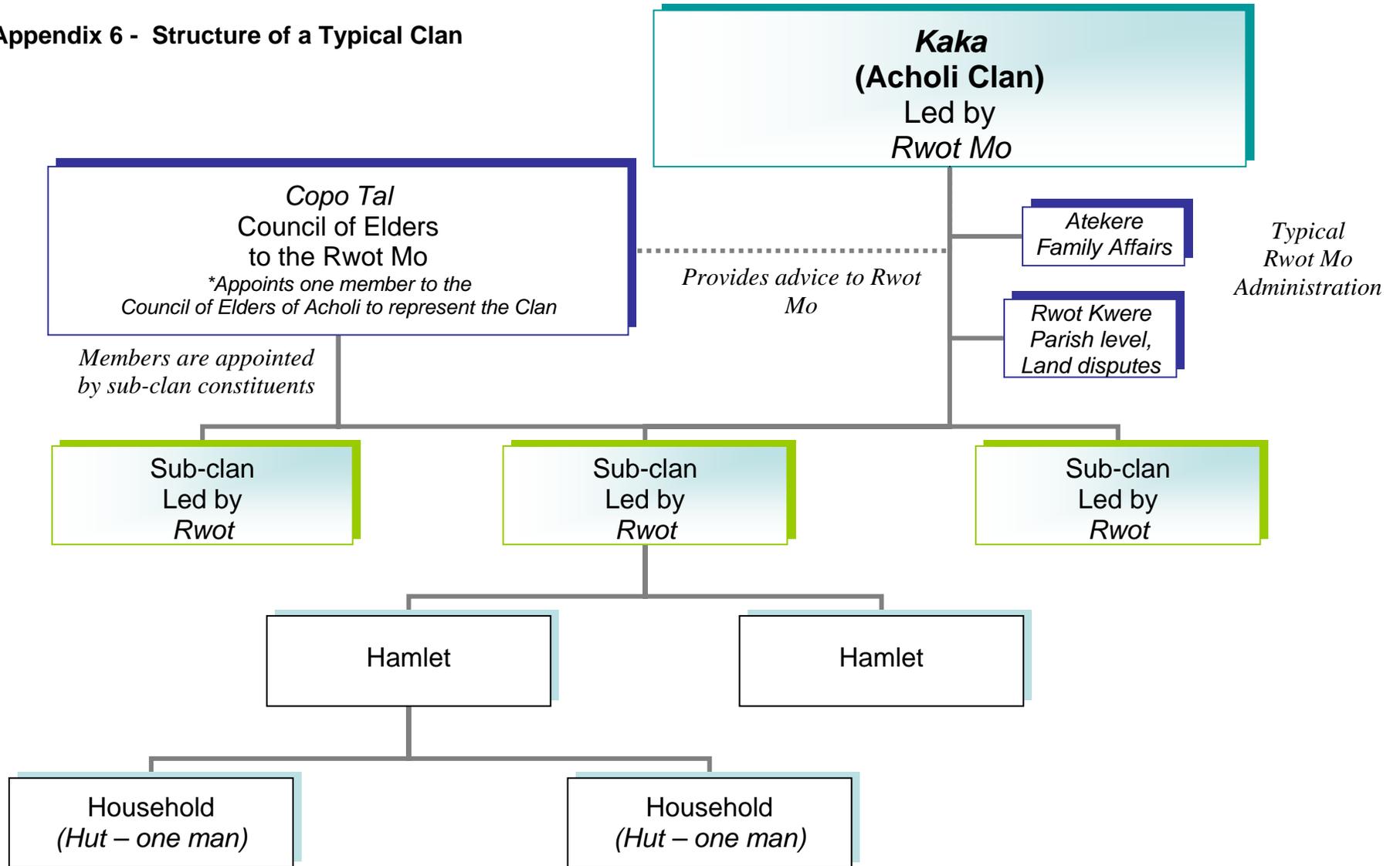
²³⁹ These examples were gathered from interviews with the 44 Elders individually, as well as group interviews with Elders and *Mego*. See also examples of *kiir* in CARITAS, Gulu Archdiocese, Psychosocial Support Program, *Traditional Ways of Preventing and Solving Conflicts in Acholi*, Gulu, Uganda, January 2005, p. 7; and, in CARITAS, Gulu Archdiocese, Psychosocial Support Program. Traditional Conflict Resolution - Conflict Resolution at Community Level', Paper No. 14, 12 August 2004, NP.

²⁴⁰ Ladit Sisto Acire, Interviewed in Acholi-bur, 13 May, 2005.

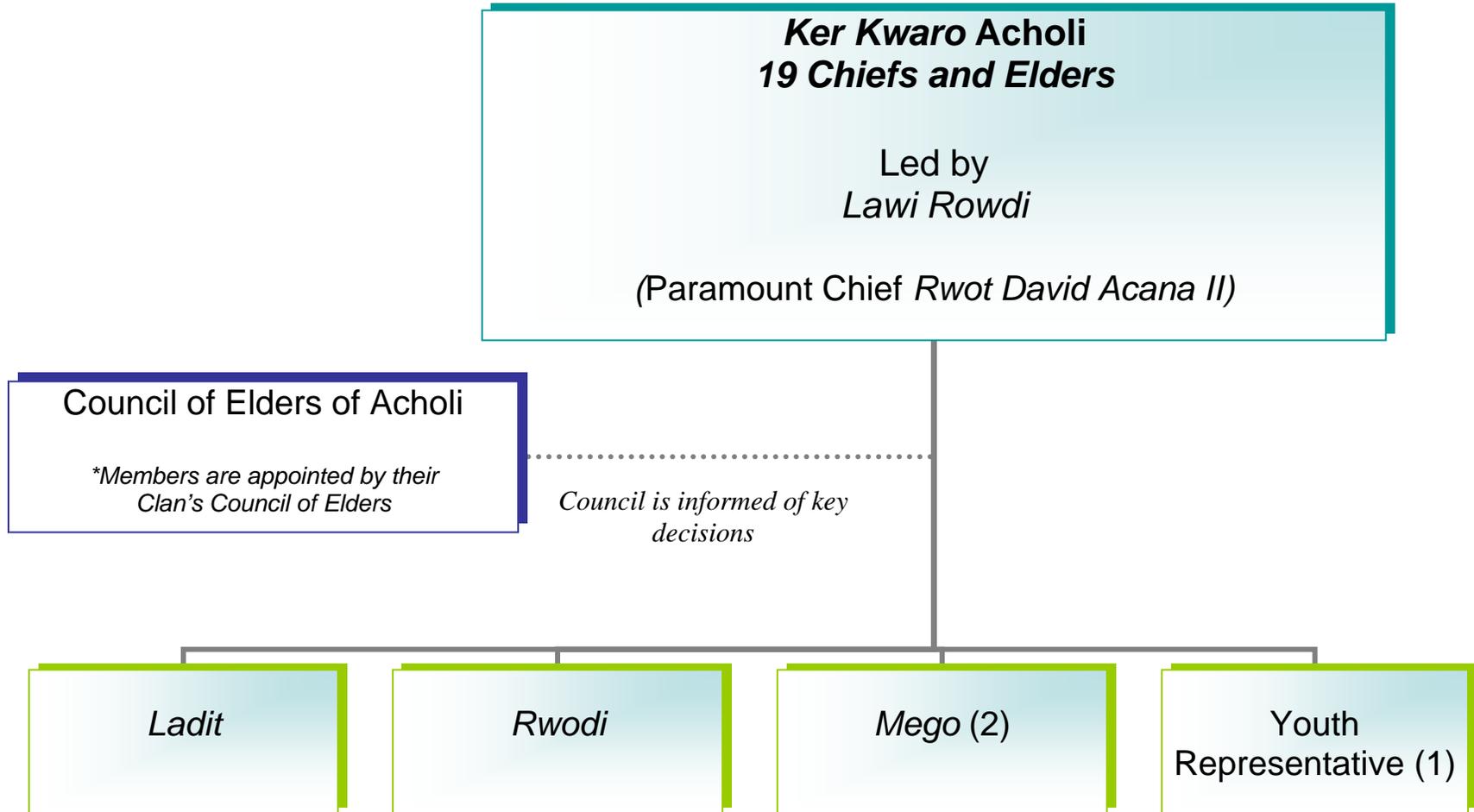
- Should arson be committed – by insurgents, security forces or community members --- calamity will follow the community and therefore a ritual is required. “This is because a house is very important, it is where life begins”.²⁴¹
- Fighting at the site of a well (usually between women and girls responsible for water collection) can usher in *ayweya* and will require rituals.
- When a mother or father may reveal and shake their breast or penis at a child. This reminds the child that they should pay respect to the one’s who ‘gave them life’. Without rituals performed, it is believed that the child will suffer illness.
- Having sex ‘in the bush’ (perhaps a euphemism for pre-marital sex?) is a form of *kii* that can result in infertility, still-birth and death of children.
- Failing to provide the deceased with a ‘proper burial’, such as failure to perform last funeral rites, is a serious abomination that will result *cen* and ‘further deaths’.

²⁴¹ Rwot Jolly Joe Loum, Interviewed in Kitgum-town, 19 May, 2005.

Appendix 6 - Structure of a Typical Clan



Structure of Ker Kwaro Acholi



Both Structures were created by Liz St. Jean, 2005.

Appendix 7 - Massacre Sites Requiring Rituals

Reports gathered by the office of P/C from various chiefdoms

Chiefdom	Date	Place	Killers	Number of People
1. Alero				
		Kal - Got Gwang	UPDF	32
		Panokrac - Latek Odong	UPDF	37
		Panyabono - Oyanya/Lalar Got	UPDF	34
2. KER KAL KWARO PUDYEK				
		Olwiyo		30
		Te Acam		25
		Tangi		28
		Loka Aswa		30
		Wii anaka		18
		Kololo		15
		Dog Park		20
		Purongo T/centre		40
3. Ker Kal Kwaro Alokolum				
		Lwityat		30
		Kulu Amuka		31
		Agung		18
		Trading Centre		17
		Alokolum Gok		20
4. Ker Kal Kwaro Paibona				
		Burcoro		25-Government
		Gwengiya		20-Government

	Paibona		19
	Pukony		20
5. Gulu Municipality (Pece and Laroo Divisions)			
	Pudyek Acoyo		20
	Pece Laroo		25
	Pael Pudyek		15
	Pageya Pudyek		10
	Pece Prison		10
6. Gulu Municipality (Koro Division)			
	Onang	LRA	23
	Aluli	LRA	26
	Tyenakaye	UPDF	30
	Lapainat	LRA	40
	Shakare	UPDF	35
	Labora	UPDF	40
	Pageya	LRA	30
	Barogal	UPDF	25
	Onang	UPDF	30
7. Puranga – Odek Sub-County			
	2/11/1988	UPDF Operation	20
	Orapwoyo	LRA attack	7
	Baro	Lam LRA attack	9
	Acet Centre	Government	6
	Acet Centre during a disco dance		9
	Odek Camp	LRA	30
8. Puranga – Awere Sub-County			
	Paikat	LRA	40
	Lagile	Government	10
	Lagile	LRA	20

9. Puranga – Bobi Sub-County

1991	Palenga Centre	Government 21 st Battalion	27
1997	Kidi Kal Adui	LRA	23
		LRA	50
1991	Bobi-Palenga	Government	27
	Bobi	LRA	23

10. Koch Goma

1987	Koch Goma	LRA	240
1989	Goma	LRA	87
	Pakawera	Government	47
	Agonga	Government	39
	Dog ayago	Government	40

11. Lamogi

1986	Gang Kal Lamogi	NRA (Government)	50
1995	Parabongo – Pabbo	LRA	5
1995	Parabongo	LRA	25
1999	Olwal Camp	UPDF	12
2003	Pagak – camp	LRA	29

12. Ker Kwaro Pabbo

1986	Mission	NRA	52
1995	Gang Kal	LRA	21
1995	Pogo / Atiak	LRA	13
1995	Gaya / Pabbo	LRA	15

13. Amuru

1979	Wii kulu Olik	UA	9
1998	Labongo Gali – Aswa	LRA	18
1999	Pagak – Atota – Abim	LRA	14
2001	Okungedi – Amuru	LRA	8

14. Ker Kwaro Bwoboma – Nam

	Bwobo Railway Station	UPDF - Lakwena attack	310
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	Knene	Lakwena	14
	Lungulu	Lakwena	23
	Wilabala	Lakwena	18
	Te – opidi	Lakwena and UPDF	25
	Nyamukino	Lakwena	18
15. Ker Kwaro Parabongo			
	Parabongo P7 School	LRA	17
	Parabongo Centre	LRA	5
	Parabongo Pida Te Tugu acel	LRA	5
	Pagak Camp	LRA	29
16. Paicho			
	Lamin Lawak	Lakwena	18
	Te Pwoyo	Lakwena	30
	Agung	Lakwena	150
	Omel	Lakwena	200
	Latwong	Lakwena	300
	Burcoro	Lakwena	29
	Loyo Boo	Lakwena and Government	900
17. Kal Kwaro Acore			
1991	Palenga trading centre	UPDF	27
1997	Kidi Kal	LRA	23

Appendix 8 - Data Breakdown

Age at Abduction

All - Age at Abduction			Average						
	Count	%	Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR	
AAA <10	82	16%	15	4.3	8	12	Mar-98	Jul-02	
AAA 10-15	279	55%	18	2.4	13	15	Mar-00	Aug-02	
AAA 16-20	73	14%	24	2.5	18	21	Aug-99	Mar-02	
AAA 21-29	56	11%	29	1.6	24	26	Jun-00	Jan-02	
AAA 30+	13	3%	41	2.3	37	39	Feb-01	May-03	
N/A*	3	1%	21	n/a	n/a	20	n/a	Mar-05	
All	506	100%	20	2.7	15	17	Nov-99	Jun-02	

*NOTE: N/A was due to the fact that 2 respondents could not remember the year of their abduction and one respondent could not recall his/her current age

Females - Age at Abduction				Average					
	Females	% Females	% ALL	Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR
AAA <10	34	16%	7%	15	4.0	8	12	Dec-98	Dec-02
AAA 10-15	133	64%	26%	18	2.7	13	16	Oct-99	Jun-02
AAA 16-20	23	11%	5%	25	2.7	18	20	Sep-98	May-01
AAA 21-29	12	6%	2%	28	2.0	24	26	May-01	Jun-03
AAA 30+	2	1%	0%	41	2.5	36	39	Jul-01	Jan-04
N/A	3	1%	1%	21	n/a	n/a	20	n/a	Mar-05
All	207	100%	41%	19	2.9	14	16	Aug-99	Jul-02

Males - Age at Abduction				Average					
	Males	% Males	% ALL	Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR
AAA									
AAA <10	48	16%	9%	16	4.5	8	12	Sep-97	Mar-02
AAA 10-15	146	49%	29%	18	2.1	13	15	Jul-00	Sep-02
AAA 16-20	50	17%	10%	23	2.5	18	21	Feb-00	Aug-02
AAA 21-29	44	15%	9%	30	1.5	24	26	Mar-00	Sep-01
AAA 30+	11	4%	2%	41	2.3	37	39	Jan-01	Apr-03
N/A	0	0%	0%	n/a	0	n/a	n/a	Aug-02	Sep-02
All	299	100%	59%	21	2.5	16	18	Dec-99	Jun-02

Age at Return

All - Age at Return			Average						
	Count	%		Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR
AAR <10	17	3%		14	1.3	7	8	Oct-98	Feb-00
AAR 10-15	246	49%		16	1.9	12	14	Sep-00	Aug-02
AAR 16-20	134	26%		21	3.5	15	18	Dec-98	Jun-02
AAR 21-29	87	17%		28	3.5	21	25	Nov-98	May-02
AAR 30+	19	4%		40	3.7	34	38	Sep-99	Jun-03
N/A	3	1%		20	n/a	13	n/a	Jan-03	n/a
All	506	100%		21	2.5	16	18	Dec-99	Jun-02

**NOTE: N/A was due to the fact that 2 respondents could not remember the year of their Return and one respondent could not recall his/her current age*

Females - Age at Return				Average					
	Females	% Females	% ALL	Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR
AAR <10	7	3%	1%	13	1.4	8	9	Mar-99	Aug-01
AAR 10-15	111	54%	22%	16	1.9	11	13	Sep-00	Aug-02
AAR 16-20	57	28%	11%	22	4.0	14	28	Dec-97	Nov-01
AAR 21-29	26	13%	5%	27	5.1	20	25	May-98	Jun-03
AAR 30+	3	1%	1%	38	4.4	32	37	Feb-00	Jul-04
N/A	3	1%	1%	20	n/a	13	n/a	Jan-03	n/a
All	207	100%	41%	19	2.9	13	16	Aug-99	Jul-02

Males - Age at Return				Average					
AAR	Males	% males	% ALL	Current Age	YIB	AAA	AAR	DOA	DOR
AAR <10	10	3%	2%	15	1.2	6	7	Oct-97	Jan-99
AAR 10-15	135	45%	27%	16	1.9	12	14	Sep-00	Aug-02
AAR 16-20	77	26%	15%	21	3.2	15	18	Oct-99	Dec-02
AAR 21-29	61	20%	12%	28	2.8	22	24	Feb-99	Nov-01
AAR 30+	16	5%	3%	40	3.6	34	28	Aug-99	Mar-03
N/A	0	0%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
All	299	100%	59%	21	2.5	16	18	Dec-99	Jun-02

Appendix 9 - Glossary

Acena

Cen (evil or bad spirit) in the area or an individual

Acut Dance

Cultural dance by women.

Acwiny

Liver.

Agat

Words spoken by the designated Elder to mark the beginning of a ritual.

Ajaa

Shaker constructed out of a gourd; traditional instrument used to contact the supernatural world.

Ajwaka

1. Diviners that can communicate with foreign spirits that can possess people.
Note: these spirits were not worshipped.
2. Able to use local medicines for healing purposes.
3. Sometimes able to identify and 'chase away' *cen*, *ayweya*, *gemo* or *jok*.
4. Called upon during *Mato Oput* to raise the dead spirit to identify who will receive the compensation.
5. Called upon to mediate a serious crime, especially where culprit or circumstances not easily identified.

Apoka

Elder appointed by the household unit to represent their voices at the council of Elders.

Atekere (or Ladit Kaka)

1. Elder responsible for settling disputes of domestic and family nature and conflicts at the clan level.
2. Presiding member of the council of Elders; acts as middleman between *Apokas* and the *Rwot-Mo*.
3. Most often responsible for conducting rituals when *kii* occurs.

Ayweya (or Anyuu)

Collection of bad things in a person. An *ajwaka* can determine if it is present and can heal those afflicted.

Boo Mukwok

Spoiled *Boo* (greens) to symbolize tension has existed long enough for food to spoil.

Cen

Ghostly vengeance hastened by ill-treatment of the dying or dead.
Involves the entrance of an angry spirit into the physical body of a person or persons and requires appeasement, often through a sacrifice or compensation/reconciliation in the case of wrongful death.

Copo Tal

Group of Elders who were traditionally appointed by clan constituents to council a specific *Rwot-Mo*.

Dwoko Ayoo

Ceremony typically performed to reconcile a conflict between members of the same family or clan.
Has also been adapted for returnees.

Dwong Pacu – “come back home”

Radio program produced by Radio Mega in Gulu that features person stories of returnees in an effort to convince current LRA members to return home.

Gang kal

Royal clan.

Gemo

1. An unknown spirit that comes rapidly; can be healed by an *ajwaka*.
2. Collective name for any sign of bad omen that comes among people.

Gomo Tong - “Bending of the Spears”

Vow between two warring clans or tribes to end hostilities.

Goyo-pii “washing of tears”

Ceremony conducted when a person has disappeared and thought to have died, but returns to a family.

Guru Iyel

Last funeral rites.

Jok (Jogi pl.)

1. God or divine spirit (or a force that “moves everything”) that can send misfortune, illness or even death and are appeased through offerings; can also be approached with prayer for protection.
2. God-like power stemming from extraordinary persons, places, animals and events. I.e. Europeans were referred to as having *Jok Mono*.
3. Used to describe one who behaves ‘abnormally’ or does ‘bad things’, often described as *lajok* (having jok).

Kac or Abila

Ancestral Shrine.

Kaka (Kaki pl.)

Loosely knit clans that composed the traditional Acholi Kingdom prior to colonialism.

Kal

Clan

Kal Kwera

Committee for reconciliation composed of *Rwodi* and Elders.

Note: only exists in some clans.

Kalbe

Millet bread; traditional Acholi food often used in rituals and traditional occasions.

Kii or Kiir

Abomination; taboos against culture and the spirit world.

Often an individual act or curse that symbolically jeopardizes the well-being of the family and therefore entire clan.

Kipwola

Evil spirit.

KKA – Ker Kwaro Acholi (or Ker Kwaro)

Contemporary institution of the Acholi Paramount Chief, established in 2000, consisting of an Executive Council of 19 *Rwodi* and Elders as well as a youth representative and two women representatives.

***Kony I pe* – “You are useless”**

Derogatory name sometimes given to young returnee mothers.

Kwete

Local Acholi brew made of sorghum or millet flour.

Used during *Mato Oput* and/or *Moyo Piny* ceremonies for feasting.

Kweyo ciny

Calming down conflicting parties by the mediator.

***La ngol-kop* - “one who cuts words”**

One who judges or the judge

Lakwena

1. Communications Elder in Labongo Clan
2. Messenger during an inter-clan conflict that acts as a go between for involved parties (clan members and *Rwot-Mo*).

Lalik or Olik

Coloured hen (grey spotted).

Laloy maber – “The perfect leader”

(*Rwot* Adonga) installed by *Rwodi* in post independence Uganda.

Laneno

Expert who knows how to *Neno I dyel* (see inside a goat) to see the source of and identify solutions to misfortunes.

Langet

Ribs.

Lapid Kwo

Negotiator of the compensation during *Mato Oput*

Larii Tal

Mediator, usually an Elder, who engages in shuttle diplomacy between two families involved in a killing; decides when it is appropriate to bring the two sides together to talk.

Laroo

A goat supplied by the injured clan during *Mato Oput*.

Latwol

twol is a snake, *Ltwol* is a hen that has the color of a spotted snake. Used in rituals.

Lawi Rwodi – “Chief of All Chiefs” or “Head of Chiefs”

Paramount Chief (*Rwot* Acana II) elected by Acholi Elders and *Rwodi-Mo* in 1999.

Lawinya

Sim Sim paste.

Layibi

Stick used to open a granary; used in ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremony.

Lupwonye dini

Lupwonye means teacher, and *dini* means religion. This term was used to refer also to LRA preachers that teach about the gospel and the Holy Spirit.

Lwoko pig wang – “washing of tears”

Ritual conducted to remove the ‘fear of death’ that loved ones have when a person was thought to be dead.

Mato Oput

Traditional Acholi process and ceremony performed in the case of an intentional or accidental murder.

Mego - “Mother.”

Elder women.

Moo-yaa

Shea butter; oil from a *yaa* tree

- Uses: 1. Smear on the chest of abducted youth as a LRA cleansing ritual.
2. Smear on the liver of the dead goat in a *Moyo Piny* ceremony.

Moyo Piny or Tumu Piny or Ryemo cen

Cleansing of an Area involving a sacrifice to chase away evil spirits or appease Gods.

Moyo Remo – “cleansing of the blood”

Ritual to prevent a reprisal blood feud between two clans after a murder occurs.

Moyo-ret

A sacrifice for a person that was injured in an accident.

Performed to appease the ancestors, prevent further illness from the injury and facilitate recovery.

Nebi

Prophet; similar to *Ajwaka* but maintaining a Christian or Moslem faith.

Neno I dyel – “seeing the inside of a goat”

Process where a *laneno* looks inside a goat to see the source of and identify solutions to misfortunes.

Ngol matir - “The right decision”

Used as translation for English phrase “traditional justice.”

Ngol me te kwaro – “Decisions according to traditional laws.”

Used as translation for English phrase “traditional justice.”

Odeyo - “Remains of the saucepan” or “Scratching from a saucepan” used for mingling

Ritual where women remove (scratch) the remains of a saucepan for mingling.

Okutu Lacal (or Lacao) – *Okutu*: “type of white thorn” *Cac*: “to ignore”

Instrument used to feed the liver to each of the parties.

Olet

Location in the bush where a sheep is dragged to for slaughter.

Olwedo

Tree leaf that symbolizes peace in Acholi; smear with the liver of the dead goat in a *Moyo Piny* ceremony.

Opobo

Slippery branch.

- Uses: 1. On which the egg is placed in ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremony.
2. Smear on the liver of the dead goat in a *Moyo Piny* ceremony.

Oput

Bitter root used to cleanse bitterness between two clans.

Oywec dyang

Cow broom.

Paneyo

Maternal relatives of a deceased person, who are normally given a form of compensation during the funeral.

Pol

Layer found between the skin and the flesh of the sheep.

Rwot Kweri

Elder responsible for parish affairs and land conflicts.

Rwot-Kalam – “men of the pen”

Educated men who replaced the *Rwodi-Mo* under colonial administration.

Rwot-Mo (Rwodi-Mo pl.)

Hereditary, anointed Chief(s) in Acholi-land, responsible for political leadership at clan level.

Rwot-Mon /Rwot Okoro

Respected women who mobilized other women for productive work in the fields.

Ryemo Ojwee

Conducted by Elders to remove *cen* from a camp; involves beating of calabashes, saucepans, doors and other general noise.

Tin mega diki megi - “Today is me, tomorrow is you”

The idea that responsibility for any harm done passes from an individual up to the family and sub-clan.

Tipu

Spirits.

Tong

Spear.

Tongweno

Tong is egg and *Gweno* is hen. This term refers to the ‘Stepping of the Egg’ ceremony.

Tummu-buru

Sacrifices for incidents involving fire.

Tummu-kir

Sacrifices for all other incidents not involving fire.

Tyer

Tribute provided to Rwodi that was used in later distribution for the clan's social welfare in times of need.

Ulele

Site of a mass *grave* holding up to 18, 000 people near Corner Kilak, Pader District.

Wang Jok

Spirit Shrine used to appeal to *Jok*.

Wang-oo

Central fireplace where extended families traditionally gathered in the evening to hear stories and proverbs from Elders and Mego.

Note: No longer practiced due to camp curfews.

Waragi (Arege)

Distilled alcohol.

Wee

Contents (ruminant) of the stomach of an animal, such as goat or sheep.

Won Kom

Chairman who, with a delegation, determines an amount for compensation of a murder.

Won-ot

Head of household; always a man.

Yat-kii

Herbs for *kii*.

Yoko wic – “Knocking Heads”

During *Mato Oput* two representatives from each party will drink at the same time and literally ‘knock heads’ to symbolize they are now reunited.

Yubu Kum – “cleansing of the body”

Transfer of *cen* from a person.

Ywayo Cen – “Dragging *cen*”

Ritual dragging of a sheep to a location in the bush (olet) so that the *cen* stays away from the camp.

