

When the Dead are Not Silent: The Investigation of Cultural Perspectives Concerning Improper Burials in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This thesis presents the findings of a qualitative examination of the effects of improper burials and the associated cultural impacts on the Acholi population of northern Uganda. Since independence in 1962 Uganda has experienced several internal conflicts, including the notorious struggle between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government. This conflict, which disproportionately affected the Acholi ethnic group, resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and culturally inappropriate burials. These burials are particularly problematic because the Acholi maintain continual ties to the dead through ancestor veneration with proper burial being one of the most important conciliatory rites. In the negotiation between the living and the dead, the social infrastructure that is built around and on mortuary practices is part of the active creation of social relationships and ways of being. Improper burials are, therefore, an obstacle to post-war recovery efforts, as these interments violate beliefs within the Acholi religious system as to how the dead should be treated. As a consequence of this mistreatment these spirits, known as *cen*, become angry and cause disease, death, possession, nightmares, and other misfortunes.

This research utilizes a psychosocial framework based in grounded theory to explore the impact of improper burials within Acholi communities, the cultural consequences of these interments, local perceptions of what should be done about this issue, and how such endeavors should be accomplished. Additionally, this study also assessed the appropriateness of forensic excavation and DNA identification as a potential solution to improper burials. Though the findings revealed that improper burials and the associated *cen* are a significant problem, the desired approach for addressing this issue depends upon whether communities practice tradition Acholi cosmology or Christianity. Based on these results I argue that religion and cosmology are vital coping strategies for addressing *cen* on local and institutional levels within northern Uganda. Furthermore, future psychosocial interventions aimed at post-conflict recovery would benefit from a more comprehensive understanding and inclusion of religious beliefs and their effects on local perceptions and needs.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Improper Burial and Cen in Northern Uganda

This thesis examines the effects of improper burials from numerous conflicts and the associated cultural impacts and implications for the Acholi population of northern Uganda. Since receiving independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has experienced several rebel movements and dramatic regime changes. The most recent and protracted conflict, from 1986-2006, involved the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government. During this twenty-year conflict, the LRA inflicted brutal acts of violence against civilians, including murder, mutilation, intimidation, rape, and the kidnapping of children and adolescents to be trained as child soldiers, while the government's army frequently failed to adequately protect civilians (Branch 2010; Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005). In addition, both the LRA and government soldiers participated in looting and the destruction of non-combatant property. Though this conflict touched all of northern Uganda (West Nile, Acholi, Teso, and Lango regions), the Acholi ethnic group within Acholiland was the most heavily affected (RLP 2004). It is estimated that tens of thousands were killed and, due to insecurity, were left unburied, hastily buried, and/or buried in mass graves (JRP 2007a, 2009, 2010; Proctor 2013; OHCHR 2007). The presence of these remains in what is locally considered to be improper burials is proving an obstacle to post-war recovery in the region (Proctor 2013). This problem arises because Acholi in northern Uganda maintain strong and continual ties between the living and the dead through kinship reckoning and ancestor veneration (Harlacher and

CARITAS 2006; P'Bitek 1971). The dead play an active role in people's lives and there is interest in how remains and memorials are treated (Petrig 2009: 342). For the Acholi this relationship is sustained through ritualistic maintenance, with a proper burial being one of the most important conciliatory rites that occur between the living and the dead (Proctor 2013). In the negotiation between the living and the deceased the social infrastructure that is built around and on death and mortuary practices is part of the active creation of social relationships and ways of being (Crossland 2000: 147).

In general, proper funerals or a culturally accepted equivalent can serve to fulfill religious and communal obligations to the dead, strengthen community ties, encourage personal closure (Stover et al. 2002; Stover and Shigekane 2003: 860), and promote cosmological balance (Baines 2010; Eppel 2007, 2014). As such, Acholi communities feel that the failure to conduct proper funeral rites and fulfill obligations to the dead will result in serious consequences (Amone-P'Olak 2007). This belief renders the existence of family or community members who have been improperly buried in one of the many mass or individual graves particularly problematic for the psychological and psychosocial health of recovering individuals and communities (JRP 2007b, 2007c).

Situating the Research within the Literature

Drawing from several sources in the existing literature (Baines 2010; Neuner et al. 2012; Proctor 2013), psychosocial health is defined in this thesis as the summed interaction of individual emotions, behavior and mental health, community

relations, economic development, as well as traditions and culture, all of which may be affected by the presence of improper depositions. In order to include and, in fact, emphasize the relationship between psychological aspects of individual experience and wider social factors a psychosocial framework was used in this research. There is a broad spectrum of approaches that are encompassed under the umbrella of this empirical framework but general goals include restoring, maintaining, or enhancing personal and social capacity through the mobilizations of local strengths and coping strategies, needs assessments, linking people or communities to resources, and addressing environmental stress (Woods and Hollis 1999). Additionally, psychosocial approaches may pertain to the investigation of any of these aspects. Though this framework was originally used for clinical social work it has expanded to cover a wide variety of topics including forced migration (Ahearn 2000), post-disaster/post-conflict well-being (World Health Organization 2005), social reintegration (Betancourt et al. 2009), mental health (Miller and Rasmussen 2010), and social reconstruction from violence, trauma, or loss sustained in post-disaster/conflict situations (Michael and Monteiro 2001).

Many of these topics are also components of transitional justice (TJ) which in the years following the 2006 ceasefire in Northern Uganda, became the dominating post-conflict framework through which international, national, and local actors have attempted to promote peacebuilding, development, and to address human rights abuses within Uganda. This top-down and bottom-up post-conflict framework, which has previously been implemented by a number of countries, includes both judicial and non-judicial actions. As the issues that can be addressed

through the application of transitional justice measures expands, this approach is being applied to an ever-growing number of conflicts in countries all over the globe (Hinton 2010; Teitel 2000).

Currently, there are a wide array of TJ mechanisms in existence including international, national, local or hybrid criminal prosecution, truth commissions, amnesty acts, reparations, institutional reforms, memorialization, and reconciliation (International Center for Transitional Justice 2015). The last component is of particular importance to this project because it ultimately affects issues relating to the dead. Broadly stated reconciliation includes the effort to address past grievances and associated contemporary issues. For example, within northern Uganda one issue that could be categorized under the purview of this transitional justice mechanism is the relationship between the living and the dead. As such, using a psychosocial framework to tackle the issue of improper depositions and their consequences aligns directly with transitional justice and has the potential to influence post-conflict mechanisms, interventions, and development being implemented by the nation-state. However, despite the potential for TJ to bring about positive change, this approach is not without flaws.

A growing number of critiques point out that many of the founding ideologies that serve as the core of TJ strategies are based on Western or external notions of what is needed in post-conflict situations and how these should be achieved (Hinton 2010; JRP 2007b; Shaw 2005). The “tendency to exclude local communities as active participants in transitional justice measures is a primary flaw” and raises pressing questions about whose interests are being served (Lundy and McGovern

2008: 266). Perhaps not surprisingly, researchers have found that if communities are not consulted and involved as prominent stakeholders, any action taken becomes disconnected from the needs and perspectives of those affected by conflict and may have little positive impact (Aronson 2011; JRP 2011, 2007b; OHCHR 2007). Top-down processes that are produced by elites and institutions are often too far removed from on the ground realities (Robins 2011: 75). Additionally, researchers have suggested that if TJ efforts are to produce sustainable, long-term results it is important to document the opinions, perceptions, and expectations of the different stakeholders continually throughout the project, from beginning to end (Aronson 2011; Arriaza and Arriaza 2008; Doretti and Burrell 2007; Eppel 2006; Fonderbrider 2002; Quinn 2007). If such an endeavor is not undertaken and external discourse is privileged, it further disempowers those with the greatest need and can potentially perpetrate a neocolonial cycle of violence (Robins 2011: 78). Furthermore, as every conflict has unique contexts and circumstances, effective intervention measures need to be firmly grounded in the lived realities of survivors and account for their perceptions and needs (Aronson 2011; Doretti and Burrell 2007, Eppel 2006; JRP 2011, 2007b; Quinn 2007; OHCHR, 2007).

A psychosocial model is appropriate for this research because it recognizes that situations, communities, and individuals present with a unique constellation of factors that influence their needs and perceptions and, therefore, advocates for community centered methods that recognize local practices and the agency of various actors. Examples of how this approach has been used in northern Uganda include issues pertaining to displacement (Bolton et al. 2007), demobilization and

reintegration of former child-soldiers (McKay and Mazurana 2004; Annan et al. 2008; Chrobok and Akutu 2008; Amone-P'Olak 2007), general reintegration (Liu Institute for Global Issues 2005, JRP 2008c), perceptions of accountability and reconciliation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2007), reparations and rehabilitation (JRP-IRJ 2011b, JRP 2012a), truth-telling (JRP 2007b; JRP-IRJ 2011a), and peace building (JRP 2009). Many of these works state that matters pertaining to the dead and improper burial are sociocultural components of broader issues such as reconciliation and positive peace building.

According to Acholi cosmology, the spirits of the murdered and those who are not given a proper burial become angry and cause harm to the living (JRP 2006b). This “ghostly vengeance” or *cen* can cause disease, sickness, death, infertility, possession, nightmares, poor crops, and bad luck (JRP 2006b, 2008a; P'Bitek 1971). In addition, transgressions against moral order known as *kiir* (“abomination”), which is a phenomenon related to *cen*, will cause misfortune to befall the children of both the victims and the perpetrators until the situation is remedied or a ceremony is performed to cleanse the area. Examples of *kiir* often pertain to the desecration of the dead, including burying several bodies together in a mass grave or walking over human remains remaining on the grounds surface (JRP 2007a). The consequences of these violations are attributed to a disruption in the close and continual relationship the Acholi believe exists between the living and the dead (Baines 2010; JRP 2006b; P'Bitek 1971). *Cen* and the disturbances brought by these vengeful spirits can also be seen as a form of social suffering.

The concept of social suffering recognizes that pain, trauma, injury, and loss are rooted in and experienced through past and present sociocultural conditions that dictate how distress is experienced and expressed (Wilkinson 2005; Kleinman et al. 1997). In consequence “social worlds are inscribed upon the embodied experience of pain and there are many occasions where an individual’s suffering should be taken as a manifestation of social structural oppression and/or collective experience of cultural trauma” (Wilkinson academia.edu: 1; also see Wilkinson 2005). Disturbances then “give expression to wider social anxieties and threats experienced by a community” (Baines 2010: 419). Put another way, individual and social apprehension to moral transgressions (improper depositions), is a form of social suffering among Acholi populations that is expressed in the phenomenon of *cen* and embodied through possessions, haunting, nightmares and other disturbances. Physical, psychological, moral, spiritual, social, economic and political dimensions of disturbances are intricately interwoven (Kleinman et al. 1997; Victoria 2011). Given these interconnections, if we are to better understand how *cen* is experienced it is imperative to explore how social, economic, political, and institutional powers entwine with ghostly vengeance and how communities react to this occurrence. One approach to this endeavor is to ask the target population how they address the problem of *cen*, or more broadly, to engage in the study of culturally specific coping mechanisms.

There are three types of improper burial considered in this study: individual graves, mass graves, and those who are presumed dead but whose physical location

is unknown.¹ Improper individual graves that may lead to *cen* include incidences where the family knows where their loved one is interred but the body's current location is either temporary or culturally inappropriate, or where the grave's location is acceptable but culturally mandated funeral rites have yet to be done. Mass graves, which the Acholi view as taboo, are defined as internments that "contains the remains of more than one victim who share some common trait connected with the cause and manner of death" (Schmitt 2001: 279; also see JRP: 2007a) including both organized and unorganized graves. Though other definitions of mass graves exist (International Criminal Tribunal for The Former Yugoslavia 1996; Mant 1987; Skinner 1987), this definition was chosen because it mirrored most research participants' conceptions and use of the term "mass grave." Lastly, when a family member is known to have died or there is strong evidence supporting their death, but the location of the remains is unknown, the spirit may eventually feel forgotten and abandoned by their family and become *cen*. This scenario is included in the category of improper burial because the cause of the *cen* and the consequences for the family and the community are the same as improper individual burials and mass graves.

¹ The three types of depositions discussed in this thesis is not an exhaustive list of burial types. In the absence of certain cultural actions, such as placing leaves on remains, unburied remains left on the grounds surface is another improper form of burial within Acholiland that can cause disturbances. However, participants within the research area did not report that this type of deposition was bothering them because the cultural institution Ker Kwaro Acholi had previously removed a large number of these surface scatters from the area. This is not to say that surface depositions are not problematic within Acholiland, and future research may find it appropriate to replace the phrase *improper burials* with the more expansive term *improper depositions*. However, as unburied human remains were only mentioned in passing, its effect on local communities was not explored.

Because conducting proper burials and maintaining good relations with the living-dead (the spirits of family members) are of such importance, Acholi families and community members often utilize any means available to them to conduct rituals or prayer ceremonies for human remains in an attempt to satisfy the spirits of the deceased. Such attempts can even be made when the remains of the deceased cannot be located. Calling-of-the-spirit ceremonies symbolically beckon the spirit back home and serve as indication to the dead that they are loved, remembered, and recognized as being part of the family. However, this endeavor, as well as any other ritual or memorial prayer activity, is often hindered by practical limitations. In the past, insecurity due to numerous conflicts prevented recovery and reburial efforts; currently, poverty arising from the economic and structural underdevelopment of the north, as well as from property loss during the LRA conflict, often impedes attempts to address the issue. Instead, scarce funds are often directed toward the more immediate needs of the living, such as food, education, and other health issues (Finnström 2008; Proctor 2013). This inability of people to respond to the needs of the dead because of a lack of capacity is a constant reminder of looting, destruction, and trauma sustained during the conflict, which exacerbate other harms individuals and communities have endured (Eppel 2010; Finnström 2001; JRP 2008b; OHCHR 2007). Though traditional rituals have the potential to alleviate *cen* and prevent further disturbances, these ceremonies require valuable resources that many families either do not have or cannot spare. The Justice and Reconciliation Project has reported that this issue is further complicated through the prohibition born-again Christianity places on engaging in traditional rituals (2008a: 12). As such,

even if capacity were not an issue certain portions of the Acholi population would not support traditional rituals.

Against this background, and in consideration of current debates in transitional justice and the literature in related fields, I consider how the problem of improper burials in northern Uganda can be resolved within a psychosocial context. This thesis contributes to the associated body of literature by continuing to investigate the consequences of improper burials and the disturbances caused by *cen*. However, this work also moves beyond identification of the problem and examines community perceptions of coping strategies used to appease *cen* and assess the appropriateness of forensic excavation and DNA identification as a potential solution to improper burials. Lastly, this research explores the dynamics that exist among traditional Acholi cosmology and various Christian denominations as well as their strategies and tactics for managing the vengeful spirits that plague the living. This work has applications to a broad array of disciplines and practitioners interested in transitional justice theory and practice, religious studies, human rights, anthropology, international relations, political science, psychology, and peace and conflict studies.

Before turning to an exploration of this research study, it is important to consider my use of the terms “traditional” and “tradition.” These are terms that are often perceived as static in nature and rooted in the distant past, which potentially limits their analytical effectiveness in present settings. However, for traditions to remain useful they must be able to meet the needs of current problems and demands. Thus, they must - and often do - evolve and change. All tradition was at

one point a creation, made manifest in the context of a particular social setting at a given point in time. This “making and remaking of meaning follows the changing conditions of everyday life, and is in a constant state of becoming; as it is made, contested, reinterpreted, and remade” to fit the current situation (Finnström 2008: 46). Based on this logic, the terms *tradition* and *traditional* and the processes associated with these words should be understood as what people (the interviewees) believe them to be, both in memory and imagination. These terms and their current uses are based in perceptions of the world as it was and an interpretation of the world as it is.

Another writing style choice I would like to highlight is my use of faith-based accounts. At times throughout this thesis, I write as if I am making faith statements instead of scholarly observations. This approach was purposefully taken in order to reflect the very real beliefs that the participants hold; namely that spirits exist and that they can, and do, affect their lives. Such an endeavor follows the reasoning that “emotive practices and experiences should be described in terms that can plausibly be attributed to the subject...terms that would be familiar to, incorporating beliefs that would be acknowledged by, the subject” (Proudfoot 1985: 195-196; also see Rex and Stepick 2013: 30). It was not this thesis objective to ascertain if, in fact, *cen* exists. Whether this phenomenon is real or imagined is irrelevant because if the participants believe in its existence then it is real in its consequences. Therefore, as I have endeavored to keep this research grounded in the perspectives of the participants, it was appropriate to describe Acholi religion and cosmology in a manner that reflects their beliefs.

Research Questions and Summary of Findings

This project investigated four fundamental questions: 1) Are mass graves and improperly buried individual graves viewed as problematic for communities within Acholiland? 2) What are the consequences of improper burial? 3) What, if anything, should be done about these burials? 4) How can this be accomplished methodologically? The latter question also includes attention to what might be necessary to accomplish this task, and who should be involved. My main findings revealed that mass graves and improperly buried individual graves are seen as problematic by survivors because these internments violate cultural notions of how the dead should be buried. In response to these violations, the spirits of the deceased come to feel angry and abandoned and eventually become *cen*, or vengeful spirits that cause haunting, possession, nightmares, and sickness. This belief seemed to hold true for a wide variety of individuals regardless of age, sex, or socio-economic status. Despite the consistent belief in *cen* there was marked disagreement between how this issue should be addressed which hinged upon religious or cosmological belief systems. This prioritization of certain religious practices produces political implications for who is involved in the process of addressing the dead and how such an endeavor is, could, or “should” be accomplished.

The religious composition of northern Uganda primarily includes both traditional Acholi beliefs and Christian religious doctrines, such as Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Evangelicalism or born-again Christianity (Proctor 2013).

Denominations and individuals combine, balance and utilize beliefs in various ways, leading to different interpretations of how to interact with *cen*. For example, evangelical Christians expressed that only prayers are necessary to satisfy angry spirits, while those who embrace more traditional Acholi beliefs, even if they also identify as Catholic or Anglican, stated that human remains need to be excavated and specific ceremonies, which involve ritual animal sacrifices, need to be performed in conjunction with the reburial process to appease the spirits of the dead.² In instances of mass graves, the inability to individually identify the deceased often prevents reburials and the associated ceremonies that could alleviate *cen* for those who follow traditional Acholi practices (Proctor 2013). Interestingly, mainline Christian groups in Acholiland - the less conservative Anglicans and Catholics - and many general participants were willing to tread the path that fell between Acholi ritual and Christian prayer. Religious leaders from both the Anglican and Catholic Churches expressed that their primary belief was that only prayers were necessary to placate *cen*, but if a traditional Acholi ritual was important to the populace, then it could be tolerated. Many of the interviewees were actively negotiating a path between Acholi cosmology and Christian beliefs, which rendered the inclusion of both prayers and rituals less problematic.

One potential solution to the *cen* caused by unidentified or commingled individuals is forensic excavation and processing in conjunction with DNA

² I recognize the critique that using terms like sacrifice portrays the culture under discussion as “primitive” and exotic. However, I have chosen to keep this word because it was the term used by the participants and I have endeavored to remain as true to their voices as possible. For examples of the context in which this term was used see the word tree located in Appendix F).

identification. Thus, the desirability and suitability of foreign anthropologists assisting with excavations were examined in the later stages of this research. It was found that the appropriateness of this option mirrored earlier findings, which depended upon the personal experience and belief system of the participant and, at times, popular beliefs in the area.

Evangelical Christians felt excavations were not desirable because they would require animal sacrifices, which are associated with traditional cultural practices, and as such are rejected as unnecessary by born-again practitioners. However, many participants expressed that using foreign anthropologists would be an agreeable situation because they (anthropologists) have the means of accomplishing excavations and identifications while the local population currently does not. These responses could be summed as: "If I want to see it done, I would allow and agree to it."

In summary, there are three different options put forth to address the improper individual and mass graves that are causing *cen*: traditional rituals that involve the use of animals, commemorations or events that only include prayers, or a combination of the two. But why is there no consensus between and amongst Christian denominations and traditional cosmology? How can these different opinions be interpreted and explained? One component is the faith-based or spiritual dimensions that either require or prohibit animal sacrifices. However, I argue that another part of the equation on how improper graves are to be handled and managed is concerned with the political uses of the dead, which I refer to as

“necropolitics.”³ A historical review of political and military movements involving northern Uganda, provided in Chapter Two, demonstrates that the dead can have a significant influence on the living, and as such, any person or institution that can control the dead can wield considerable power over communities. If the dead are viewed as part of the community then reorganizing relationships with the dead - or how the dead are interacted with - also reconstitutes the living (Verdery 1999: 109). As researchers working in other cultural contexts have shown, this (re)organizing of the dead is often done in very purposeful ways and because of this human remains have become a vigorously contested site for various constructions that promote specific agendas (Crossland 2000). The relationship between the living and the dead can be turned into a political symbol for how the dead are used. This negotiation can then be used to a variety of ends, such as who owns the dead, who controls the past, who can legitimately direct the future (Crossland 2000: 146; McEvoy and Conway 2004: 545).

Different opinions about how improper burials should be treated may have more to do with who is included, or *excluded*, from influencing this process. For example, when evangelical leaders claim that only prayers are necessary to address *cen*, they are not just denying Acholi rituals; they are also excluding the cultural leaders who would be directing traditional rituals and attempting to reduce their social power. By limiting the breadth of social actors who can legitimately manage

³ To my knowledge the term necropolitics as it is defined in this thesis has not been coined by other sources within the literature. However, the concept has been explored and elaborated upon by a number of researchers working within other post-conflict contexts, including Crossland 2000, 2009, Verdery 1999, and Wagner 2008 to name only a few.

the dead, evangelical leaders are attempting to strengthen their own power over the living. As such, the dead are “sites and sources of important political and ideological conflicts” (McEvoy and Conway 2004: 546).

In every community affected by improper depositions, and especially by mass graves, there are undoubtedly tensions between the use of bodies as political platforms, as economic opportunities, and as a site of interaction between the living and the dead, both individually and socially. In instances of necropolitics it is not only human remains that are powerful as “graves are often as potent as the bodies themselves in the creation of political narratives” (Crossland 2009: 291). This is especially true in northern Uganda because graves are continually present on the landscape and serve as a visceral indication of events. Furthermore, all of these components impact efforts of post-conflict reconstruction.

Based on the findings of this research, I argue that religion and cosmology are vital coping strategies for addressing *cen* on a community and institutional level within northern Uganda. Additionally, future psychosocial interventions, which may ultimately extend to forensic excavations and DNA identifications in order to mediate the relationship between the living and the dead would benefit from a more comprehensive understanding and inclusion of religion and its effects on local perceptions and needs.

Thesis Layout

In order to illustrate how I arrived at this conclusion I first provide a contextualized political, cosmological and religious background of Acholiland, which

frames and helps to explain the opinions, perceptions, and needs expressed by the participants in this study. Next, I detail the methods used in the field while collecting the data. This section includes not only the approaches I found to be successful, but also those that were less effective, and my recommendations for how such problems could be avoided in future research. This section is immediately followed by discussion of how and why the data was coded, analyzed and interpreted through the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. From here, I present the research findings and discuss their implications before finally concluding with recommendations based on these results.

Chapter Two

History of the Northern Uganda Region

The Importance of A Contextualized History

In this chapter I provide a historical background to several relevant conflicts and political movements that have affected northern Uganda, as contemporary trends have their roots in these past events. For example, answers to questions on how mass graves should be addressed and who should be involved are affected by both current actions and past circumstances, such as struggles over authority and power or the rise and fall of political and religious groups. Interpretations of the past and assertions made about Acholi society influence responses to conflict and perceptions of appropriate future directions amongst religious, cultural, and political leaders (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 4). To more fully comprehend the perceptions shared by participants during research, it is necessary to understand the historical development of these religious, cultural and political dynamics.

Uganda as a British Protectorate

Uganda became a British protectorate in 1896 and remained so until independence in 1962. This period saw, among other things, the creation of administrative units and districts in order to facilitate indirect rule by the colonial power (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 4). However, it should be recognized that units of social organization existed before British occupation and were not solely a colonial invention (Finnström 2008: 31). Prior to colonization, the socio-political structure was characterized by decentralized, lineage-based chiefdoms that were

based on clans in northern Uganda, and centralized kingdoms (Bunyoro, Buganda, Busoga, Ankole and Toro) in southern Uganda (Branch 2010: 26; Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 110-111). The British were first interested in Uganda for its geographic significance and only became politically invested after the rulers of the Buganda kingdom requested the presence of missionaries in order to learn about Christian religion and obtain “Western knowledge” (Mutibwa 1992: 1). Buganda, at the time of this request, was under threat from both Egypt and the Ugandan kingdom of Bunyoro; therefore, British investment in the region was potentially politically advantageous for the ruling Bagandan elite (Mutibwa 1992: 1-3).

It is important to consider colonial governance and the policies that the British employed because these actions are the foundation for several of the national divides that have ensued since independence. Additionally, both British policy and subsequent national divisions have affected how the Acholi perceive and define themselves as well as how they are defined by others. Colonialism is also part of the impetus for the Acholi formation as one ethno-political unit in order to facilitate broader representation at the national level. Ultimately these divisions and struggles over political participation became key components in many of the armed conflicts. It is necessary to understand the history of these armed movements as it is from these conflicts that improper individual and mass graves were created, which in turn give rise to and are directly linked to social uncertainty and anxiety associated with improper burials, which is expressed socially as *cen*.

After the British became established in Buganda, colonial rule later spread throughout the region by employing Baganda as imperial agents, a political policy

that suited the expansionist goals of both parties. In the remaining kingdoms, the British aligned themselves with rulers who already reigned over centralized state-like regions with established hierarchies in order to enable indirect control over large numbers of people through minimum effort (Mutibwa 1992: 1). To facilitate the same type of rule in the north, where centralized kingdoms did not exist, the colonial administration, in concert with fledgling Christian ministries, appointed new chiefs to represent their interests (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 4). The colonial government ensured the success of these locally illegitimate appointees in lieu of the traditionally elected chiefs through the provision of resources such as access to rifles, allowing British colonial appointees to maintain power through force if necessary (Behrend 1999: 17).

The institutionalization of British-made units over clan organization also actively contributed to the creation of territorially-defined ethnic identities that had previously been more geographically fluid (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 4; Finnström 2008: 31, 36). A segment that had previously been part of a broader Luo group found in several nations, such as South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, began to define itself more concretely as one Acholi entity. It should be noted that the British did not create a domain of ethno-regional belonging out of nothing. Acholi collective identity had been forming since the eighteenth century, but colonial practices had a significant impact on Acholi identity as it is perceived today (Finnström 2008: 52). This decidedly political order became naturalized and reified over the years as administrative units changed to reflect ethno-political identities. For example, in order to facilitate greater participation within the centralized system created by the

British, and in competition with other ethnic groups, the Acholi began to delineate themselves as a cohesive cultural unit (Behrend 1999:18). Eventually boundary-making, ethnic codification and a demand for hierarchies would prompt the Acholi to create a paramount office of the Acholi, a position which is still in contention as some consider this individual to be “a leading Acholi chief and not chief of the Acholi” (Finnström 2008: 45-46). The British also endeavored to unite the Acholi, often through the utilization of Christianity and the promotion of chiefs that were willing to cooperate with the colonial administration. However their efforts were aimed at controlling and managing the protectorate and not uniting the people for Acholi benefit (Finnström 2008: 41).

The British also emphasized and eventually institutionalized a regional division between Nilotic language groups living in the north and Bantu language groups in the south. In part, this divide manifested itself through the exploitation of well-developed hierarchy systems in the south and the preferential development of this region to serve colonial ends, while largely neglecting the nomadic pastoralist groups in the north (Branch 2010: 27; Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 110-111). People in the south were, in general, treated as intellectuals and civil servants associated with government rule while groups from the north, especially the Acholi, were heavily recruited into the army and came to be seen as a warrior class. This perception of the north as a military/police recruitment zone not only disproportionately marshaled northerners into specific professions but promoted the perception of the military as an attractive career, as it provided one of the few opportunities for the undereducated to rise socially and participate in the national

sector (Behrend 1999: 18). Thus, when Uganda achieved self-governance, these two centers of power (the north and the south) were at times ethnicized as postcolonial manifestations of collective identity in the pursuit of political agendas (Branch 2010: 29; Finnström 2008: 31; Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 115).

An increased disunity between the north and the south was not the only rift created by colonialism. In general the "political, educational, economic and social policies that were pursued by the British not only sharpened existing differences, but also introduced new class formations, stratifications, and cleavages" (Mutibwa 1992: xiii). These separations would later be used by various ruling parties to drum up support by vilifying the opposing group and initiated a legacy of division that to this day "impedes the development of an integrated Ugandan nation" (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 6; Mutibwa 1992: 6). It is necessary to briefly discuss the various presidents and some of their actions to better understand the fluctuations in political representation and the ontological insecurity faced by the Acholi today and their existential efforts to control their lives. All of these aspects have ramifications for how improper burials are perceived and potentially addressed today.

Political Movements Since Independence

In 1962, Milton Obote, a northerner from the Langi ethnic group, became president of an independent Uganda. During his first presidency, Obote worked to fill positions of the central state with northerners while continuing to entrench and expand the colonial policy of using northern populations to staff the armed forces. By the late 1960s one-third of the national army was made up of Acholi (Branch

2010: 29). This militarization of politics became standard practice for how domestic affairs would be conducted for years to follow.

In 1971, Idi Amin, the Army Chief of Staff from the West Nile region, staged a successful coup supported by the United States and Britain, who were increasingly worried about Obote's anticapitalist rhetoric (Finnström 2008: 66-67). After replacing Acholi and Langi troops with soldiers from West Nile, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Amin immediately began using violence to correct what he saw as Obote's ethno-regional favoritism, which itself was a division based in colonial politics. First political representatives, then appointed chiefs, and finally, Acholi and Langi civilians who opposed his government were either killed or forced into exile by Amin (Finnström 2008: 65; Mutibwa 1992; Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 112). Ultimately tens of thousands were killed, and this purge left the people within Acholiland destabilized and without political representation at the national level (Branch 2010). After this brutal displacement, Amin turned south and ordered invasions into Tanzania, who countered by joining forces with the rebel members of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) loyal to Obote. The subsequent collaboration between Tanzania and the UNLA succeeded in the overthrowing Amin in 1979 (Branch 2010: 29).

The 1980 elections saw Obote beat contender Yoweri Museveni to regain power in a campaign plagued with allegations of corruption (Behrend 1999: 23). The Acholi and Langi populations from the north were once again heavily recruited to fill the ranks of the army. However, unlike before, there was no wide-scale political rehabilitation, as only a small portion of the Acholi elite was incorporated

into the new government (Mutibwa 1992). Unfortunately, these newly instated northern soldiers took revenge on individuals from the West Nile region for the violence that had been inflicted under Amin (Finnström 2008: 65). This cycle of revenge-seeking, manifested in militarized postcolonial politics, served to further entrench and polarize ethnic divisions, and served as a precursor for additional violence to come.

Following his defeat, Museveni and his followers responded to what they viewed as northern military tyranny by creating the National Resistance Movement (NRM), with its military division called the National Resistance Army (NRA), and waged a guerrilla warfare campaign against Obote for roughly six years, from 1981-1986. Unlike Idi Amin, who had rooted his prosecutions in ethnic and tribal differences, Museveni's NRM/A was composed of a heterogeneous mix of southern ethno-linguistic groups. Solidarity and support was achieved by articulating the campaign as a regional grievance between the north and the south, effectively reframing the movement from a war against Obote to a war against the north with the Acholi and their strong military presence being assigned most of the blame (Branch 2010: 30-31). These actions illustrate the potential malleability of ethno-political identity, as different leaders muted or emphasized different aspects of the population as a means to achieve a desired end.

In 1985, a portion of the UNLA led by Bazilio and Tito Okello, both from Acholiland, broke away from the main army and ousted Obote. However, only six months later, control of the country was lost to the NRA despite the peace accord that was signed between Museveni and Okello (Finnström 2008: 68). Museveni

immediately suspended multi-party political activity and sent the NRA to pursue what remained of the UNLA as they fled north to Acholiland. In part because the NRM had successfully employed regional divisions as a means to create group cohesion and demonize the north, it was assumed by the NRM/A that the returning UNLA had support from the rural Acholi who carried the colonial stereotype of being warriors (Finnström 2008: 75). This assumption painted the picture of a massive force poised to threaten the south, resulting in the NRA launching an insurgency against civilians and the UNLA, while denying the Acholi political representation at the national level (Branch 2010: 33-34; Finnström 2008: 71).

Ontological Insecurity and Social Anxiety

When thousands of soldiers fled north to escape Museveni's NRA, they brought with them an increased threat of *cen* (Behrend 1999: 29). Historically, when soldiers returned home they were considered to have developed an "impure heart" or *cwiny marac*, because of the violence they had wreaked. Violence committed against enemies during armed conflict was not problematic in and of itself nor was it viewed as a moral violation. The threat to the community came from the spirits of the fallen. According to local beliefs, a soldier remained in a liminal state in the eyes of the community until he was ritually cleansed and the spirits of the dead were appeased. However with the growing anonymity of warfare it became increasingly difficult to identify which individual had been killed by whom. This rendered communities unable to reconcile with the spirits of the dead

and by extension the associated perpetrator remained “impure” (Behrend 1999: 29).

Problems associated with modern warfare were not the only stumbling block when it came to addressing *cen*. As the power of elders declined, so too did the willingness of the soldiers to submit to their authority, and without ritual cleansing the abundance of vengeful spirits multiplied.⁴ These spirits and those viewed as responsible for their creation were assigned blame for the misfortunes the region was experiencing, further straining inter-societal cohesion. Despite the tensions between the returned soldiers and elders, the indiscriminate harassment and mounting human rights abuses including murder, torture, rape and general plunder committed by the NRA led to the development of a union between local Acholi elders, inactive ex-UNLA soldiers in the area, and the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), which was comprised of ex-UNLA who had formed a NRA resistance movement in South Sudan (Branch 2010: 34-36; Behrend 1999: 24-25). Part of this cooperation was due to the lineage-based elders' claim that returning UNLA soldiers carried *cen*, which only the elders had the power to dispel. By inserting themselves as one of the only local entities capable of addressing moral and spiritual violations within communities the elders created a monopoly over control of the dead (Behrend 1999: 29; Branch 2010: 33). Though ex-UNLA soldiers had originally been

⁴ The declining power of elders is a side effect of past colonial endeavors and present Christian religious attempts to delegitimize their influence and power within local populations. This enterprise was in part achieved through missionary efforts at delegitimizing Acholi ancestral beliefs, which are spirits traditionally associated with and interacted with through elders (Behrend 1999; Finnström 2008; Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006).

reluctant to bow to the wishes of these elders and receive ritual cleansing (Behrend 1999: 25), as part of the UPDA they gained the support of elders, and tensions between these two groups were temporarily stayed due to the presence of a common enemy. Initially, this collaboration was successful; rebel soldiers stopped harming local communities and began outreach efforts, explaining their actions as an attempt to stem NRA violence and increase northern political inclusion.

By 1987 this alliance began to fracture due to intense NRA counter-insurgencies, and eventually UPDA soldiers turned on the Acholi communities in order to obtain the supplies and manpower needed to sustain the rebel effort (Branch 2010: 35). This coercion led to diminished support for the UPDA, which was increasingly unable to defend the local population from the NRA. This internal crisis within Acholiland encompassed a loss of state power, a lack of political representation, the need to address NRA and UPDA violence, and inter-societal rifts between elders and an inflated number of young soldiers that were thought to carry *cen*. All of these dynamics set the stage for a new type of rebel movement; one that incorporated religion as a rallying point.

A previously unknown Acholi spirit medium named Alice Auma, who was known as *Lakwena*, or “Messenger,” emerged as the leader of a movement that was initially concerned with ritual healing and cleansing former Acholi soldiers in an attempt to rehabilitate and reintegrate those who had become internal strangers within their own culture (Behrend 1999: 26). However, violent encounters with NRA soldiers prompted Lakwena to incorporate military actions, and the organization became known as the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) (Allen and

Vlassenroot 2010: 8; Finnström 2008: 75). By incorporating aspects of Christianity, Lakwena was able to trump the power of male Acholi elders who had previously claimed to possess the sole authority to cleanse *cen*, as Christian divination was not included in the historic authority of the traditionally elected elders (Allen 1991). Another contributing factor to Lakwena's popularity was the heightened insecurity in the late 1970's to the early 1990's that caused many Christian religious leaders to live in exile or internal displacement. This collapse in institutional church life and reduced religious leadership allowed Alice Lakwena to receive additional support, as her movement was a functioning outlet of Christian expression (Ward 2001: 195-196).

With the advantage of having seen the success and failures of previous rebel movements, Lakwena and the spirits (or *jogi*, singular *jok*) she claimed to channel proceeded to address conflict within Acholiland by using the NRA as a common enemy.⁵ She offered purification for past deeds and inclusion of soldiers while emphasizing regional commonality through a discourse of spiritual healing and redemption that blended traditional beliefs with Christianity (Behrend 1999: 43-45). This last aspect allowed the HSM to become extremely successful in a short period of time - one year - as Lakwena's message of redemption and unity, regardless of ethnicity, appealed to a much wider audience, including not only soldiers from the former UNLA and the UPDA, but also groups outside of Acholiland (Behrend 1999: 26; Finnström 2008: 76). In addition, it has been argued that the

⁵ Jogi can also be spelled with two g's. After consulting several Lwo dictionaries I have chosen to spell the word with only one g.

HSM gained acceptance because the spiritual beliefs of the movement became a mechanism for making sense of dramatic social changes in a time of lessened political representation and a means through which social discontent in northern Uganda could be expressed (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 8; Omara-Otunnu 1992: 458). Ultimately this allowed Alice Lakwena to successfully unite most of northern Uganda. However, once her army crossed the Nile River, they were seen as northern invaders, and the HSM was defeated roughly 100km from Kampala (Branch 2010: 37; Finnström 2008: 76).

The Government of Uganda and the LRA

In the wake of Alice Lakwena's defeat, the northern region was once again without widespread, systematic leadership, and the civilian population was being threatened by the remaining factions of several failed rebel movements and government troops. It was out of this turbulent assemblage that Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) would emerge. Kony, like Alice, also claimed to be a medium that was possessed by spirits, and believed that all Acholiland had to be purged of internal enemies (Branch 2010: 37). At the time of the LRA's infancy a significant portion of the UPDA had accepted the government's Pece Peace Agreement or joined the NRA (Finnström 2008: 89).⁶ With only a limited number of

⁶ The Pece Peace Accord of 1988 was an agreement to cease hostilities between the UPDA and the government of Uganda. Notable components of the agreement included releasing prisoners of war, reintegration of UPDA soldiers into the NRA if they so choose, and rehabilitation of war affected areas (United Nations Peacemaker).

volunteers joining his cause, Kony increasingly resorted to violence and coercion in order to secure soldiers and supplies (Branch 2010: 38).

As the LRA was emerging so too were several government policies and actions that would later influence how the LRA treated civilians. First, the NRM developed a policy of becoming more invested in local government structures, and local councils (LCs) were instituted by the government at the village, parish, sub-county, county or municipality, and district levels to act as indirect representation (Finnström 2008: 93). Secondly, there were efforts to form local defense units (LDUs) to help protect the civilian population. Lastly, beginning in 1996, the government forced thousands of rural inhabitants into internally displaced person (IDP) camps in order for the NRA to more effectively target and eradicate the LRA (Harlacher and Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 3). All of these actions led Kony to believe that the enemy had become internalized, effectively transforming NRA collaborators, whether real or imagined, into traitors within the civilian population and thus targets for eradication (Branch 2010: 41). The LRA utilized a fluctuating methodology for discerning between "good" and "bad" Acholi and began a campaign of inflicting brutal violence against noncombatants that included murder, mutilation, destruction, intimidation, rape, and the kidnapping of children and adolescents to be trained as child soldiers (Branch 2010: 42, Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 116). This distinction between good/pure or bad/impure did not resonate with noncombatants who were often labeled "supporters of the enemy" by both the LRA and the NRA (Finnström 2008: 86). For example, part of the NRA's method of protecting people was to move them into IDP camps. However, by concentrating the

population into camps and restricting their movement, the NRA subjected noncombatants to increased violence from the LRA, who viewed those who moved to IDP camps as supporters of the government and subsequently acceptable targets to be cleansed. Noncombatants had little choice in the matter and were often left underprotected by the government after being forced to relocate (Branch 2010: 42). Between the NRA, which was renamed the Ugandan Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) in the early 1990's, and the LRA, the civilian population was trapped and terrorized by both groups, with neither one protecting the populace from the other. Additionally the looting and losses in IDP camps decimated economic productivity and later influenced the (in)ability of families and communities to conduct funeral rites for proper burial, which by extension exacerbates the presence of *cen*.

Not only were IDPs restricted in their movements and economic options, but the prolonged conflict and extended camp displacement caused a severe disruption in social reproduction (Finnström 2008; JRP 2007a, 2009, 2010; Proctor 2013). For example, strict curfews at night often prevented the practice of *wang-oo*, or storytelling around a campfire, during which community or clan elders teach children norms and values through stories of heritage (Finnström 2008: 146). Additionally, the physical restrictions on movements over the landscape prevented elders, many of whom died during the conflict, from passing along important customary knowledge, such as information on land boundaries and ownership (Harlacher and Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 5). Declining social reproduction not only stunted traditional knowledge transmission, it also contributed to a further decline

in the power and authority of the elders. Conversely, the dynamics of the conflict and camp life led to an increase in power for women and youth.

During these two decades of conflict, numerous peace attempts failed due to mistrust and unmet demands on both sides. An early illustration of this concerns the government's actions during the Pece Peace Agreement in the 1980's where several high-ranking UPDA rebels were imprisoned and killed "under unfortunate conditions" after surrendering (Finnström 2010a: 79). This mistrust has carried over to the blanket Amnesty Act, passed in 2000 by the Ugandan parliament. Rebel fighters were required to surrender their weapons and renounce any continued violence in the name of the rebellion. In return, all those who surrendered were either assimilated into the NRM or demobilized for reintegration into the civilian community without having to confess to any crimes they may have committed (Villa-Vicencio et al. 2005: 125). For those still within the LRA, relations with the NRM only grew more tense when those who accepted the 2000 amnesty were portrayed as surrendering to the will of the government instead of pursuing reconciliation between the two parties (Finnström 2010b: 137). LRA rebels also saw this amnesty as reinforcing a hierarchical order in which the superior government forgave the inferior upstarts (Finnström 2008: 229). In addition, Museveni undercut the stability of these peace measures by publically referring to the rebels as "hyenas," who were objectified as wild, sub-human creatures that needed to be managed through proper guidance (Finnström 2008: 114). The denigrating language denied the LRA any political credence and caricatured people in the north as animals. This classification not only allowed the violence to be

perpetuated, but also denied the legitimacy of any ideas for social change - good or bad - proposed by the rebels (Finnström 2010b: 151). According to this perspective, amnesty became yet another tool for persecution in the repertoire of measures used by the government. This theme of overt action developed into a common concern that leading members of the LRA repeatedly brought up during various peace initiatives over the years (Atkinson 2010). Yet the actions taken during this conflict arose from not only local agents, but were also affected by the contributions of external actors from beyond the borders of Uganda or even the Great Lakes Region.

International Influences

In 1986, Museveni inherited a nation-state in economic crisis, with foreign aid being the only available option to stem inflation. Thus, after bowing to the requests of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the government began trading economic reform for substantial amounts of foreign aid, which was in turn primarily invested in developing the south while fighting the rebels in the north (Mwenda 2010: 47). In the early 1990s the United States, with its concerns about stopping the spread of Islamic extremism, began providing extra funding to the NRM/A (who had been renamed as the Ugandan Peoples Defense Force or UPDF) to combat the LRA (who were receiving funding from the National Islamic Front based in Sudan). This relationship provided Museveni with the perfect opportunity to request more and more funds in the name of supporting US geopolitical interests, as well as make the moral appeal that additional military

spending was necessary to protect civilians in the north (Blattman and Annan 2010: 155; Mwenda 2010: 49-55). In addition, by labeling the LRA as terrorists, the government of Uganda was able to dismiss negotiations demanded during peace talks by claiming that it would be immoral to negotiate with such a group (Finnström 2010a: 81). It has been suggested that this opportunistic manipulation severely hindered any incentive to end the rebellion, with the war providing the means for both regional solidarity and economic stability in the south.

In 2003, the Ugandan government referred the crisis in the north to the International Criminal Court, which issued arrest warrants for Kony and his top four commanders two years later in 2005. Several of these individuals have subsequently died, while one is currently being tried at the ICC.⁷ Despite these efforts, the presence of the ICC has been contested on several fronts. To begin with, the ICC has been seen among northerners as a tool of the government, given that its investigation and prosecution is only geared toward the LRA despite the human rights abuses committed by the NRA/UPDF. Instead, the NRA successfully requested that any human rights violations brought against government officials be tried in national courts. The ICC explained its acceptance of this request because "the alleged crimes committed by the Ugandan government were not severe enough to breach the court's gravity threshold" (Finnström 2010b: 137). This one-sided approach illustrates bias, as government troops have been committing crimes

⁷ Dominic Ongwen was captured/surrendered in January of 2015 and made his first appearance at the ICC on January 26th 2015. He is being tried for three counts of crimes against humanity, and four counts of war crimes, including murder and the cruel treatment of civilians.

against and neglecting civilians in the north with almost complete impunity since 1986. In addition, as part of the ICC's mandate, it cannot prosecute crimes perpetrated before 2002.⁸ This arbitrary period (July 1st, 2002 to the present) seems wholly inadequate, as seventeen years of abuse that are part of the region's memory are not being acknowledged (Finnström 2010b: 137). Consequentially, the ICC warrants strained peace negotiations, especially during the 2006-2008 Juba peace talks, which required negotiation concerning the accountability of the LRA leaders (Allen 2010: 242). There has, however, been a distinctly positive aspect of ICC involvement, namely the greater awareness overall of human rights violations. With international scrutiny focused on the area, it was increasingly necessary for the Ugandan army to put forth a more successful effort when it came to protecting the populations in the north (Allen 2010: 261).

The LRA has been pushed out of Uganda since 2006, and it is unlikely that this group will return. Yet some people still live in fear that the depleted LRA forces that operate out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan will return to northern Uganda. Despite their reduced capacity, the rebels still cause havoc, use violent force against civilian populations, and continually manage to avoid capture by the contingents of UPDF soldiers that

⁸ This time period is based on the temporal jurisdiction of the Rome Statute, which is the treaty that established the ICC and details among other things, the crimes that fall under the ICC's jurisdiction, its rules of procedure, and mechanisms for cooperation between the ICC and signatory States Parties. Specifically, the ICC "has jurisdiction only with respect to crimes committed after the entry into force of this Statute" (UN General Assembly, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998: 10). As such, the court only has the power to try crimes committed after July 1st 2002.

have been sent to pursue them. Meanwhile, Ugandans face the immense task of healing after 20 years of extreme violence as well as underdevelopment in the north.

National Development Efforts

Still under the leadership of Museveni, the current government has implemented two development frameworks to aid in facilitating sustainable peace in northern Uganda. The first Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), which was initiated in 2007, was plagued with insufficient oversight and funding, understaffing, and corruption. The second phase of this project, PRDP II, has been carried out from 2012 to mid-2015 and aims to ensure the functionality of implemented developments and improve on past efforts. A recent report from the Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) has found that although PRDP II made improvements in reconstructing physical security, health and education facilities, as well as water and public works sectors, there were a number of issues of importance to northern communities that were either not addressed or failed to attain saliency at a local level (Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity 2015: 2-3). These included an increasing number of conflicts over land and other natural resources, youth underemployment, sexual and gender-based violence issues, and a “lack of appropriate transitional justice mechanisms,” all of which amounted to the finding that northern Uganda was still in a state of underdevelopment when compared to the rest of the country (Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity 2015: 3). Given the perceived inadequacies of the ICC and the shortcomings of the

PRDP plans, local populations in Acholiland have often turned to some of the mechanisms that have served to orient their lives in the past - religion and cosmology - because these strategies previously afforded communities with the means of coping with situations beyond their control.

As soldiers returned to their homes, both during and after the conflict, they faced some of the same dilemmas that had afflicted the returning UNLA troops; their actions created *cen* and the vengeful spirits had come home with them. As it had in the past, *cen* and, by association, returnees, were blamed for the misfortunes that befell the populace (Harlacher and Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 5). This increased psychosocial tension only added to the distress felt by the community and hindered both reintegration and reconciliation attempts. Additionally, the capacity for elders to dispel *cen* through traditional ceremonies was even lower than it was before as fewer people knew the proper rituals, possessed the means or ability to fulfill them, believed in their efficacy, or were willing to submit to the power of traditional authorities. Thus, though the presence and effects of *cen* have multiplied, the ability to address these spirits has been reduced (Behrend 1999).

However, as seen above, traditional cosmology was not the only religious influence operating within Acholiland. Christianity has played an influential role in the trajectory of the country's development since colonization. In order to better understand how *cen* is presently experienced and perceived, it is important to not only understand it as a concept, but to consider the context that led to its current expression.

Chapter Three

Religious and Cosmological History of the Region

Understanding Cen within Religious Discourses

The discourse in rural areas is inextricably tied to religion and spiritual forces that give expression to catastrophic experiences; thus, current expressions and perceptions of religion and cosmology can only be “understood in the context of the history of various religious discourses” (Behrend 1999: 100). *Cen*, specifically, can be more effectively comprehended by taking note of the complexities of the concept within its context, including its historical underpinnings. It is not enough to simply study *cen* on its own as its current expression is the culmination of traditional practices and beliefs, Christianity, and political maneuverings both during colonialism and after independence.

Luo Cosmology

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the socio-political organization in northern Uganda during the pre-colonial era was organized into chiefdoms, which in turn were composed of clans. From the level of clan, social units are separated into villages, then hamlets, and finally to households (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 24-25). Cosmology amongst these units are utilized to explain and cope with misfortune and to guide behavior (Behrend 1999: 107; P’Bitek 1971). Both hardships and blessings were seen as the result of spiritual forces including chiefdom and clan *jogi*, ancestors, and free *jogi* (explained below), all of which could

display anthropomorphic characteristics such as feeling cold, hungry, thirsty, abandoned, or loved (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 42-43).

Each chiefdom and clan has its own *jogi* or spirit who is responsible for enforcing moral order within a specific geographic area (Behrend 1999: 108; Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 44). Violations of moral order can cause an individual to become impure of heart and force the *jogi* to send punishment or misfortune to the perpetrators (Behrend 1999: 107). During yearly celebrations, inhabitants would make sacrifices to the clan or chiefdom *jogi* to ask for protection, but only those who were clean of heart and free of guilt could do so without incurring the wrath of the *jogi*. This in turn encouraged individuals and families to settle their disputes before attending the ceremony.

Ancestors consist of clan members who have died and are responsible for enforcing social rules and promoting clan unity (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 43). These living-dead are capable of helping or hurting people according to how the living behave. An *abila*, or ancestral shrine, can be found in many homes and is the location where people would go to offer sacrifices for blessings or for thanks to the ancestors for general good fortune, successful harvests or hunts, or the birth of children (See Figures 1 and 2). Both the ancestors and the clan or chiefdom *jogi* were thought to only send just punishments. As such, severe punishments and unexplainable sickness are attributed to the work of free *jogi* (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 46).

Unlike the other spirits, free *jogi* are not tied to a specific location and can move over large distances. Though these spirits can be used to heal or to harm,



Figure 1. This picture displays two household *abilas*. Photo by A. Kembel 2012.



Figure 2. This photo displays a village *abila*. Many of these shrines were purposely demolished by the LRA in order to destroy the power they symbolized (Finnström 2008). Photo by A. Kembel 2012.

especially when harnessed by an *ajwaka*, or witchdoctor, they can also strike without cause. These free *jogi* frequently bring illnesses with specific symptoms such as anxiety (P'Bitek 1971: 114). In instances of these “spiritualized” ailments, treatment serves to address both the physical, psychological, and religious cause of the condition (P'Bitek 1971: 114). As colonial control spread and new forms of political organization were implemented, the influence of clan and chiefdom *jogi* was greatly reduced as traditional offices were replaced or dispensed with altogether (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 24, 48; Russell 1966: 29). This same time period, which corresponds to the introduction of Christianity, also saw the proliferation of free *jogi*, a category under which *cen* is subsumed (Behrend 1999: 109-110; P'Bitek 1971: 108). A number of these new spirits had foreign names, demonstrating that “the Acholi were using their ‘cultural archive’ to interpret this new threat to their worldview” (Behrend 1999: 106; Foucault 1972).

The Spread of Christianity

Christian missionaries first arrived in Uganda in the late 1870's, with an evangelical wing of the Anglican (Protestant) church, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) appearing in 1877, and the Catholic White Fathers Mission arriving in 1879 (Pirouet 1978: 1-2). These Christian groups, being confined to Buganda, initially worked together to align themselves with the politically-active younger generations and were soon set in opposition to a traditional political party and a Muslim party (Pirouet 1978: 3). In 1887, the new ruler of Buganda, Mwanga, elevated Christian chiefs in an attempt to offset the traditional powers. This tactic proved so successful

that Mwanga soon attempted to turn against the Christians to curb their growing power only to be deposed by a Muslim-Christian alliance. Rivalry and suspicion quickly disrupted this newly formed coalition, and the stronger Muslim party drove the Christians into exile (Gifford 1998: 112). In 1888, the Christians were able to oust the Muslims and reinstate Mwanga, though his powers were severely curtailed (Pirouet 1978: 5). Being English, the CMS missionaries also led the campaign for the British declaration of Uganda as a protectorate, as it would cement their power over the Catholics who were French evangelists (Gifford 1998: 112). As a direct result of this power change, any individual with political ambition had to be a member of one of the Christian groups, successfully uniting political and religious motives within the region for the foreseeable future (Pirouet 1978: 7).

Despite early Anglican success, this evangelical brand of Christianity was at times less popular than Catholicism because the evangelical Protestants expected a strict adherence to Christian morals. Conversely, the Catholics did not require the same level of religious fervor and realized that Christianity in the region had become indigenized; therefore, they did not expect the population to give up worldly items or practice monogamy (Pirouet 1978: 10-11). Despite these different approaches both religions remained popular, in part, because adherents were taught to read and write, a skill that became mandatory for political advancement (Pirouet 1978: 29). This was especially the case with the expanding colonial power filling political positions with literate individuals who would support their cause.

The initial Christian expansion into Acholiland beginning in 1904 was at the invitation of a *rwot* (chief) named Awic who had been imprisoned in Kampala for

resisting British rule (Pirouet 1978: 149, 152-153). During his incarceration in the south, Awic observed the expansive changes the British were bringing and the potential advantages conferred upon those who could read and write. After returning to the north, a request was extended to the CMS church to send catechists, as Christian churches were the sole source of education at the time (Russell 1966: 3). Despite several false starts, Christianity successfully expanded into and throughout Acholiland because of spiritual motivation, a local demand for education, and because missionaries had become the handmaidens of the British regime (Pirouet 1978: 35; Russell 1966: 33).

As British expansion took place in the north, local chiefs who were antagonistic to the new rule were deposed and replaced by more acquiescent candidates who had been taught in missionary schools (Marchetti 1999: 21). These new pupils were comprised of the traditional chief's sons, who worked to serve a variety of purposes. The *rwot* would have educated offspring who could handle affairs with the government, which was a requirement that was becoming necessary for political advancement and the betterment of the clan. In addition to this, the colonial power would gain new chiefs who would support their endeavors and retain the appearance of traditional legitimacy within communities, while the churches gained the opportunity to spread their faith and their power base. These different motivations culminated in churches becoming "an essential part of the social fabric, and have become deeply infused into political, social, and cultural life." (Gifford 1998: 116). Though the centrality of the Anglican and Catholic churches

has remained strong, other denominations have crept into prominence; perhaps the most notable of which is Pentecostalism.

In the mid-1980's Pentecostalism started gaining popularity throughout Uganda. Though this movement is independent of the Anglican *balokole* revival, which took place in Uganda from the 1930's to the 1980's, the Pentecostal movement has continued to build upon some of the same stances and roles (Kalu 2008: 95). Such characteristics included being "saved" and an "uncompromising rejection of assimilation between Christianity and African customs" (Gifford 1998: 152-153; Kalu 2008: 95). With church founders originating from both within Uganda and abroad, the born-again experience emphasizes or exploits a need for enthusiasm and participation in services that create a collective atmosphere; attempts to promote a perception that adherents can breaking through traditional or economic boundaries associated with poverty; and that emphasizes that believers can control their life circumstances and be victorious over the various struggles they are grappling with (Gifford 1998: 156-157, 169-170). This viewpoint was at times bolstered by the state, which required new missionary groups to become involved in development. In the south, this obligation painted Pentecostalism as a new dispensation with the potential to provide greater opportunities than the established Anglican and Catholic churches (Gifford 1998: 170-171). Despite the popularity of evangelical churches, the north remains predominantly Catholic, in part due to the Catholic Church's greater presence in terms of numbers, external funding, and infrastructure investment (Gifford 1998: 147; Pirouet 1978: 144).

The partition of cosmology and religion into different sections within this chapter was for organizational purposes and should not be seen as a suggestion that cosmology and religion in Acholiland are entirely separate entities. Though most Acholi have converted to some form of Christianity, traditional practices and Acholi cosmology have infused Christianity and vice versa (Behrend 1999). For example, the literature addressing *cen* (JRP 2012b, 2011, 2008a, 2007a, 2006b; Neuner et al. 2012) demonstrates that it is a significant problem in Acholiland, affecting a wide variety of individuals regardless of age, sex, or socio-economic status. This research also found that the perception of a vengeful spirit that could cause harm and whose genesis is rooted in traditional cosmological beliefs was internalized within the belief system of Christians. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, disagreements over how spirits should be appeased arise between participants because both religious institutions and individuals combine and balance beliefs according to diverse social, political, and economic needs, which leads to different understandings of *cen*.

Chapter Four **Methods**

Laying the Foundation

This thesis is based on research undertaken in Uganda during the summer of 2012, though networking and several of the founding ideas for this project were the product of two previous visits in 2011. For ten weeks I conducted ethnographic research on Acholi cultural practices, needs, expectations, and perspectives in order to answer the question, what are the culturally appropriate solutions for addressing improper individual and mass graves in northern Uganda?

This research, which was funded in part through the generosity of the W. K. McClure Scholarship for the Study of World Affairs, was conducted under the auspices of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), a Uganda-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses broadly on human rights issues within the country. With several locations in Uganda, the organization strives to address topics related to conflict, transitional justice, governance, access to justice, gender and sexuality, displacement, and mental health and psychosocial well-being. I specifically worked in the RLP Kitgum field office, the National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre (NMPDC). Their activities focus on establishing a national memory narrative by documenting all of the conflicts that have affected northern Uganda. The office also conducts community outreach, community-based action research, and documentation that fall under the umbrella of its parent organization RLP. One example of this research is the NMPDC's massacre scoping and conflict mapping project, which, as its name implies, records events associated with conflict

throughout Acholiland. The decision to work with this NGO was based on the previous networking I had done with several of the staff and administrators, their invaluable expertise in and familiarity with the area, and their established status as a reputable organization. All original research material, including informed consent forms and audio recordings, remained with RLP upon my departure. Additionally, the government of Uganda requires all foreign researchers to be associated with an organization already operating in Uganda (See Appendix A for Letter of Association with the Refugee Law Project). This requirement is coordinated through the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) which reviews all proposals based on many of the same guidelines as those considered by American Institutional Review Boards (IRB), with particular concern for ethics (See Appendix B for UNCST approval).

Participant Descriptions

The 52 participants in this study originated from war-affected communities with known occurrences of improper individual burials, reburials, and/or mass graves, or they had conducted ceremonies on behalf of deceased and missing relatives. Because the landscape contains burials from several conflicts, selected participants were not limited to those who had lost loved ones during the struggle between the LRA and the government of Uganda. It should be noted that the number of listed participants only reflects the people who contributed in semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The research was also influenced by

numerous daily informal exchanges, which were recorded field notes but not counted as part of the official tally.

The 52 participants, whose responses served as my primary source of data, included individuals who either lived in close proximity to a mass grave(s), were believed to have a loved one located in a mass grave, had participated in a single grave reburial, desired to conduct a reburial, had participated in a calling-of-the-spirit ceremony, or some combination thereof. In addition, key informants that held distinct positions, such as elders, *rwodi* (chiefs), and various religious leaders of different denominations were consulted because their perspectives could shed light on how the research questions relate to communities on a macro-level.

Research Locations

The research locations were identified through initial field visits and in consultation with Refugee Law Project directors. The identification of potential field sites was based on past massacre scoping conducted by NMPDC that had identified the presence of mass graves and other war-related losses within communities. Labongo Akwang sub-county was selected as the primary geographical area of exploration because reburials were known to have occurred in the area and because transportation to and from the area was logistically feasible during the rainy seasons (See Figures 3 and 4). Naamokora and Omiya Anyima sub-counties were included later in the research, based upon the presence of two mass graves, the characteristics of the site and the ability to access participants (See Figure 5).

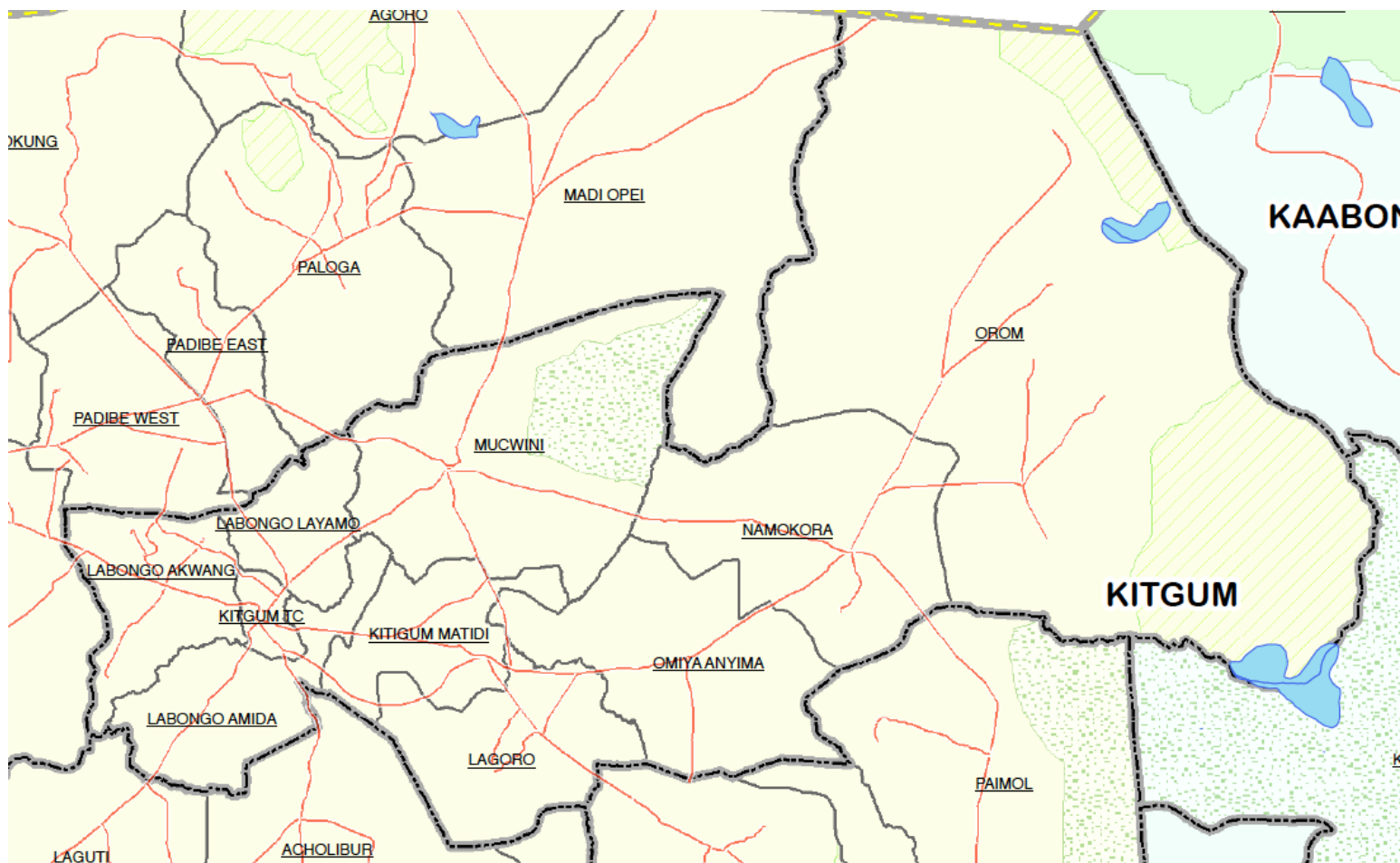


Figure 4. Image of Kitgum District and its constituent Sub-counties. Map Source: <http://reliefweb.int/map/uganda/uganda-greater-north-planning-map-details-14-oct-2010>

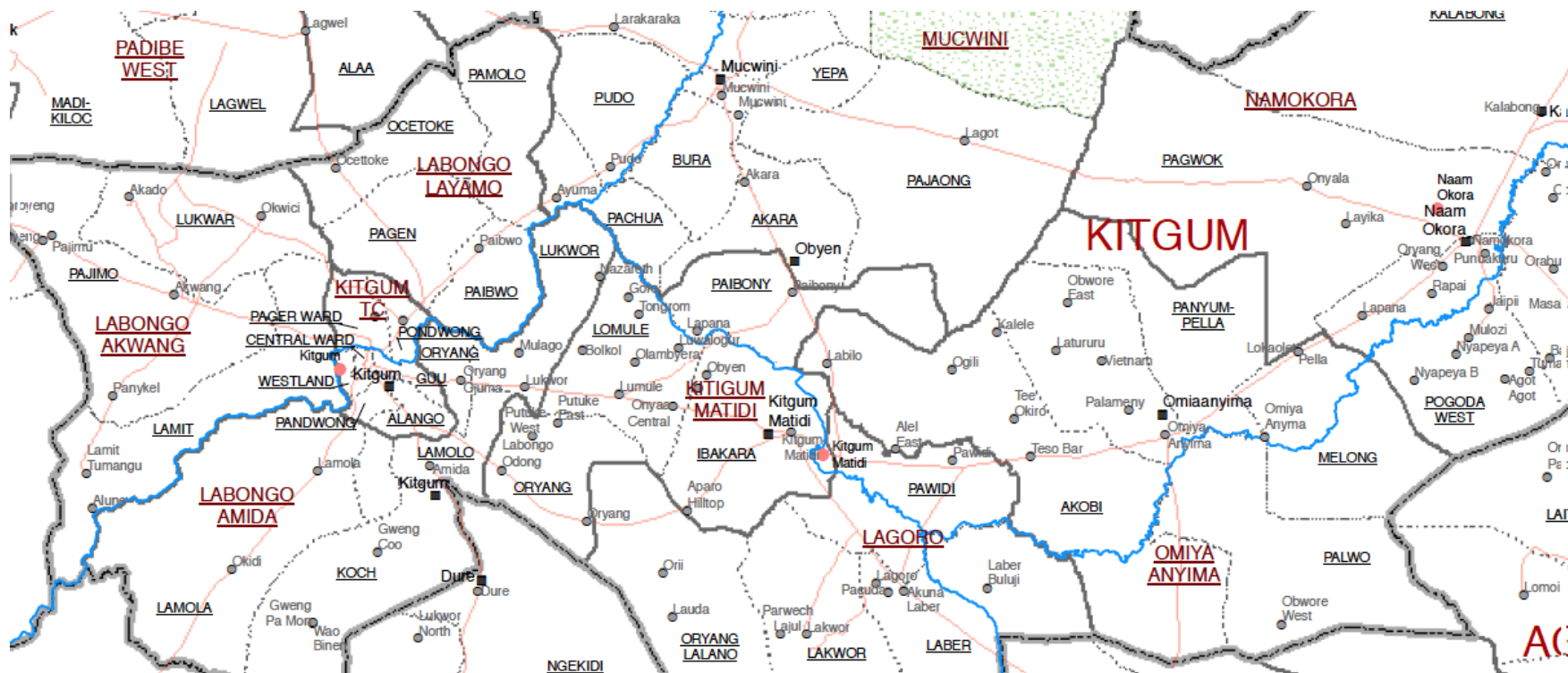


Figure 5. Map of research locations. Labongo Akwang Sub-county is located to the left of Kitgum town while both Omiraanyima and Naam Okora town are on the right. Map Source: <http://reliefweb.int/map/uganda/uganda-planning-map-details-22-dec-2010>

Gaining Access to Participants

Before any interviews took place, accessing participants also required obtaining consent from the Local Council Member 3's (LC3's). An LC3 is a government official and gatekeeper that presides over a specified geographic area - a sub-county - and manages the activities within his/her respective region. After an LC3 had granted permission to conduct research she or he would introduce me to a Local Council Member 1 (LC1) or a member of their chair personnel, who helped mobilize community members for participation. An LC1 is the government official that supervises at the village level, while the chair personnel under a LC3 serve as consultants and help the LC3 with his or her duties (For a hierarchical listing of these local government positions see Figure 6). After initial interviews took place within a community, snowball sampling was used to locate other affected families in the area.

Accessing participants through introductions is necessary on a formal level because it is a cultural norm for outsiders, both foreign and domestic, to work through existing hierarchies of authority. Any researcher, including other Acholi, wishing to speak with community members would be expected to follow this protocol. Additionally, land wrangling (disputes over land boundaries or ownership and even attempts to swindle another out of land ownership) is rampant in the north and communities are suspicious that outsiders may try to steal their property, as land is one of the most profitable resources in the region. Because of these fears, a researcher must approach communities through a trusted individual, lest their intentions be misunderstood. However, there are potential biases that arise from

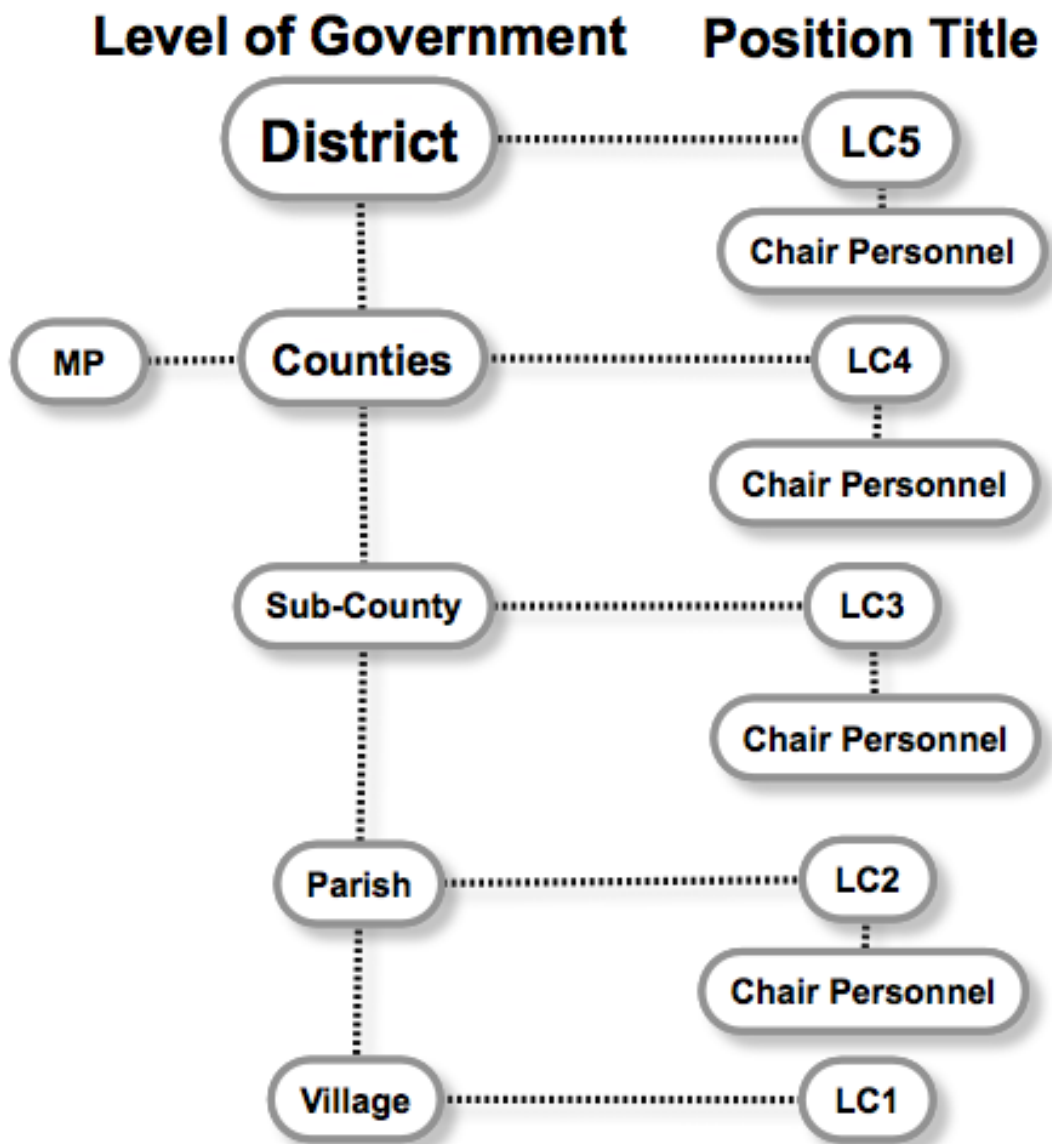


Figure 6. Government Hierarchy and Associated Titles.

meeting participants in this manner.

It is possible that the LC3 and other officials steered us toward personal family and friends or people who agreed with their viewpoints concerning the study. For example, in one research location the first people we met were members of that individual's clan who had very coordinated opinions on how to address the mass grave in their area because the future management of that particular grave had economic implications for them. This selective directing is a factor within the research that should be recognized because it implies that the results should be cautiously applied to the wider Acholi population. However, this possible bias should not be considered a limitation because these people were contending with mass and individual graves and thus their opinions and perspectives are still relevant to the research questions.

Another related dilemma arose when an LC1 remained for the interview after making introductions to a family. At times, questions posed to the participants were answered by the LC1 and his presence may have affected the diversity of opinions the participants were willing to voice. However, LC1's are elected members from the village level and are often elders within their communities. Because of this close connection to their village, these individuals have a vested interest in their community's perceptions and needs. Additionally, social pressure makes it less likely that an LC1 would deliberately push an agenda that was not supported by the community as he or she may be related to, live close to, work with, and depend upon this network of individuals. It is also important to note that Acholi society is collectivist in nature and important decisions often require input from an

individual's family and clan. Because kin-based decisions are a cultural norm a researcher in this region should be cautious about overemphasizing and prioritizing individual opinions and interviews to the exclusion of collective responses. However, if the researchers goal is to hold interviews without the presence of an LC1 I would suggest interviewing the official in a separate session before the families so that he or she is no longer curious about the type of questions that the researcher will be asking and less likely to stick around for another interview process.

The Research Scheme

The methodology used in this research was qualitative and the study exploratory in nature. Primary data collection methods included informal interviews and discussions, thirteen semi-structured interviews, and two focus group discussions. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing. It was usually in their home and in the presence of several family members from the same household or compound. As interviewing can be used to investigate motivations, opinions, experiences, and differences in meaning (Dunn 2010: 102) this method effectively allowed me to investigate the validity of the project's objectives. Interviewing also encourages responses in the participants' own words (Dunn 2010: 103), and permits the informant to convey the information she prioritizes. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were utilized instead of structured or unstructured styles because they facilitated conversations that generally focused on improper burial while still

permitting participants to introduce aspects of this topic and directions that had not previously occurred to me (Dunn 2010: 110-111).

On several occasions more than one family was present, and the interview became an impromptu focus group. This transition to a different research method was necessary to ensure that the different families were not offended as they had often taken time away from vital daily activities, such as digging (farming), in order to be present. Utilizing focus groups was beneficial in several ways. First, these groups allowed me to test my interpretation of emerging conceptual categories that were generated during individual interviews and refine or redirect future inquiries accordingly. Secondly, focus groups can be useful for understanding the socially-constructed nature of knowledge (Cameron 2010: 154), as well as observing the transmission of information between individuals. This method allowed me to observe group dynamics as “relevant constitutive forces in the construction of meaning and the practice of social life” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005: 902). Both of the groups were comprised of a mixed-demographic, including men, women, young adults, and the elderly. The inclusion of both young adults and elders allowed me to observe the dynamic that may exist between these two groups. Several sources within the literature pertaining to northern Uganda (e.g., Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; Behrend 1999, and Finnström 2008) suggest that the power of the elders has been greatly diminished. Because of these reports, I was interested in gauging how eager the youth were to listen to elders and their perspectives. Though elders may possess less power and authority than they did in the past, the youth that I observed seemed willing to consider the responses provided by elders or at

the very least did not openly reject them. Importantly, young adults reported that traditional rituals were an important aspect of addressing improper burials, but many of them were unfamiliar with how to conduct such ceremonies or the rationale for why certain objects were used. If this observation is representative of the broader population, it may have implications for the importance of these specific rituals in the future.

Locating the Researcher

At this point it is pertinent to include a bit of information about my background, as researchers do not conceive of, proceed through, or interpret their work without frames of reference which are influenced by an individual's history, their experiences and conceptions, and their interests (Charmaz 2005: 509). This research is no exception to this rule, beginning with my approach to the problem. My early graduate training was based in forensic anthropology with a personal interest in human rights and the use of excavations as a tool in international trials and investigations. My studies reflected an outlook that viewed forensic excavations and DNA identification as a truth telling and narrative establishment tool to be used in prosecutions, with the secondary potential of helping those who had lost loved ones. But as my studies progressed I became more and more interested in the needs of the living. After switching to the cultural anthropology subdiscipline and honing in on transitional justice, I increasingly recognized a disconnect between the cultural and forensic aspects of mass grave excavations and began to see the potential advantages of such efforts informing each other, especially for the benefit

of surviving communities.

Developing Interview Guides

Ultimately with my interests swinging along a continuum between the living and the dead, and with an eye towards contributing information that may aid in address wounds from the past without creating new instabilities in the future, I designed interview guides which would allow me to consistently cover topics pertinent to the research question while using a semi-structured interview format that allowed for flexibility within the interviews. However, several of my original questions were tweaked after a formative conversation I had with Acholi musician, Jeff Korondo. While discussing the research and the potential for excavation and DNA identification, I also mentioned that forensic evidence was advantageous - if not necessary - at the level of international courts and tribunals. He pointed out that many communities feel that they know what happened and that aligning my inquiries with a need for forensic evidence may inadvertently prioritize a perspective that is not shared by communities. Though he recognized that there are instances in which knowing the minimum number of individuals interred would be beneficial to communities who contest the version of events being put forth by the government, I needed to modify some of my questions if they were to capture community perceptions of mass graves without imposing external legal, political, or cultural concepts (personal communication June 2012). Jeff's comments made it clear that if my goal for this research was to investigate the opinions, needs, and expectations of communities struggling with improper burials, then I needed to

continually strive to interrogate my own bias while consciously grounding the research in the perspectives of the participants. Regardless of what types of evidence may be needed in international courts, prioritizing judicial inquiries begins to tilt the research away from the priorities of target communities. The importance of reflexivity was a concept that my education had made me aware of, but I had never operationalized it before. I realized how essential reflexivity was to my endeavor and that I would need to constantly explore the basis for my questions and assumptions with a better understanding of how this concept was applied in a real-world setting.

The adjusted open-ended questions (see Appendix C) were tested on Acholi staff working at NMPDC and refined in collaboration with my local research assistant and interpreter, Bob Julius Acaye, various RLP staff members and researchers, and a local *rwot*. Pre-testing ensured that the questions were culturally appropriate and could be accurately communicated in Lwo, the local language.

Bob, whose contributions were invaluable to the research, was located through a job search conducted by another researcher. A call for applications was put out, and Bob was identified as an ideal candidate for this research based on his interview for the other research position. Both before and during the research, Bob and I also developed interview strategies for interacting with and eliciting information from participants. For example, given my lack of knowledge about Christian biblical references, any question posed to us about this subject was answered by Bob, who has a more developed knowledge base in this area. As the research progressed, we noticed that respondents provided more in-depth

explanations depending on which one of us posed the question. At times I was able to play the naïve researcher and be provided with more detailed explanations about information pertaining to rituals because there was no presumption that I, as an outsider, would have had any experience with the issue. Whereas when Bob asked the same question, some of these nuances were omitted because informants presumed that, as a local, he already had an understanding on the topic. Conversely, because Bob was familiar with many cultural references, when participants were asked to give an example of a cultural concept, they often provided more specific answers when Bob asked them this question; they were more confident that he would be familiar with the social context of the explanation.

During the interviews, questions from the protocol were rarely read verbatim but served instead as prompts for discussion. Because concepts and categories were being explored and identified, an inductive approach using grounded-theory was taken, allowing new findings to emerge (Bernard 2006: 493). Grounded-theory, used as both a method of inquiry and a mode of analysis, can be applied to substantive area(s) of social perception (Charmaz 2005: 508), such as how improper burials were perceived and what should be done to address them. While in the data collection stage, Bob and I continually reflected upon and explored the information presented in the interviews to identify important findings, which later influenced the topics explored in future interviews. Grounded-theory continued to be used in the analysis of the data to develop an integrated set of concepts from the transcripts that illustrate processual connections. For instance, this approach allowed me to locate subjective and collective experiences, such as the

hauntings, nightmares, or sickness associated with *cen*, in larger structures like religion and cosmology, in order to understand the relationships between the two. The results are useful for informing transitional justice efforts in northern Uganda and other situations in which the spirits of the dead directly affect the lives of the living.

Due to the informed consent process and the introductions, all participants were familiar with the topics under discussion and knew that I was seeking their perspective because of their pre-established relationship to the topic, such as their experience with reburials or calling-of-the-spirit ceremonies. As such, after some degree of rapport was established, interviews generally started with personal narratives about specific parts of their life history relating to their involvement with the subject and then proceeded to more abstract topics. Having some understanding of their past experiences on matters relating to the dead allowed me to tentatively direct the conversation in a manner applicable to the interview questions. For example, if a participant conveyed that a loved one had been improperly buried and that an exhumation and reburial had been conducted using traditional rituals, I would inquire about the different aspects involved in this process. If, however, an informant wanted a prayer ceremony to be conducted, more time was spent probing the various components of what constituted adequate prayers. These types of inquiries allowed me to explore the broader research questions concerning how mass and individual graves and *cen* should be addressed, as well as who should be involved and what was necessary to accomplish this endeavor.

Interviews with elders, chiefs, and religious leaders included many of the same questions posed to the general populace, but often included additional inquiries about how the different religious groups could or might be willing to work with each other and allow demands other than their own to be met. As an illustration, if a respondent felt that rituals were necessary to alleviate *cen*, then she was also questioned on whether prayers could also take place and vice versa. Given the diversity of responses received, these types of questions were helpful in making recommendations for future work that could potentially help appease *cen* pertaining to mass graves and individual improper burials within communities.

The questions themselves evolved over the course of the research as different complexities emerged, and additional topics and concepts were investigated. The types of questions used techniques such as 1) descriptive knowledge of events, people, places, or experiences; 2) repetition so the participant would say more about a particular topic; 3) nudging comments to continue a conversation; 4) clarifications to ensure understanding on vague or complex answers; 5) opinions to deduce impressions, feelings, or needs; 6) storytelling to identify actors, events or causal links; 7) structural inquiries to encourage reflection on how experiences influence perspectives or opinions; and 8) hypothetical questions to encourage reflection or a comparison of experiences. The order of the questions and topics varied according to the informants and their perspectives. Individuals from the Akwang sub-county were asked how the improperly buried, individual graves of family members were affecting them, as only two families that I interviewed knew of a mass grave(s) in their general vicinity. Conversely,

individuals from Naamokora and Omiya Anyima sub-counties lived in the presence of well-known mass graves, so these interviews primarily investigated the effect of such graves on the larger community. All groups were asked the core questions concerning whether they were affected by mass graves or improperly buried individual graves, how they were affected, and what they wanted to see done about the issue. As discussed in Chapter One, improper burial of any kind was reported as problematic because participants were affected by *cen*, yet, how this disturbance should be addressed varied according to religious preferences. Participants who followed Christian doctrines espoused that only prayers were necessary while adherents to traditional cosmology cited that rituals and, ideally, exhumation and reburial would be necessary to appease the angry spirits. Informants in this latter group expressed that internments in mass graves were a problem because comingling would prevent identification. After encountering similar responses over several interviews, all later groups regardless of their specific religious or cosmological beliefs who were affected by mass graves were asked about the potential appropriateness and desirability of forensic excavation and identification.

Informed Consent

All participants were presented with an informed consent form written in either English or Lwo according to their preference (See Appendix D and E). Given the variation in literacy rates, my research assistant also read the form aloud in Lwo, and we answered any questions the participants posed. Like the research questions, the format and content of the consent form had been reviewed by NMPDC staff and

approved by the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology. In most instances, the participant gave verbal consent to participate, which was recorded via audiotape, and signed a consent form after the interview was completed. Signing after the interview completion was likely a protection strategy against land wrangling that can cause individuals to fear signing a document whose contents have not been verified. For example, incidences exist in which an individual has provided his or her signature for something as innocent as a meeting attendance sheet and found out later that this same signature was illegally used as a bill of sale for their land (Lawino 2013). This example and other experiences like them are communicated amongst communities and contribute to an atmosphere in which outsiders are gauged with suspicion. As such, during the course of the research, it was often only after rapport, and a degree of trust had been established that the participants felt comfortable signing the document.

In addition to recording verbal consent, an audio recorder was used to document all interviews and focus groups. Though notes were taken, the recorder allowed me to focus on the content of responses, non-verbal gestures, non-verbal interactions among the participants if more than one were present, as well as a communal compound complete with children, pets, livestock and chores. Additionally, in Acholiland, it is occasionally culturally inappropriate to interrupt particular participants (specifically elders) when they are answering questions or telling a story. As such, at times, exact details were not always relayed to me during long dictations. To account for this, most recordings that were conducted in Lwo were transcribed in their entirety so that during the analysis important points were

not lost. This approach also illuminated instances in which the participant had misunderstood a question because of how it was translated. Identifying these miscommunications allowed Bob and I to revise our approach to avoid similar mistakes in the future. Lastly this transcription tactic helped Bob hone his interpretation skills, which was beneficial to the overall research. The downside to transcribing interviews in their entirety was the increased time investment required as one-hour recordings often took six to eight hours to transcribe and translate. However, I feel that the benefits of this endeavor proved to be worth the time commitment.

Using a voice recorder to capture data also presented some practical challenges. In the one instance of recorder malfunction, Bob and I immediately and independently recorded everything we could remember about the interview and compared notes. Fortunately, this particular interview had been conducted in English. As this recap was completed directly after the interview session, I feel confident that many of the important details were accurately captured. Sound pollution from wind picked up by the microphones was also an impediment to transcription for several of the recordings. Unfortunately, there was no way to have a windscreen shipped to the area during the research timeframe. Overall there was not any loss of data but there was significantly more time spent listening to recordings in order to produce accurate transcriptions. For future research, I would recommend a windscreen as part of a researcher's technology toolkit to avoid this problem.

Chapter Five

Analysis

Qualitative Coding

The data collected in the field was primarily analyzed using SimpleMind, a mind map program, and the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) program NVivo10. Using NVivo allowed me to code the data and subsequently interact with the information in a manner that fostered abstraction and the creation of analytical categories that directly addressed the research questions. A code within a CAQDAS program can be defined as a “short word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language” (Saldaña 2009: 3). Coding allows the user to encrypt, summarize, organize, index, search, explore, and analyze large amounts of information by reducing the data into manageable and potentially insightful key themes or categories (Bernard 2006: 405; Cope 2010: 281-282). Essentially, data reduction leads to organization, which helps facilitate analysis through comparison. Ultimately, a great benefit of coding is that these associations have the potential to illuminate unexpected connections and relationships (Cope 2010: 283).

Though coding can be done by hand, there are a multitude of advantages that stem from using a CAQDAS program to process data. Depending on a researcher’s approach, the number of codes produced may become unmanageable if only recorded on paper. A computerized program enables the user to quickly manage and modify a large number of codes, including un-coding, renaming, deleting,

moving and merging codes as necessary (Saldaña 2009: 26). Software like NVivo also allows the researcher to avoid creating unintentional duplicate codes for a single datum, define and embed metadata within codes, and link a variety of analytic tasks, such as memos and relationship patterns, to particular sets of data (Saldaña 2009: 28, 85). However, perhaps the one of the greatest benefits of CAQDAS programs is the ability to efficiently search and query coded data, as well as compare this data to information that has been subsumed under other codes. For example, coding stripes allowed me to visualize what sections of the data had been assigned specific codes and how different topics were related (See Figure 7). Though there are other commercial CAQDAS programs to choose from, such as ATLAS.ti and MAXQDA, NVivo was utilized because it can seamlessly handle multiple source formats, and could be accessed for free through The University of Tennessee.

Methodology

My coding approaches utilized grounded-theory as a template for my method of inquiry. This methodology offers “flexible guidelines that encourage the inductive creation of theory through successively more abstract levels of conceptual development” (Charmaz 2005: 507). The objective is to remain closely connected to the data so that one’s comprehension of the text remains rooted in the original information (Bernard 2006: 493). Such an approach is also in-line with my research agenda of foregrounding participant perspectives and needs, as this tactic attempts to locate subjective and collective perceptions within broader phenomena and

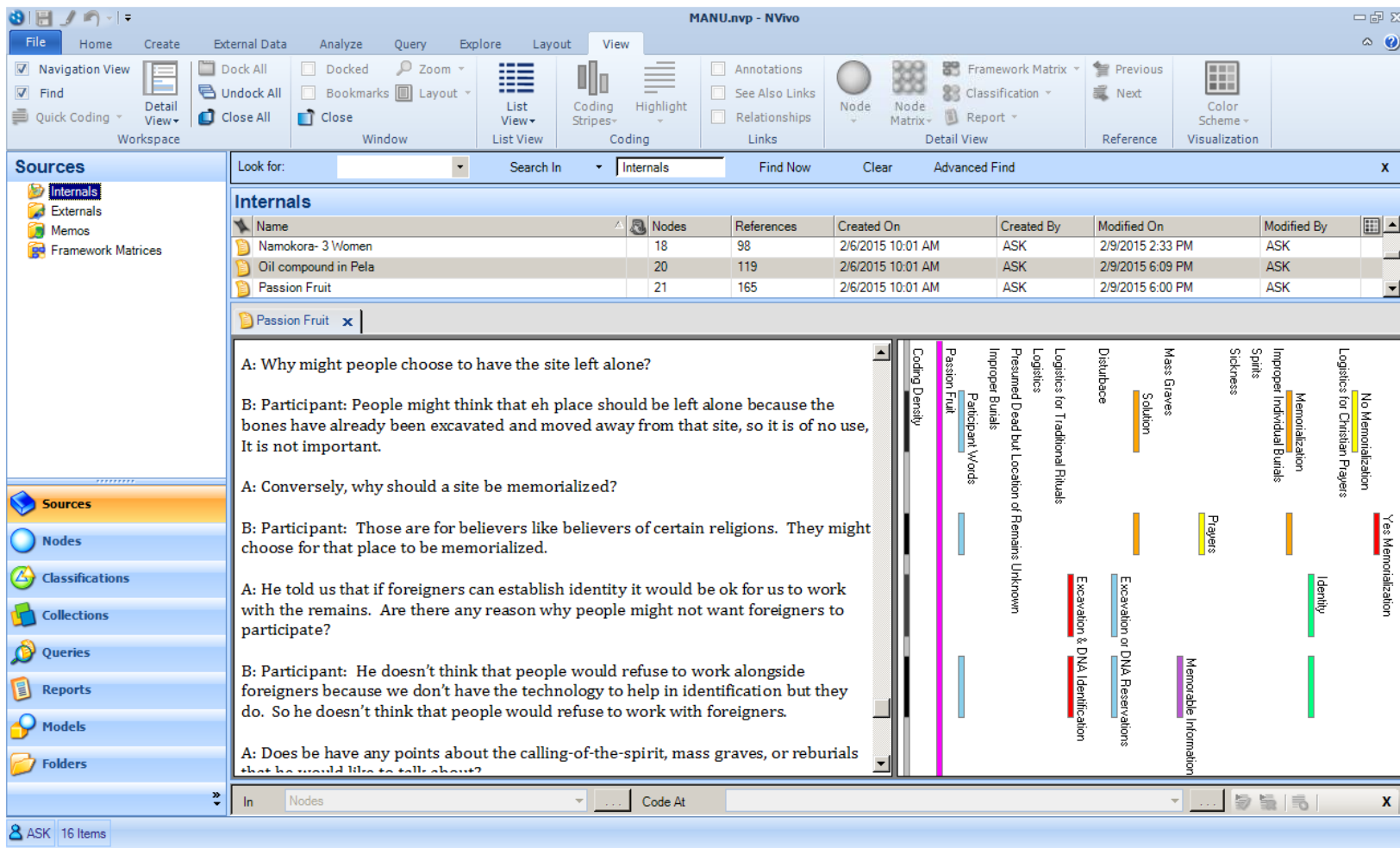


Figure 7. Screenshot of data and coding strips within NVivo 10.

structures, while keeping the created conceptual concepts that can illuminate relationships between structures rooted in the participants' respective empirical realities (Charmaz 2005: 508).

There are, however, limits to grounded-theory, which prevented me from using it in its entirety. Coding within qualitative research is rarely a strictly inductive practice, and this research is no exception. My first broad research question, which asks whether mass or improperly buried individual graves are problematic within Acholiland, is derived from reports in the literature and I have deductively investigated if this phenomenon is reflected in the collected data. Additionally, while producing and applying codes and categories an analyst is often constructing both inductive and tentative deductive codes, even if the former is more prevalent than the latter because there is still a constant consideration of the broader picture. Lastly, there are aspects of grounded-theory that I did not feel would be appropriate tools for this project, specifically category boundary building and the continual reduction of codes and categories to one core variable to be applied as a grand overarching theory (Saldaña 2009: 167). Both of these endeavors are limiting in that there are multiple forces that may influence a participant's perceptions and needs. As such, developing one explanatory theory defined by strict boundaries may cause the researcher to lose sight of the nuanced multi-dimensional realities of community members.

First Cycle Coding

The initial analysis of transcripts began by iteratively coding the transcripts in their entirety. First cycle coding included descriptive, value, initial, and process coding. All of these coding approaches can be seen as fundamental for laying the foundation on which more abstract analytical categories are built and were chosen before coding began based on their ability to answer the fundamental research questions. Descriptive coding is a basic starting point in qualitative research projects where the topic of the material is identified and coded. For example, if I asked about who was involved in a reburial ritual and a participant answered “elders and family members,” then the applied codes were ELDERS and FAMILY MEMBERS. The main function of this categorization process is to intimately acquaint the researcher with the breadth of topics in the data, to index the contents of the data, and to provide an organizational basis for searches and comparisons (Saldaña 2009: 72). These labels also often answer who, what, when, where, and how questions (Cope 2010: 283). As such, descriptive coding directly addresses the research questions concerning what should be done about improper burials, how this should be accomplished, and who should be involved.

Value coding applies labels that reflected a community member’s values, attitudes, or beliefs. This method was particularly important for ensuring that the constructed substantive categories were grounded in the reported perceptions and needs of the participants. This coding approach is also another way of getting at the question of what should be done about improper burials. For example, a common response to the question posed above was that prayer memorials in remembrance

of the deceased should be held annually. This information was subsequently coded as PRAYER because it reflected a participant's belief and values. As the analysis progressed, it became apparent that some codes, such as PRAYER, were too broad and that a finer degree of detail was needed. As such, when necessary, codes were sub-divided into child codes, or child nodes as they are labeled in NVivo. These more specific labels (PRAYER WITH TOLERANCE FOR TRADITIONAL RITUALS and PRAYER WITHOUT TOLERANCE FOR TRADITIONAL RITUALS) remained linked under its parent code but served as a more accurate reflection of participant attitude.

Process coding was used to investigate the consequences of actions or inaction and was directly useful in investigating the effects of improper burials. For example, a community member might detail that a family member who had been improperly buried had become a vengeful spirit (*cen*) and was causing nodding disease and nightmares within the family. This portion of text was subsequently coded as SPIRIT with sub-codes NIGHTMARE and SICKNESS.

All of the coding methods discussed above can also be considered a part of initial coding. Though it is less specific than any one of these approaches, initial coding directs the analyst to break down the data into distinct parts in order to compare and contrast these parts (Saldaña 2009: 81). This approach helped me to remain open to unexpected relationships and connections that I had not previously identified when I was coding with a particular method in mind. As an illustration of this point, on several occasions, participants talked about trying to identify human remains in advanced stages of decomposition based on their clothing or their teeth,

and said that those who could not be identified were more likely to be buried in mass graves. During the first cycle coding instances like these were coded as MEMORABLE INFORMATION because it suggested that individual identity was something the interviewee valued and could potentially become an important analytical code.

Second Cycle Coding

Second cycle coding methods move the analysis from descriptive labels to analytical codes, which are created through abstraction or reduction. Descriptive codes are combined into the categories that constitute interpretive conceptual themes, which is a significant aspect of the project because they are capable of interpreting why individuals or communities hold certain perspectives and act, or endeavor to act, in specific ways (Cope 2010: 283; Saldaña 2009: 149; Waitt 2010: 232). It is important to note that analytic codes can arise from sources other than descriptive codes. Some themes may have been present at the beginning of coding because they were embedded in the original research questions, or have been imported from the associated literature if these topics are a good fit for the data (Bernard 2006: 398; Cope 2010: 283; Saldaña 2009: 158).

Select parts of focused coding were the primary second cycle analysis method utilized in this research. During focused coding the researcher constructs categories “without attention to their properties or dimensions” (Saldaña 2009: 155). This method recognizes that an analytical theme may be constructed from elements that do not share the same descriptions but can be subsumed under a

broader category (See Figure 8). For example, the statements “Then there will be prayers and making Mato Oput” and “As Christians we need to follow the Christian way and not do sacrifices at the time of exhuming the bodies. We just need to pray and teach” have different parameters as the former includes tolerance of a traditional ritual that involves the slaughter of an animal (Mato Oput), while the latter does not. If a researcher were to draw strict boundaries around these perceptions these statements would fall under separate categories. However, such a practice ignores that these declarations both concern prayer and exist along a continuum of beliefs that can be held by Christians.

Once the analysis had reached a point where several topics were being produced, memoing- a method for recording potential relations between themes (Bernard 2006: 499)- was explored using the mind map software SimpleMind. Though memoing does not require connections to be displayed graphically, these charts helped me to visualize relationships and develop explanations of association. An additional method of coding that helped clarify relationships was simultaneous coding, which is when two or more codes are applied to the same datum or sequential text passage(s) (Saldaña 2009: 155). This is a useful tool when the data displays content that relates to multiple topics or is descriptively and analytically significant. For example, in the quote at the bottom of Figure 8 the participant states, “A mass ritual should be done at all mass grave sites in the region to appease the spirits of these people.” The descriptive topic of the sentence is RITUAL, but what about MASS GRAVE and SPIRITS? If I use simultaneous coding and labeled all

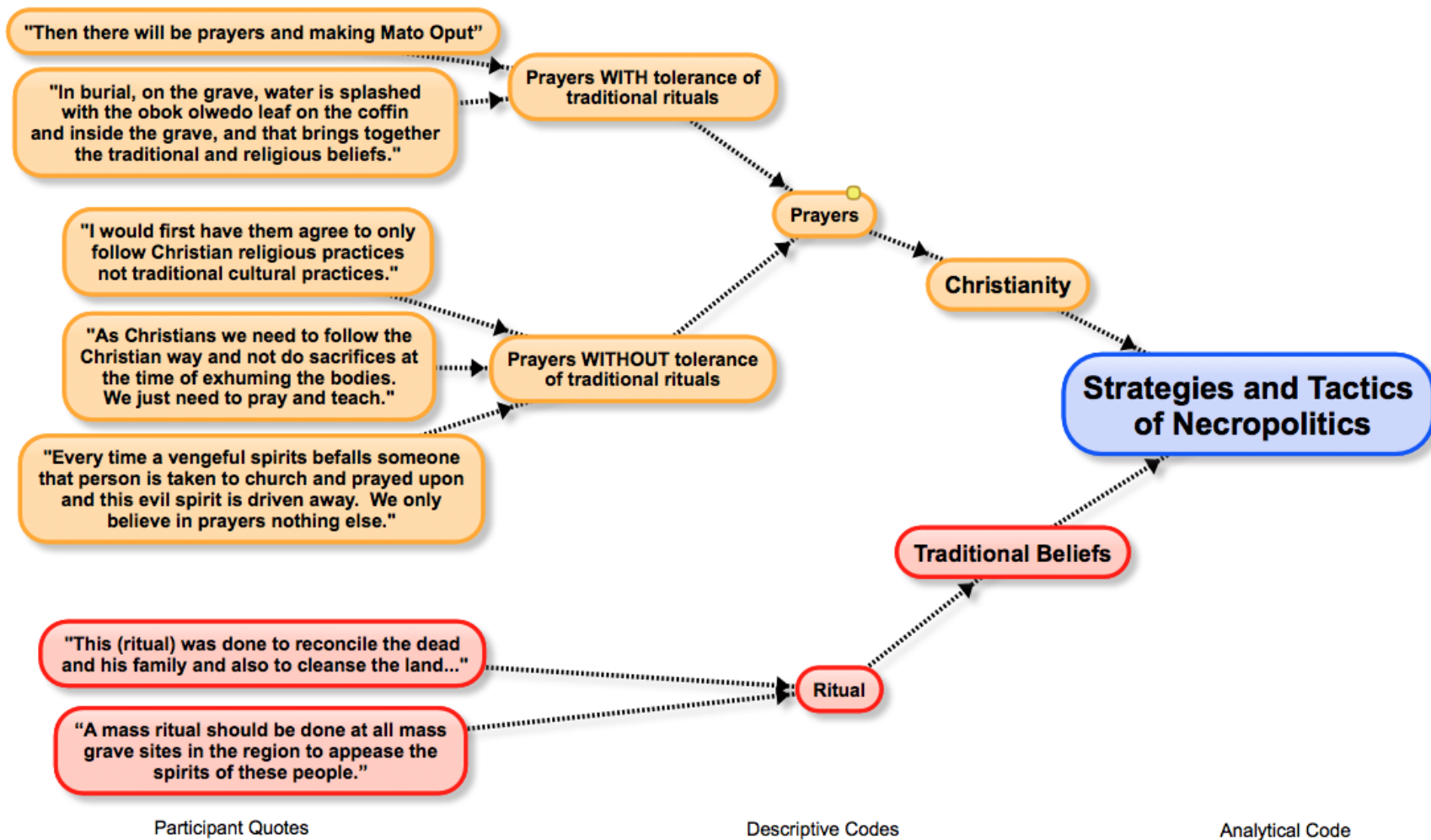


Figure 8. An illustration of how participant statements concerning improper burials can produce the central theme of necropolitics.

three, I then have the capability of using NVivo to compare instances where any of these codes co-occur and what that data says about the nature of this relationship.

Though I have written about these methods as separate entities, it is important to remember that ultimately several of these tactics are fluid and can occur concurrently. All coding, no matter which type, is a form of analysis and there are a variety of other schemas that can be utilized. However, the approaches outlined above were specifically chosen for their ability to address the research questions and inform upon the following findings, in a manner that was consistent with this study's goal of remaining grounded in the participant's perspectives.

Chapter Six

Findings and Discussion

Understanding Proper Burials

The initial questions in this research involved exploring whether participants viewed improper burials to be problematic, as was suggested by the literature (Amone-P'Olak 2007; Baines 2010; JRP 2007a, 2009, 2010; P'Bitek 1971; Proctor 2013; OHCHR 2007). However, in order to gain a better understanding of improper burials and their implications, it is first necessary to understand what people define as a proper burial and how the Luo understand death and the dead, or as they may be more appropriately labeled, the living-dead. Participants informed me that their knowledge on this subject and various other rituals was obtained from older family or clan members.

Assuming a family member has died from natural causes, the body is buried in an individual grave outside the door of the house, with women being buried on the left and men on the right (Narratives are provided in the footnotes as examples of the participants actual words and thoughts on the topics under discussion).⁹ This burial configuration demonstrates to the spirit of the deceased that they have remained a part of the family. This placement also ensures that the living-dead, who inhabit the world of the living as ancestors, feel like they have received a proper

⁹ “Now when somebody dies, he or she is buried at the site of their door as you go out of the house. If you are a woman you are buried on the left hand, of you are a man you are buried on the right hand side of the house. Very close to the door, and it goes around until they leave this house for another house or migrate somewhere else” (male religious leader).

burial and are being remembered.¹⁰ If the community members also practice traditional rituals then first and second funeral rites would need to be conducted (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 74). As was described to me, during the first funeral rights, a goat was killed and its *wee* - undigested food within the small intestine - was spread around the grave and on the individuals who physically dug the grave.¹¹ This act, which cleanses the area, is done while entreating the spirit to rest in peace, to bring blessings upon the family, and to not cause further disturbances. *Wee* was reported as an important ingredient in many traditional rituals and was chosen because sheep and goats eat a wide variety of food, which increase the chances the mixture created in their stomachs will work as a spiritual cleansing agent and will appease the spirit of the deceased.¹² Second or final funeral rites require more substantial funds and may occur years after the deceased has passed away. These large celebrations are attended by both friends and family and require precise gifts to be given to specific family members. Interestingly, one

¹⁰ "These people are buried so because they are still a part of the family.... they are called the living dead. They live" (male religious leader).

¹¹ "The goat is slaughtered to cleanse those ones who dug the grave and buried the bones (the goat is not used to cleanse everyone but only those who did the digging, put the remains in the grave and did the refilling). They (these few people) are made to kneel down and *wee* is smeared on them, this is for cleansing so that nothing bad happens to them" (male elder).

¹² "The reason why it (*wee*) was specifically chosen is because the goat or the sheep eat so many things; different kinds of leaves, grasses, various types of soil. So the Acholi's thought it wise that all this that it eats will at the end mix up" (male elder).

celebration can serve as the final funeral rites for multiple individuals.¹³ If the family practices Christianity, then prayers at the first burial will be all that is necessary. After having fulfilled these obligations a family or community will have upheld their obligation to the dead and would not expect the spirit to cause future problems.

Improper Burials as Moral Violations

All informants, despite age, sex, socio-economic status, and belief system reported that improper burials were a problem because the spirits of the deceased who have yet to receive proper burials had become *cen* and were disturbing them. This disturbance was said to manifest as nightmares, sickness, death, poor harvest, haunting, and possession.¹⁴ As illustrated in Chapter Three, failing in one's burial obligations constitutes a moral violation against the ancestors. These spirits, many of whom may already be angry because of the circumstances of their death, become

¹³ "Assuming you have both cases where someone was killed and another were some one died normally; all there funeral rites can be done at the same time or concurrently. Then their spirits will be appeased because everything has been done" (adult male).

¹⁴ "If the bodies are not retrieved the spirit of the deceased will appear in dreams and haunt the family members. For instance it would complain why hasn't their bodies yet been brought home. And it will bring misfortune to the family" (adult male). "My own child, the deceased, seized him like a demon and made him mad" (adult female). "People, but most especially children, from the families of the deceased are being haunted. The haunted are falling sick any many have died so far because of that" (adult female). "That mass grave site, sometime when we walk past it in the night, spirits will appear to you in the form of a living person" (male elder).

even more so once they feel that their family has forgotten them.¹⁵ The amount of time it took for a spirit to become *cen* depended on the reality of the living. Several participants not only cited insecurity as a major factor in the creation of improper graves, but also as a reason why the spirit had not bothered them during times of intense conflict.¹⁶ The spirit seemed to understand that the situation was simply too dangerous. If disturbances from spirits are in part due to survivors' psychological anxiety of not fulfilling obligations, then perhaps this defensible grace period arose from the living knowing that there was nothing that could be done. However, as soon as security within the region improved this justification for inaction was no longer tenable.¹⁷ The absence of resources necessary to conduct proper burials did not seem to be a legitimate excuse in the eyes of the spirits. Despite the problems this brought, many families reported that they had not yet done burials or rituals because they lacked the capacity or were in the process of organizing for the

¹⁵ "The spirit of the dead might be unhappy because he was innocently abducted and killed" (adult female). "Someone who is buried away from home and their body is not brought home will become vengeful and start disturbing people. This is because the Acholi believe the spirit will be upset because its bones have not been brought home" (male elder). "His spirit will be unhappy thinking that it has been neglected and totally forgotten about. So it will cause the same kind of death to happen and it will bring sicknesses as well" (adult male).

¹⁶ "The spirit was not disturbing us because the war was still going, the spirit thought it was not safe for the family" (adult male).

¹⁷ "Once peace came we thought about bringing the body home. In 2005 it was a little peaceful and people would sneak to the bush (to bring relatives home)" (adult male).

event.¹⁸ Families that could raise the funds and had conducted a culturally appropriate reburial or calling-of-the-spirit ceremony reported that they were no longer experiencing problems. This finding corresponds with Eppel's research in Zimbabwe, where families who were also being disturbed by the dead benefited psychologically and socially from reburials (2014).

Personal guilt and identity seemed to play a large role in determining which spirits were responsible for a family's problems. For example, in several interviews individuals reported that non-familial remains were buried on their land or that they lived in proximity to burials, but did not feel that these remains were bothering them or their family.¹⁹ In these instances problems arose not from the unknown spirits but from known family members. This finding emphasizes the importance of the deceased identity, a prominent theme throughout the research. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the presence or absence of identity affects not only mental health, but also the likelihood of being buried in a mass grave and the subsequent method used to appease spirits once individuals have been interred.

¹⁸ "I am also a poor woman and cannot afford to buy the requirements for the ritual" (female elder). "The first time they did it (had a memorial ceremony) they were supported by Caritas, so they did not do it the next time around because they did not have the capacity to lobby for food, to cook for people and all that" (adult males and females).

¹⁹ "For those who are buried here they are not our relatives so they are not bothering us but they could be disturbing their own families" (adult female).

The Multifaceted Notion of “Improper”

This discovery that unknown remains are less problematic than known remains demonstrates an interesting distinction between cause and effect. Improper burials and human remains in and of themselves are not the problem; they were the cause of the real issue, vengeful spirits.²⁰ Yet what constitutes “improper” is not solely based on the location of the grave, the number of individuals in the grave, or the absence of rituals or prayers. Other important factors include the status of the interred (whether they were soldiers or noncombatants), and what activities happened during the initial burial. Participants were less concerned about *cen* if the dead were combatants and had been fighting for either the NRA/UPDF or the LRA. Conversely, the death of noncombatants or people who had died “innocently” or had been “maliced” to death was seen as a far greater crime and was accompanied by more severe consequences.²¹ Lastly, one group I spoke with were undisturbed by a mass grave they had created because the bodies were decomposed beyond the point of recognition and prayers had been done at the time of the burial. As this community was predominantly Christian,

²⁰ “I will need to tell you that what is disturbing people are not the skeletons. The thing that disturbs people is the spirit of the dead and not the skeleton. This is because spirits are hanging around everywhere” (female cultural leader).

²¹ “[t]he spirits of people who were maliced to death or innocently killed will start disturbing people” (male elder). “Our son died innocently and very badly and we know the spirit is very annoyed and so we need to call his spirit back home first” (adult female) “She believes that the spirits are angry and that is why they are causing problems, because they were innocent civilians, peasant farmers, who were picked up from villages and just murdered. However, if they were soldiers killed in combat then there wouldn’t have been any kind of problem” (adult female).

prayers spoken over the unknown transformed this mass grave into an appropriate burial, even though this form of internment has historically been taboo within Acholiland (JRP 2007a).²² Of course, whether this approach is deemed adequate depends on the participant's religious orientations.

Traditional Acholi Cosmology

Individuals who follow traditional Acholi cosmology believed that improper burials should be addressed through specific rituals. The following section will provide a general outline of how several rituals associated with mass graves are conducted. The data did display minor variations in how these rituals were conducted, for example, there was some disagreement as to whether a goat or a sheep was most appropriate for specific rituals. Most of the participants mentioned that a goat was used if a person had died a non-violent death, while a sheep was used if the deceased had been murdered. Given this nuance it is possible that the discrepancies are not actually disagreements in how the ritual is conducted, but translation errors. Though there are other older explanations of how these traditions are performed (Harlacher and Gulu Archdiocese 2006; JRP 2006a, 2006b) traditions are not static entities but mobile performances that often change to meet

²² "Do you consider this mass grave to be a proper burial?" (interviewer). "It is a proper burial because a priest presided over it [when the bodies were being buried]" (male elder). "After ramming the bones down, the grave was cemented. After cementing the grave people cooked at the gravesite, at the mass gravesite, after cooking people ate, some even cooked from their homes. After everyone had eaten prayers were done, and then that was all" (adult male). "Is that considered a proper burial for these people?" (interviewer) "They think that we have given them a proper burial" (female elder).

the evolving requirements of the people. Therefore, as needs change so may interpretations of tradition, and if the goal is to produce meaningful change, then practitioners should not ignore new realities and cannot solely rely on descriptions of traditions made in the past.

During a reburial ritual, a sheep is brought to the gravesite. Participants may also bring a goat if the land around the grave needs to be cleansed. An adult slaughters the sheep, and its *wee* is sprinkled in and around the grave. *Wee* may also be smeared on those who physically excavate the grave in order to protect them from the spirit. During this process, clan elders communicate with the spirit. They recognize that the deceased may not have deserved their fate, and the living tell the spirit (whether it has become *cen* or not) that this ritual is a step towards a proper burial and a clear indication that the deceased has not been forgotten. They entreat the spirit to bring blessings to the family instead of causing calamity. Those present then eat the remains of sheep, and any leftovers are left at the gravesite. If the land needs to be cleansed of *cen*, then the goat is slaughtered, and its *wee* is spread around the grave and in the bush. The carcass is then roasted and left in the bush without being consumed. About half of the respondents stated that after exhumation a *yago* fruit is placed in the old grave before it is refilled as a symbolic replacement of the body.²³ When the remains are brought home, they are laid to

²³ “The Acholis choose to use *yago* because that fruit happen to be a killer, because back then a woman had gone weeding for finger millet and left her child sleeping under a *yago* tree. When it was time for the mother to breast feed, the mother found that the baby had passed out and so she caused an alarm. People gathered and found the boy dead, then took the baby home for burial but before they could bury him, he came back to life before he could get buried. That’s when the elders decided

rest in a single grave facing away from the compound. During the reburial, another sheep is slaughtered, and its *wee* is again spread in and around the grave and on the physical laborers. This ritual completes the first funeral rites and ensures that the spirit is appeased and will not haunt the reburial site. Most of the participants, who wished to incorporate traditional cosmology, were adamant that a sacrifice needed to be made at the excavation site and at the homestead for this ritual to be considered a proper burial.²⁴ Deviations from this procedure were not considered to be proper and the spirit would not be appeased. As such, several respondents commented that they had not conducted reburials because they lacked the required number of animals.²⁵ The youth are not excluded from this process but their role is limited to that of a bystander in order for them to learn how the ritual is conducted.

Ajwaki (translated in English as “witchdoctors”) are instrumental in calling-of-the-spirit ceremonies, which are conducted to summon the spirit of a family member home if the location of the physical remains is unknown or if the remains cannot be accessed. Documentation compiled by the Justice and Reconciliation Project has noted that ritual ceremonies involving witchdoctors are “less rigidly defined, and the *ajwaka* determines the specific process after first interacting with

to bury the elephant fruit [*yago*] in the grave that had been dug for the baby. From then on that is why that fruit is used” (male elder). “After removing the body, you put the soil back into the grave. Yago is dropped into the grave where the wee has been poured already and the grave is refilled” (female cultural leader).

²⁴ “It’s not a proper burial because only one goat was used and yet there was need for another one to be slaughtered back at home” (adult female).

²⁵ “Because we couldn’t afford to get another goat that burial wasn’t proper at all” (male elder).

the spirit and learning its demands” (2012b: 5). This flexibility in ritual procedure can explain why informants gave two different explanations for how this ceremony was performed. In instances where the location of the remains is unknown an elder blows a horn while a family member calls the name of the spirit. The *ajwaka* is in the house and beckons the family to enter once the spirit has come. At this point the spirit will speak to the family through the *ajwaka*, and the family will be able to recognize the deceased’s speech pattern.²⁶ The family will ask the spirit why it is angry and then attempt to fulfill its wishes. This may require telling the spirit that they are still considered to be part of the family and providing blood from a sacrificed goat in a calabash (a gourd cut in half) in order to quench the thirst of the spirit.

The second version of this ceremony calls the spirit home when the remains cannot be retrieved. During this ritual, a burning torch is taken into the bush at night. A family member or close friend will call the name of the deceased and tell them that they have come to take the spirit back home while plucking a branch off of the *oboke olwedo* tree.²⁷ At this point a horn is blown and people return to the home of the deceased’s mother in silence without looking back.²⁸ Once the participants have reached their destination a chicken egg, which the spirit enters, is covered with

²⁶ Participants reported that a spirit may choose not to speak but even if other spirits are thought to be in the area only the spirit called by name will come.

²⁷ The leaves of the *oboke olwedo* tree are thought to bring blessings. This belief has also been incorporated into Catholic beliefs.

²⁸ When I questioned why people did not look back I was informed that the spirit would become angry that it had been seen and refuse to come home.

the *oboke olwedo* branch. At this point the spirit has been called home and will consider itself a recognized member of the family again.

The examples described thus far all pertain to individual burials. When I made inquiries into how mass graves should be treated I was informed that if individual identity could be established the rituals would be the same as for individual burials.²⁹ In the absence of known identity, it was suggested that the most appropriate approach to appease spirits whose bodies were in a mass grave would be to call the spirit home. However, none of the participants who were thought to have family members in a mass grave had actually done this, either because the knowledge that a family member's remains were known to be in an improper burial causes anxiety that could not be remedied by a calling-of-the-spirit ceremony, or a collective clan decision had been made to follow Christian beliefs instead of traditional rituals. Additionally, a lack of capacity is also an issue because this ceremony requires funds and resources to be used by and paid to the *ajwaka* who conducts the ritual – a potentially costly endeavor as the services rendered by a witchdoctor can be expensive. Taken together these challenges may indicate that the popularity of Christian prayers may be in part a byproduct of their practicality,

²⁹ This procedure does not automatically imply that all of the excavated remains would require two sheep to be slaughtered. Some of the participants reported that it would be acceptable for the animal slaughtered at the excavation site to represent all of the exhumed remains. While some community members felt that this sacrifice would require an upgrade from a sheep to a cow or bull, others reported that a sheep would surface. In the event of an excavation a consensus would have to be reached before the actual event took place. Despite these different opinions, participants were adamant that every set of remains would require the sacrifice of separate sheep once the body had been returned to the family compound for reburial; a prerequisite that may prove to be prohibitively expensive for many families.

convenience, and relative lack of expense.

Christian Denominations

Participants who self-reported as Anglican, Catholic, or evangelical (Pentecostal) all espoused that prayer was all that was necessary to appease *cen*.³⁰ Religious leaders of these denominations conveyed that their primary opposition to rituals arose from the use of sacrifices. For them, the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ eliminated the need for other sacrifices.³¹ This viewpoint is difficult to reconcile with traditional cosmology because of the view that if rituals do not include sacrifices the result will be the same as if no action had been taken. The primary difference between these denominations was that Catholics and moderate Anglicans were willing to compromise and allow rituals to be done as long as prayers were also done, while evangelicals and conservative Anglicans of the *balokole* tradition

³⁰ “[I]t is only prayers that can appease the spirits of the deceased” (adult male). “Concerning disturbances, he felt that the spirits only bother people if they believe in them so prayer for the devout should be enough” (religious leader).

³¹ “Jesus suffered, and was tortured and crucified on our behalf. He was sacrificed so no other sacrifices are needed. You don’t need to kill a goat or a sheep because Jesus Christ was killed like a sheep to redeem us, to cut off the traditional beliefs because his sacrifice was the only sheep we need. He’s a good shepherd because he sacrificed his life to redeem us. So why should we continue to do other sacrifices? His sacrifice was once and for all for our salvation to redeem us” (religious leader). “Because for us we believe the Jesus Christ has already sacrificed himself, so slaughtering of the lambs will not now add anything, any value. Because the death of Jesus Christ actually cleared out everything. So the slaughtering of goats and lambs is of not benefit anymore” (religious leader).

firmly oppose any involvement of rituals.³² All three of these groups have similar approaches to conducting prayers for improper individual burials or mass graves. Additionally, many religious practitioners believed that offering prayers eliminated the need to do a calling-of-the-spirit ceremony (or to use *ajwaki*). The elements of the prayers include: laying out the life history of the deceased (including how they died); giving comfort to the family and friends; teaching moral lessons that are pertinent to the situation or the church's cause; preparing the living to face their own deaths in time; asking forgiveness of the spirit if the remains being buried do not correspond to the correct individual; and a call to the congregation to remain psychologically stable because the spirits of the innocent would rest in peace and not disturb the living.³³

³² "I have never been involved or invited to attend a reburial but I would first have them agree to only follow Christian religious practices not traditional cultural practices" (religious leader). "She does not believe it traditional rituals so they should not be done. For her she thinks that prayer will solve everything" (adult female).

³³ "He mentioned that the prayer should include a section an asking for forgiveness in the event that the remains being buried are not the suspected person" (religious leader). "If the people know that somebody has committed his or her life to the lord of has not, this is why the life history of the deceased has to be read. As a leader, as a shepherd, you might know that the deceased was not committed to the church, so the sermon should be contextual" (religious leader). "The substance of the prayers is first of all you declare that we were not the ones who killed you and be known that the circumstance of your death might have been gray but as a human being you deserve a decent burial and it is awkward to see your [loved] ones just littered around. That is it is not good. So we just say, 'We as human beings would like to bury you just like other human beings and give you a decent burial. We pray that you remain peaceful and rest in peace' (religious leader). "During the prayers the background of the two people killed was read to the congregation, to the mourners. They also told the mourners how they were killed. During his sermon the reverend

Almost all of the participants that I interviewed, including those who only supported the use of prayers, knew what was involved in the rituals associated with the dead, and most knew how they were conducted. The prevalence of this knowledge indicates that traditional rituals are still important to communities and are still being used. As such, taking the political middle road and allowing for both prayers and rituals is advantageous for Catholics and Anglicans because it does not alienate community members who feel that rituals are essential. This stance also renders these two denominations an attractive option for communities and individuals who incorporate aspects of both traditional cosmology and Christian religion into their lives. This moderate stance is not new as both Catholics and Anglicans saw early success in their missionary endeavors in Uganda by allowing for a greater degree of accommodation for traditional practices (Pirouet 1978: 5). Even between these two groups, different degrees of tolerance factor into the success of early Christian movements, with Catholics requiring fewer Christian commitments, such as monogamy and the renouncement of “worldly objects,” than Anglicans (Pirouet 1978: 10-12). By appealing to a greater constituency these denomination have the potential to translate demographic or numerical advantages into social and political power, which ultimately increases the likelihood that the churches

prayed upon the spirits that the souls of the deceased should rest in peace because they were innocently murdered” (adult male). “[D]uring the ceremony he told everyone to be at peace and be stable in their mind because that people that were killed in that land were innocent people, that had [committed] no crime although some were rebels. He also told the people who owned the land around or a garden around to continue tilling their land, nothing bad will happen” (adult male).

objectives and goals are met. Ultimately, I cannot definitively say that political gain trumps spiritual pursuits, but the diversity of opinions for how improper burials and *cen* could be addressed within Christian denominations does suggest that political and religious motives are interwoven.

Necropolitics

Given the similarities in how various Christian denominations would ideally like to see the issue of *cen* addressed why are there discrepancies in tolerance levels? I propose that this dynamic is, in part, a reflection of these groups historical approach to traditional practices and a strategic attempt to control or exert influence over the living vis-à-vis the dead. We have seen that there is a close and continual relationship between the living-dead and the living (Baines 2010; JRP 2006b; P'Bitek 1971), so much so that a failure to fulfill obligations to the dead can result in reduced psychological and psychosocial health. Whoever can claim control over the dead, or more specifically how the living interface with the dead, gains a vast amount of political and social power. This process is nothing new and such attempts are far from novel within northern Uganda. There are numerous examples within Acholiland's recent past where different political or social groups attempted to gain a monopoly over the control of the dead. For example, when Christian missionaries moved into Acholiland they demonized *ajwaki* in an attempt to reduce the control and power these individuals possessed. More recently when UNLA soldiers fled north to escape the NRA, lineage-based elders claimed that they were the only entity capable of addressing *cen*, a claim that provided them power over not

only the soldiers that carried *cen*, but the populace in general, as vengeful spirits can contagiously disturb one's family and community (Baines 2005). Additionally, through the combination of traditional cosmology and Christianity Alice Lakwena was immensely successful in consolidating control and very quickly became both influential and popular within northern communities (Behrend 1999).

Thus necropolitics both between religious and traditional authorities, and between Christian denominations in northern Uganda is a power struggle over who has the authority to control how the dead are managed, and how people psychologically cope with uncertainty. By disagreeing with or denying the validity of rituals, Christian authorities are limiting the power of "traditional" cultural leaders. Once again, I have separated the discussed of traditional and religious practices in order to present the data. However, such a distinction is not mirrored in the perceptions of the participants. The mere observation that so many Christians believe that *cen* is real illustrates that Christianity has been indigenized and demonstrates that aspects of traditional culture are very important to communities. By recognizing this importance and being more tolerant of traditional rituals moderate Anglican and Catholic leaders are gaining the potentially profitable middle ground.

Currently the number of mass graves in northern Uganda is unknown, and this particular type of burial is problematic within Acholiland for several reasons. Traditionally, burying multiple people in one grave was seen as taboo (JRP 2007a), because not only were the deceased buried away from their families home, but it was thought that the individual spirits would be uncomfortable sharing one space

and subsequently cause problems.³⁴ However, community members created many of the known mass graves within the research area during times of insecurity and when remains had become unrecognizable. At various times within the region, intense conflict has either forced people to flee or prevented them from providing adequate burials. Often this meant that people would return to decomposing and sometimes scavenged human remains. This scenario is particularly troubling within Acholi culture because the living are obliged to afford some form of burial to these individuals, seeing remains littered across the landscape is traumatic, and a failure to afford proper respect to a dead body is a transgression against moral order known as *kiir* and can cause *cen* (JRP 2007a). As such, mass graves were sometimes created for remains that could no longer be individually identified. Mass graves were also a practical solution for survivors grappling with insecurity, a reduced capacity to provide appropriate burials, and the fear that taking home the wrong remains would anger the spirits. Ultimately, the traditional value placed on the deceased's identity now shapes the paths available for communities to address the consequences of mass graves. One of the major reasons for the creation of mass graves now prevents reburial rituals because the living cannot establish identity or the remains have become commingled.

³⁴ "It will bring so many problems, and evil spirit could haunt people in their dreams or will besiege someone and make them go mad. It can bring sicknesses to both children and parents. Basically because the bodies and the spirits are not comfortable in one grave" (adult male).

Some of the informants recalled scenarios where *ajwaki* sorted remains.³⁵ Even though the people knew that this method was potentially flawed, they still gained some form of psychological relief because the community had done all that they could given the options that were available to them. However, most of the participants did not believe *ajwaki* had the ability to accurately assign identity and had not used their services.³⁶ Given these restraints, prayer has become the only other option for coping with angry spirits.

Forensic Exhumations and DNA Identification

Forensic exhumations and DNA identification have the potential to aid in the process of addressing the *cen* in mass graves by reassigning individual identity. In order to avoid imposing a top-down solution, it was first necessary to investigate if such a resolution would be desirable and feasible. Considering the range of needs, perceptions, and beliefs that exist within Acholiland, such an evaluation would be a huge undertaking and a thorough investigation of the logistics of a forensic endeavor in this region is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, the

³⁵ “The reason why identification is very important is that we the Acholis believe that if you happen to take the wrong bones home there will be effects to the family. That’s why however hard it is to identify elders will have to seek council from the witch doctor. Even if the witchdoctor gives them the wrong bones the spirit will do no harm” (male elder).

³⁶ “Ok but to say that an ignorant person who calls himself or herself an ajwaka can do that (sort remains), I don’t believe in that.” (religious leader) “They say that they don’t believe witchdoctors can actually separate or identify bodies. Then Mama interjected and said that she doesn’t believe in witchdoctors doing that because she thinks that they mislead people with lies” (adult female).

following results and their broader implications should be considered preliminary findings.

Questions pertaining to DNA samples and conducting analyses on the remains were incorporated in order to make a cursory assessment as to whether the procedures often involved with forensic excavations and identification would be compatible with local perceptions of how the dead should be treated. This inquiry included questions about non-Acholi personnel handling remains, providing DNA samples, and the families' willingness to relinquish remains for the extended time necessary to test the remains. Again, this was only a preliminary investigation, and this list of questions was not extensive. Parts of these conversations also included fielding questions about what DNA could not do, such as identifying spouses from their partner's DNA sample.

In general, the data revealed that the perceived appropriateness of this option was dependent upon the individual's belief system. Evangelicals and conservative Anglicans felt that excavations and DNA identifications would be unnecessary because only prayers were needed to appease vengeful spirits. Additionally, excavations were not desirable because they would require animal sacrifices, which were associated with non-Christian cultural practices, and as such were rejected by born-again practitioners. Additionally, some informants expressed that they would not want excavations because seeing the remains again would be too emotionally upsetting and would only add salt to old wounds, whereas prayers

for believers were a less painful healing process.³⁷

Catholic and moderate Anglican religious leaders reported that if the public desired excavations and DNA identifications they would have no issue supporting such an endeavor.³⁸ Yet, despite the influences of Acholi cosmology on the expression of Christianity in the region, these informants did not envision a ceremony that involved a hybrid of both prayers and rituals; instead, these activities could occur in the same space as long as they were conducted at different times. For example, when questioned about how the demands of ritual and religion would be reconciled, I was told that the process would likely be the same approach used by those who were already practicing religious dualism; prayers one day and rituals

³⁷ "I would not accept that to be done because this person has already been buried, and even if you separate them and bring them to me I will still have to bury the bones and it will make no difference. The only thing that I want is for the resources that would be spent and this to be directed to compensation and setting up a structure at the mass gravesite. Separating bones are not important, we need the spirit to be appeased" (adult male). "[T]his will bring bad memories back and open up people's wounds" (adult male). "According to what they are saying, an excavation would bring bad memories because people will start seeing bones again and the actual opening of the grave will uncover the wounds. The church that they want, every time people go there to pray people will give themselves to God because even though it is a memorial they are healing themselves, it is a healing process to them. An excavation would open up their wounds again. So in that case prayers are a psychosocial support to them" (adult females).

³⁸ "Personally it would be very good because the families would be able to pick the remains of the deceased and take to their homes. In that way it will even make them happy because they will know that it is the bones of the beloved member of the family. Because according to the African perspective if a person is buried well at least you know that the tension will be lessened a bit, even according to the Catholic Church. When you see the grave of somebody that pain that you have will be lessened" (religious leader).

the next.³⁹ Community members in this category also expressed that they would support excavations and DNA identifications because even though they would only be using prayers during the reburial, the reestablishment of identity fulfilled their need to bring the correct set of remains home, and by extension appease the associated *cen*.

For participants who did not identify as born-again Christian, the response to excavation and identification was largely supportive, with the majority of the participants' inquiries pertaining to the process and science behind DNA identification.⁴⁰ For those interested in doing rituals, DNA identification would provide a vital first step, and indeed participants who followed these beliefs expressed that this assistance would be welcomed. A general summary of the

³⁹ "If a community insisted on using a sacrifice would the church refuse to come until it was over or would they just stand aside until it was done?" (interviewer) "No, because Caritas in Gulu has been supporting the local people with even they could buy the goats or the lamb and the local people and the local people could do their traditional way of cleansing of the spirit" (religious leader)... "You guys would be there during the ceremony and afterwards you would lead a prayer or how would they interface together?" (interviewer). "Normally that one is done in our absence. We don't involve ourselves in such. Because we don't want to be party to that (animal sacrifice), if we come we come for prayers. We don't want to mix the traditional way of doing things with our belief" (religious leader). "So these different practices can coexist but they are not going to become a hybrid?" (interviewer). "Ya, that one is done on separate occasions, not one the same day" (religious leader).

⁴⁰ One participant expressed that the time allotted to test and compare DNA samples between excavation and reburial should be not longer than three days in order to avoid cultural violations. As this is not feasible, if this were a widespread requirement then excavation and DNA identification would not be appropriate for this population. However, when I asked about this requirement in subsequent interviews, participants expressed that this was an old burial guideline for dealing with fresh human remains, and that since the deceased have been in the ground for years this requirement was no longer applicable.

responses emphasized a desire for identifications, an acknowledgement that local communities currently lacked the ability to make positive identifications on their own, with the conclusion being that they would accept help from outsiders.⁴¹ The critique can be leveled that this approach would not be as beneficial to younger generations because a decade of internment in IDP camps hindered the transmission of cultural values. However, even though the youth may be less familiar with traditional practices they have not made a complete break from history and do not live in a vacuum removed from disturbances that are considered to be social and spiritual in nature.

These ambiguities concerning the appropriateness of excavation and DNA identifications demonstrates that if excavations and identifications were to be pursued, there would first need to be extensive efforts to educate communities on the various components and requirements of forensic excavation and DNA identification. This process must also cover the type of results that can and cannot be delivered, as well as the limitations involved with this type of identification. The questions that the participants voiced demonstrated that if this avenue were to be explored further it would require an expansive educational program to teach the population how genetics and DNA work so that communities are willing to accept

⁴¹ “Because they don’t have the capacity to find out what has happened to their family members they go the traditional way. However even if foreigners could come and help with excavation and help identify the real bone of their child it will really be good for them” (adult female). “Since we do not have the technology to match people to their families and if you people do then it would be ok if you do the tests” (adult male). “He doesn’t think that people would refuse to work alongside foreigners because we don’t have the technology to help in identification but they do. So he doesn’t think that people would refuse to work with foreigners” (adult male).

any potential results as reliable determinations. The importance of belief should not be underestimated. Participants must believe that DNA can accurately identify people and that the remains returned to them belong to their lost loved one. Wagner has demonstrated this point through her work in the former Yugoslavia, where huge portions of the population were asked to give DNA samples in order to make identifications. The distinction Wagner observed was the difference in accepting information and believing in it (2008: 119). This discrepancy is important because for social repair to occur from such an effort people need to believe in the process and the results, an assertion mirrored by the participants.⁴² However, this approach does privilege a certain type of knowledge production. The reliance on DNA could create an environment that only leaves room for one authentic identity and discounts or downplays other ways of knowing (Wagner 2008: 120). For example, what would this mean for *ajwaki* whose practices may produce other answers? A thorough investigation of this question was beyond the scope of this research but interviewee perceptions of witchdoctors seemed to indicate that their methods were falling out of favor, perhaps as a result of being demonized by Christianity.⁴³ When asked if foreign investigators and *ajwaki* could work together one informant indicated that such cooperation would be unlikely.⁴⁵

⁴² “You know how you mentioned DNA, well you can run DNA tests on bones if you have collected DNA samples from the living relatives and match them” (interviewer). “We agree with that if it can be done and if people accept that” (religious leader).

⁴³ “We don’t trust the work of the witchdoctors anymore and we can’t depend on them for anything, we would prefer to follow the Christian believes because it brings about peace and forgiveness to us” (adult female).

Lastly, for those who wished to conduct traditional funeral rites, the retrieval and identification of remains would only be the first of several steps. If social repair through the appeasement of *cen* originating from improper depositions were the goal of identifications, then intervening organizations would also have to consider the capacity of communities to produce the items necessary to fulfill necessary obligations. An example from the data indicates that failure to conduct both first and second funeral rites can result in *cen*.⁴⁶ Would the intervening agencies be the ones to provide these resources?

Capacity within Communities

The importance of capacity or lack thereof was a constant thread in many of the interviews. Participants expressed that severe looting during conflict had meant that even if there had not been so much insecurity they still lacked the livestock and other requirements needed to complete reburial rituals. The inability to afford these same materials was frequently the explanation given for not having completed

⁴⁴ There is also the possibility that participants were unwilling to divulge to outsiders the extent to which they used *ajwakas*.

⁴⁵ “Will it be better to work with the witch doctors (over foreigners), or will the witchdoctors cause bad things to happen if they are replaced?” (interviewer). “One stool cannot be shared by two people if it has been decided that a witchdoctor should do the work then their technology should not be involved and vice versa” (male elder).

⁴⁶ “The spirit of the boy has not come into any of their dreams or brought any other problem at home, but instead it is the spirit of her late husband that comes in her dreams and to one of her daughters (adult female).” “Were they able to give him a proper burial?” (interviewer). “He was given a proper burial however they have not yet done the last funeral rites. So that could be the cause” (adult female).

rituals years after greater security has been achieved, a factor which only contributes to anxiety and psychosocial distress (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 78). The cost of conducting rituals may also be influential in decisions on whether to use prayers or traditional ceremonies to mitigate angry spirits.

Necropolitics as an Economic Tool

Cen is a pressing issue that affects the lives of individuals but it is not the only issue Acholi families may struggle with. Many of the families who had loved ones in known individual graves reported that they would like to conduct rituals but lacked the funds to provide all of the necessary material for an excavation, reburial, and funeral rites. In addition, during difficult economic times, the return of remains and their proper burial does not contribute to an individual's survival needs. The daily needs of the living may be more immediate and trump the needs of the dead. Economic survival can also motivate the living to use the dead in order to meet daily needs. The pursuit of such efforts may motivate communities to intentionally overlook improper burials, such as mass graves, or to be strategic in how they choose to address this issue. If explanations for an individual's actions can "emerge from contextualized social situations" (Finnström 2008: 21), it is then appropriate to consider necropolitics, which is defined in this research as the use of the dead to pursue political, social, and economic ends. For example, communities may choose to maintain the presence of mass graves in order to keep the issue of their losses and the fact that the government failed to protect them in the public eye. Some

survivors of the Mucwini massacre in northern Uganda, where 56 people died, felt that the creation of a mass grave “would serve to mock the government for doing nothing to protect them from the LRA even though they had prior warning” (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2008a: 12). Thus, dead bodies, as a collective can be a visually and emotionally powerful political tool.

Additionally, a mass grave has the potential to set a community apart and designate it as special both socially in interpersonal relationships, and outwardly to governments and aid organizations. This designation may be seen as particularly vital especially when large portions of the country have suffered, and there are many areas that could be chosen for development or aid distribution. In challenging economic situations, the perceived advantages of not excavating a mass grave may outweigh the desire for individual burials. It is a harsh reality that non-government organizations (NGO's) often spend money on the people and issues their donors find appealing (Stirrat 2006: 13). Mass graves, when used as a symbol, can distinctively represent a community, and if a population has the means to draw attention to their particular plight, it is possible, depending on the needs of the community, that survivors could choose not to excavate. At one of the areas that contained a mass grave, participants voiced their desire to see a church built at the site, especially since this land would be unsuitable for other forms of economic development.⁴⁷ If a

⁴⁷ “She is saying that that plot of land where the mass grave is belongs to her family. Namokora is becoming a sub-county and growing fast. All plots along this main road are being sold off, probably to investors who want to put their business there. From the center up to near the mass grave and beyond people have sold their land and it is helping their families in one way or the other. But for her family, that piece of land can't be sold because no one wants to buy near the mass grave. So she is

church were to be built as a memorial and annual commemorations held it could serve the dual purpose of indicating to the spirits that they are still a part of the family, while also drawing in visitors who could stimulate the economy in the area.⁴⁸ In the former scenario annual prayers would serve as a form of psychosocial coping and way for future generations to remember the violence that took place there, while the latter would allow local community to pay for daily necessities. Exhumations may be desirable and ideal, but the repatriation and burial of a loved one will not feed a family, or pay for school fees, whereas “war tourism” or large-scale annual commemorations may. This use of the dead illustrates that necropolitics can serve a variety of purposes in accordance with the needs of the living and is actively being used at the local and institutional levels.

Prioritizing *Cen* in Everyday Life

As mentioned above, individuals may postpone attempts to appease the dead in order to meet the immediate needs of the living. Therefore, it was also important to discover the level of urgency this issue posed in communities, and the prioritization of (re)burials in reference to any other challenges that individuals and

saying that the government should compensate them because of that. How will they survive, how will they take care of the young ones if they do not have any way of resourcing for money?” (adult female)

⁴⁸ “As I said before we would need a church to be built at the mass gravesite so people will go and pray there. So we don’t need anything big, we only need prayers to be organized. Just like in Pimol where a church was built where the 2 martyrs were killed. This would make even the younger generations and even people from overseas to come and pay homage and they will know that this was a place where many people were killed” (male elder and adult male).

communities may be facing. Interviewees felt that the most vital needs facing communities were health, education, and stability. The research participants' linked *cen* to health, with about half of them specifying that it is connected to mental health.⁴⁹ This finding is also in accordance with a study by Neuner et al. (2012) who found that high levels of depression, attributed to *cen*, were present amongst Acholi who had experienced traumatic events during the war.

The placement of improper burials and *cen* within the broader category of health fits well because survivors use religion and cosmology as a means of interpretation, explanation, orientation, and coping. For example, in the past, the presence of *cen* has been used as a disease explanation model (Behrend 1999). This practice continues to be applied to modern challenges as several participants expressed that unhappy spirits were the cause for nodding disease or *lug-lug*.⁵⁰ Additionally, some participants with mass graves on their property reported that

⁴⁹ "The most important thing for them is rehabilitation. They can never do anything or have good health, even their children cannot go to school when they are scared of the spirits that chase them. That is why they prioritize a church to be built there or probably prayers can be done there over and over again so that people settle in their mind and other things can be brought on board" (adult female).

⁵⁰ "I think that's the reason why there are so many bad things happening nowadays. For example, the outbreak of the nodding disease" (adult male). "Acholis believe that it will bring very many problems. Nowadays there are weird diseases that are linked to unhappy spirits, for example, the nodding disease, the outbreak of Ebola, and yellow fever. The elders believe that all these are coming because the spirits are unhappy because they were not accorded proper burial" (male elder). "[T]he spirits of his brothers are not happy because these days his children are falling sick, children that come from that family are falling sick and the disease is very weird so they assume maybe it is because these spirits are not happy" (adult male). "They have some serious sickness in the family, and they think that the spirit of their son is unhappy and that is why the children in the family are suffering, but they don't know for sure because they have not gone and inquired to a witchdoctor as to what could be the cause" (adult male).

the grave was also affecting their economic options or had the potential to do so, which links this issue to economic stability. Unsurprisingly, the perceived importance of addressing improper burial was dictated by the severity of psychological distress, which is in turn based upon individual's personal experiences. On one end of the spectrum were individuals who believed that *cen* was a problem within Acholiland, but they did not personally feel disturbed because they had a good relationship with the living-dead. On the opposite end of this divide were those who felt that *cen* plagued most aspects of their life.⁵¹ These individuals who lack the capacity to address the dead are in a difficult situation. Even though they are disturbed by *cen* and may want to appease the dead, they have to meet the daily requirements of the living, yet in a circular fashion the dead hinder their ability to efficiently fulfill these demands.

The dichotomy between proximal and distal stressors to psychosocial health is useful here for understanding this circular effect. Traditionally distal stressors refer to trauma (e.g. the death of a loved one, physical wounds, the loss of property) that occurred in the past and has become less painful and thus less influential on daily life. This is juxtaposed against proximal distress (e.g. poverty, economic hardship), which is more general but may have a more pronounced immediate effect on the lives of the living (Miller and Rasmussen 2010: 9, 12). However, for the Acholi, once notions pertaining to the living-dead and *cen* are incorporated this gap becomes less pronounced. The death of a loved one and their internment in an

⁵¹ "Every time they [the children] go [to school] they always become very afraid [of the spirits in the mass grave] and they come back" (adult female). "We would rather appease the spirit and be happy without being afraid of anything" (adult female).

improper burial may have happened years in the past, but the cultural belief in *cen* and the disturbances experienced keep distal stress - including the lack of capacity to appease the spirits - proximal to people's lives. This anxiety then affects daily life endeavors, such as social relations or an individual's ability to pursue economic endeavors. For example, community members who fear the spirits located near a mass grave may be unwilling to walk past the site to work in their gardens, this in turn diminishes their ability to feed their family, or grow surplus crops that could be used to pay for medicine or school fees.

Research Limitations

Before concluding there are several limitations to this study that should be recognized. First and foremost is that this research has not been reviewed and commented upon by participants, and as such these findings are only my interpretation of the data. In an attempt to be reflexive and mitigate potential misconceptions, I have tried to include the voice of my informants, so that readers may see the material from which I have based my findings and draw their own conclusions. Secondly, as I have written this thesis I have become aware that works within the anthropology of religion could have shed light several of the research topics and that this literature is underrepresented in this thesis. More broadly it would seem that much of the literature on post-conflict work in northern Uganda, which primarily comes from transitional justice, has not widely incorporated the work of religious studies, perhaps to its detriment. Lastly, it appears accurate to hypothesize that if improper burials are addressed there will be some improvement

in mental health within Acholiland. However, this approach is only a partial solution, as it does not address all forms or causes of the social anxiety embodied through *cen*. If deemed appropriate, forensic excavations and DNA identifications would still only address part of the problem. There are still broader issues such as underdevelopment in northern Uganda that can cause social uncertainty within communities (See Figure 9). Burials by themselves are but one piece of a complex multi-faceted puzzle (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 126).

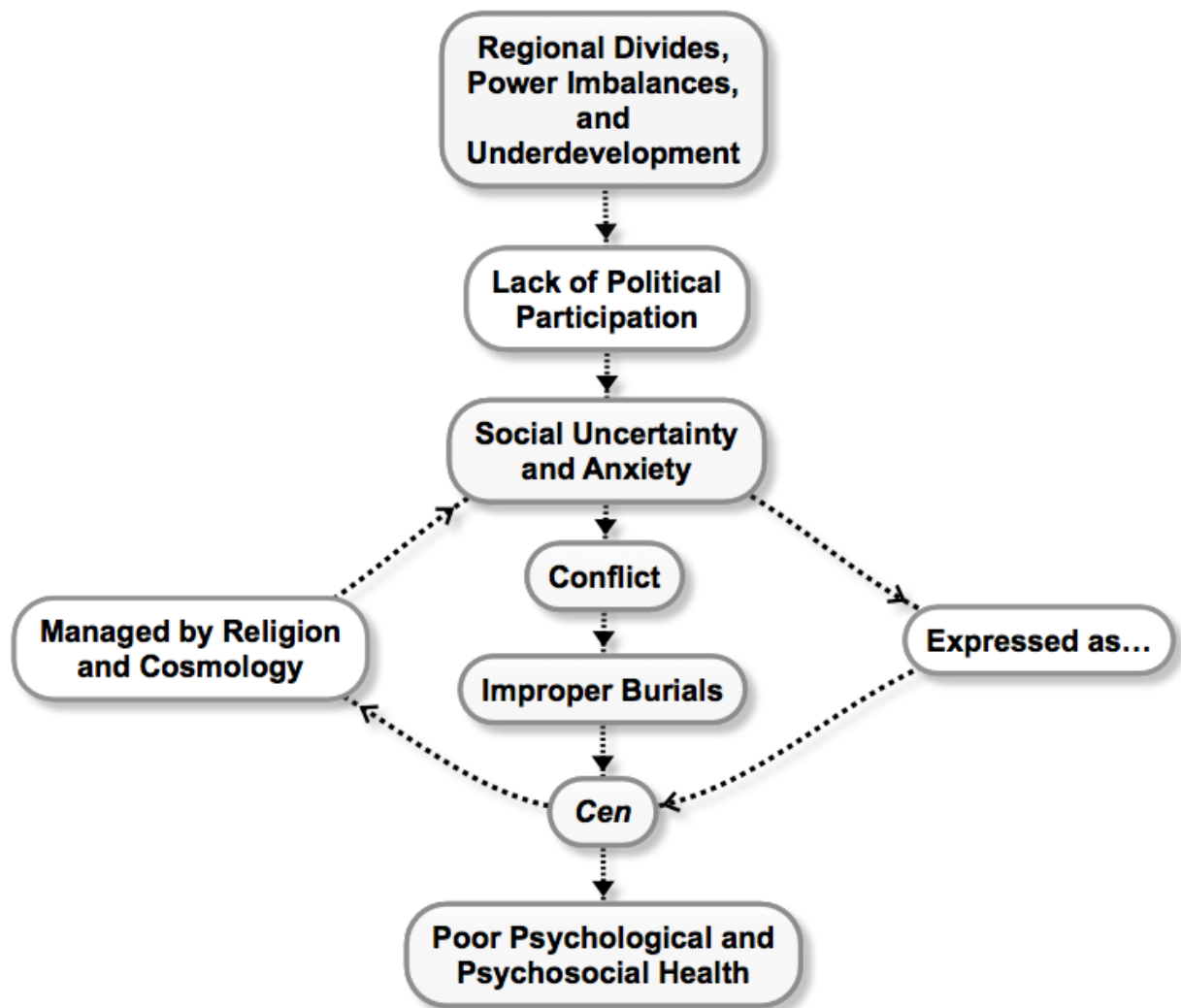


Figure 9. This chart illustrates that improper burials and *cen* are components of broader social issues, which will require holistic solutions.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis has been an exploration of how social anxieties due to current lived realities in northern Uganda, such as underdevelopment, a perceived lack of political participation, capacity, and an inability to control one's surroundings are producing a form of social suffering collectively experienced as *cen*. In an effort to mitigate this situation, communities within Acholiland employ cosmological and religious tactics as psychological and psychosocial coping strategies for orienting their lives in concert with the needs of the dead. This in turn creates a dynamic where the dead can be used to further various political, social, and economic agendas at the local, regional, and national level.

The study set out to explore the effect of improper burials and their consequences on Acholi communities, the phenomenon of *cen*, and the dynamics of coping strategies used by individuals to address this issue. The investigation of these questions contributes to existing knowledge concerning *cen*'s effect on the Acholi population; it explores the potential for forensic excavation and DNA identification as a possible solution to improper burials; and explores the dynamics between the traditional cosmological and religious coping mechanisms use by communities.

The main empirical findings reveal that improper burials are problematic because this moral transgression against the dead causes the spirits of the interred to become angry and bring disturbances to the living. The particular approach employed to cope with these difficulties is based upon a combination of individual

and community belief systems. In their simplest form, these options include traditional rituals requiring animal sacrifices and Christian prayer ceremonies that view sacrifice as unnecessary. The extent to which *cen* affects and shapes people's lives demonstrates that this is an important issue within Acholiland. To address the dead is to tackle past atrocities that have become contemporary issues, an undertaking that falls within the purview of various post-conflict and peace-building interventions.

The findings of this research indicate that religion and cosmology are central pillars of Acholi cultural identity and as such, should be incorporated during the implementation of post-conflict mechanisms (Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese 2006: 126). With this in mind and given the potential for different spiritual needs, alleviating *cen* on a culturally appropriate, long-term, sustainable basis may require addressing the stark disparities between various religious denominations and cosmologies, as these have the potential to permeate broader recovery efforts and shape psychosocial health. If post-conflict TJ measures are to attempt redressing the legacies of the past, in ways that these resonate with individuals, and their local realities, such as the role of the dead, the strategies used by communities to navigate their worldview should be considered. A failure to include communities as stakeholders in policies or initiatives that affect their lives is likely to produce results that do not resonate with local lived realities. This fundamental requirement of grounding actions within community perception is perhaps best illustrated by an Acholi religious leader:

“When people believe in something, that belief can affect their lives. So the Luo people have very strong beliefs in the spiritual world, therefore if a child is not properly buried, if a child has not received a decent burial, that child according to them, then becomes *lacen* (*cen*). *Lacen* is now affecting our people in that manner. So the religious people are saying...let us go and pray and prayer is not bad, but you must understand the people first before you pray. How do you pray, you know? You are going to pray, but you are not touching their lives, just touching their skin, not the inside. Then you cannot reach them, and you cannot become effective. So what we are saying as the religious people, let us know our people. What do they believe in? What do they fear? They fear *lacen*” (personal communication with Bishop Ochola II M.B, Retired Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Kitgum in July of 2012).

Though this individual is talking about the application of Christianity to the Luo people, the message that broader intervention and development programs need to understand the perceptions and needs of the people, as well as how they meet these challenges, is the same. In this line, further research is necessary to facilitate a greater understanding of how local tactics and strategies for coping with the dead and *cen* can be incorporated into broader national post-conflict mechanisms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Association with the Refugee Law Project. An official stamped copy with the RLP letterhead has been kept on file.

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
Research Secretariat
PO Box 7168
Kampala, Uganda

June 14th, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Research Permit for Ms. Kembel Adrianne

I am writing in support of Ms. Adrianne application for a research permit. Ms. Adrianne is an Intern with the Refugee Law Project and a Masters candidate in the University of Tennessee, USA. She will be conducting research on the topic of "Cultural Perspective Concerning the Proper Reburial of Mass Graves in Northern Uganda" between the dates of June 15 –August 7th 2012.

We have reviewed the proposed methodology to be used in this study in light of the new UNCST National Guidelines for Research involving humans as research participants and we are satisfied that they comply with the UNCST guidelines.

Ms. Adrianne had submitted a summary of her research project, a proposed timeline of her research activities and 4 recent photographs. Please do not hesitate to contact me on +256-772-398-275 or research@refugeelawproject.org should you require further information.

Thank you for your usual cooperation.

Sincerely,



Stephen Oola.
Head of Research & Advocacy Department

Appendix B: E-mail notification of Ugandan National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST) approval.

Dear Ms. Kembel,

RE: THE INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES CONCERNING THE PROPER BURIAL OF MASS GRAVES IN NORTHERN UGANDA (SS 2854)

This is to notify you that the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) approved the above protocol on 22 June 2012.

The approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Payment of the research administration and clearance fee of 300 US Dollar.
Payment is made to Standard Chartered Bank Speke Road Branch; the account title is UNCST and the account number is 8705611811400. If however you wish to pay in Uganda shillings, the account number is 0105610632101. If you intend to wire the research fees, the swift code is SCBLUGKA. Note that bank charges will entirely be the researcher's responsibility.

Yours sincerely,
Leah Nawegulo
for: Executive Secretary

UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Guide

- How are you affected by the mass grave in your community? Are there any consequences to having a mass grave in your community or having a loved one that is buried in a mass grave?
- What do you think should be done to make the situation better?
 - How would this happen?
 - What would be required for this to happen?
- What do you think should happen to people who are buried in mass graves in your community?
 - What do you want to happen to this or these graves?
- What would be a proper burial or ritual for people in mass graves?
 - How would this happen?
 - What would need to be involved?
 - Or what would be required?
 - Who would need to be involved?
- Are there any consequences to having a mass grave in your community?
 - Do people still suffer from effects?
 - What would need to happen to make the area better/safer?
 - Were any ceremonies preformed to cleanse the area?
 - What ceremonies
 - Who performed them
 - Who should be involved
- How have other communities handled this issue?
 - If yes, what do you think of this method?
- Would a reburial and/or those ceremonies be appropriate here?
 - Why/Why not?
- Do you think that it is necessary?
 - Why/Why not?
- Do you think other members of your community will want a proper burials/ceremonies?
 - Why/ Why not?

If conversation moves in this direction:

- What is necessary for a proper burial or ritual to take place?
 - What religious ceremonies will be required?
 - Elaborate: when, where, who, why, and how
 - What cultural ceremonies will be required?
 - Elaborate: when, where, who, why, and how
 - How or who would decide on which ceremonies should take place?
 - What kind of animals will be needed, how many? Which sex, six, etc
 - Does the type and number of animals needed depend on who is thought to be in the grave?
 - If some members of the community want proper burial or ceremony and others don't what should happen?

- Who should decide?
 - Does everyone in the community have to agree?
- What should happen to those who are exhumed?
 - How would they be reburied?
 - Where would they be reburied?
- Who should be involved?

Reburials of known individuals:

What happened in the original burial?

- Who was buried, how or why did they die, were you able to go home?
- What about people who died in the bush?
- What ceremonies did you do when he/she was first buried?
- What were the consequences to having your relative buried in the IDP camp?
- What would have been the consequences if your relative was still in the IDP camp?
- Why did you want the remains moved?
 - Did anybody else want the remains moved?
 - Why
 - Did anyone ask you to move the grave
 - Why
- What was required to move the grave?
 - Exhumation:
 - What ceremonies?
 - What does this involve
 - What does it do
 - Who was involved
 - How was the grave excavated?
 - How were the remains stored
 - How were the remains transported
 - Does all of the remains need to be recovered
 - Reburial:
 - What ceremonies?
 - What does this involve
 - What does it do
 - Who was involved
- Was this process acceptable
- Was this considered a proper/decent burial
- Is your ancestor satisfied
- Who paid for this reburial
- Would you change anything about this process
- Do you feel that there are other important aspects that we have not talked about yet?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form in English

The Investigation of Cultural Perspectives Concerning the Proper Burial of Mass Graves in Northern Uganda

INTRODUCTION

My name is Adrienne Kembel and I am a researcher from The University of Tennessee in the US. Locally I am associated with the Refugee Law Project (RLP), who serves as an advocacy organization in Uganda. It is my goal to learn how mass graves are affecting you or your community and what should be done about it. Copies of this document will be passed out to every participant and it will also be read aloud. If you do not speak English a translator will read this document and help answer questions in a language that you are more comfortable with. If at any time you have questions or would like more information please feel free to ask. You have been selected as a potential participant because you are a stakeholder in this issue and your opinions are important. Some of the people asked to participate in this study include communities that currently have mass grave(s) located in the general area, family members of those thought to be buried in graves, various religious figures, community leaders, and members of interested third parties such as RLP staff or other institutions.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

All meetings will take place as either focus groups or as individual conversations in either your community or another place of your choosing. I will be asking for your opinion and thoughts on the mass grave or graves in your community, what you think should be done about the situation, and how or what would be necessary for this to be accomplished. Each session will last no longer more than 2 hours, unless you or other participants want to continue discussing the issue or feel that there are other topics that should be discussed.

The risk involved in participating in this study is very small. However, some of the questions may bring up bad memories of past events. If at any time you feel uncomfortable and no longer want to participate or do not want to answer a question you do not have to do so. The benefit to participating in this study is that any potential intervention is more likely to be based upon your needs and expectations or those of the community.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All of the information gathered from this research will be kept confidential, and information that could individually identify you will not be recorded or will be edited out. Every respondent will be assigned numbers to ensure that their information will be kept private. All data will be securely stored on a password protected computer and will only be made available to the people involved in this study. With the permission of the participant, all interviews will be recorded on a

digital recorder. Audio files will be stored on a secure computer for two years after the completion of the study before being deleted by the researcher.

If you are participating as part of a focus group you and others in the group will be asked to respect the opinions of other group members. You should know, however, that we cannot stop or prevent participants from talking about these issues with other people.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be destroyed and will not be included in the reported results. The conclusions of this research will be relayed or presented to the community for their consideration and comment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Adrienne Kembel, at 0778556159, or Theo Hollander or John Ogwok of the Refugee Law Project at 0776897080.

CONSENT

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Signature _____ or thumbprint of participant

Date _____ Consent to audio recording? YES NO
day/month/year



Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Ngiino Ki-kwedo tam ma lupe ki yoo ango ma opore dok myero me Yiko-yik Lumuku I Tekal-kwaro wa I Kumalo me Uganda

MUKWONGO

An nyinga *Adrienne Kembel*, an atye latin kwan me Tennessee University ma tye *US*. Ki kany kono atye ka tic ki *Refugee Law Project (RLF)*, ma gitiyo ma calo dul ma gineno dok gwoko twero pa dano i Uganda. Miti na tye me niang kit ma yik lumuku tye ka kelo peko i ka bedo ma wa tye iye ki dong ngo ma mite ma omyero watim malupe ki peko magi. Ngec man ki bi poko dok ki bi kwano bot dano weng ma omiyo tam gi I lok man. Ka pee ikwano lep muno, la kup lok obi kwani lok magi dok obi konyo wun ki gamo lapeny ilep ma wu niang maber. Ka ce itye ki lapeny moo, bed agonya me penyo ne I cawa mo keken. Ki yeri me miyo tami pien itye ki ngec dok iniang lok man maber cii tami pire tek tutwal. Jo mukene ma kiyero gi me konyo kwed man gi yaa ki ka bedo mapat pat ma yik lumuku otime iyee, jo ot ki mogo bene ki iyoki gi I buu lyel man, lutela dini I rwom ma pat pat, lutela I kin gang I rwom mapat pat, ki dong jo mukene ma gi tye ki cwinyi i lok man ma calo lutic pa RLP ki dul mekene mapat pat.

NGEC MA LUPE KI KACKE, NYWAKO TAM KACEL KI JO MA KI YERO GI

Kacoke weng obibedo I gurup onyo tam ki bi nywako ki ngat acel acel I ka bedo ma wutye iyee onyo kamo keken ma wun oyo. Abi penyo lapeny ma obi kwako ngec pa wun ki tam ma meggi ma lupe ki yik lumuku onyo bur-lyel me yik lumuku otime iye ma tye I ka bedo ma wutye iye ni, tam ango ma wu tamo ni omyero ki tim ma lupe ki lok man, ki dong yo ango ma rwate dok ber wek tic man otiine. Nywako tam man pe obi cwalo cawa ma kato ariyo, niweko ka wun pud utye ki lok mukene ma wutamoni omyero ki mede ki nwyako ne.

Rac me mino tami I lok man peke madwong dok tidi tutwal. Kono do, lapeny mukene romo poyo wii pi jami ma raco ma otime I kare mukato ane. Ka I nongo ni in I peke agonyo me gamo lapeny mo dok cwinyi dek gamo ne cii pe itim. Ber pa nwyako tam I lok man aye ni, kit kony

mo kene pole obi lupe ki mite onyo tam pa wun ma obi miyo pi ka kabedo ma orumu wun kany.

MUNG

Ngec weng ma ibi miyo me konyo kwed man ki bi gwoko I mung, ngec ma ce gwok nyutu ngat acel acel obedo anga pe ki bi coyo onyo ki rucu woko. Dana weng ki bi mini gi nama mapat pat mineni ngec ma gu bimiyo ki gwoko I mung. Ngec ki lok weng ki bi gwoko I computer ma kitweyo wiyo ki nama dok ki yapo bot joo ma tye ka kwed man keken. Ngec weng ki bi mako dok ki gwoko ka iyee dok imiyo twero pire. Dwon weng ma kimako ki gwoko ii computer maber ma tye ii National Memory and Peace Documentation Center (NMPDC) ka ngino ki kwedo lok man otum.

MINE ME LOK

Miyo tami ma lupe ki kwed man tye ii mitini; I romo kwero miyo tami I lok gire labongo pwod mo. Ka I dyere me mino tami, pwud I twero weko ne gire labongo pwod mo onyo keng mic moo keken. Ka ii juku mino tami ma peyaa kityeko koko nyec man cii nyec ma ibii miyo ni ki bi rucu okoo ma pedong ki bii keto itic. Lok ma kwed man onongo ki bi dwoko bot wun dok ki tito bot wun wek bene omii tam wu iyee.

KIT ME NONGO NGEK

Ka itye ki lapeny cawa moo keken ma lupe ki ngino lok man ongoo kwed man, I romo goyo cim bot ladoo wii kwed *Adrienne Kembel* ii cim cing nama 0778556156, onyo *Theo/Mr. John Ogwok (CUG)* I cim cing nama 0776897080 me Refugee Law Project.

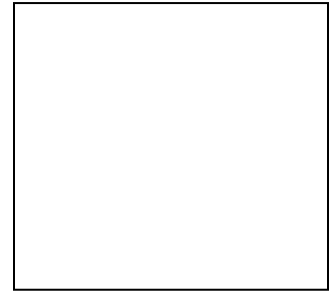
CADEN NII AYEE

Akwano lok ma malo nii, ongo kii kwano lok man. Apenyo lapeny mapat pat ma lupe ki lok man dok ki gama lapeny man bene maber. Ayee labongo dic moo me miyo tam dok me konyo kwed man.

Keketo Cing: Kadino Cing:

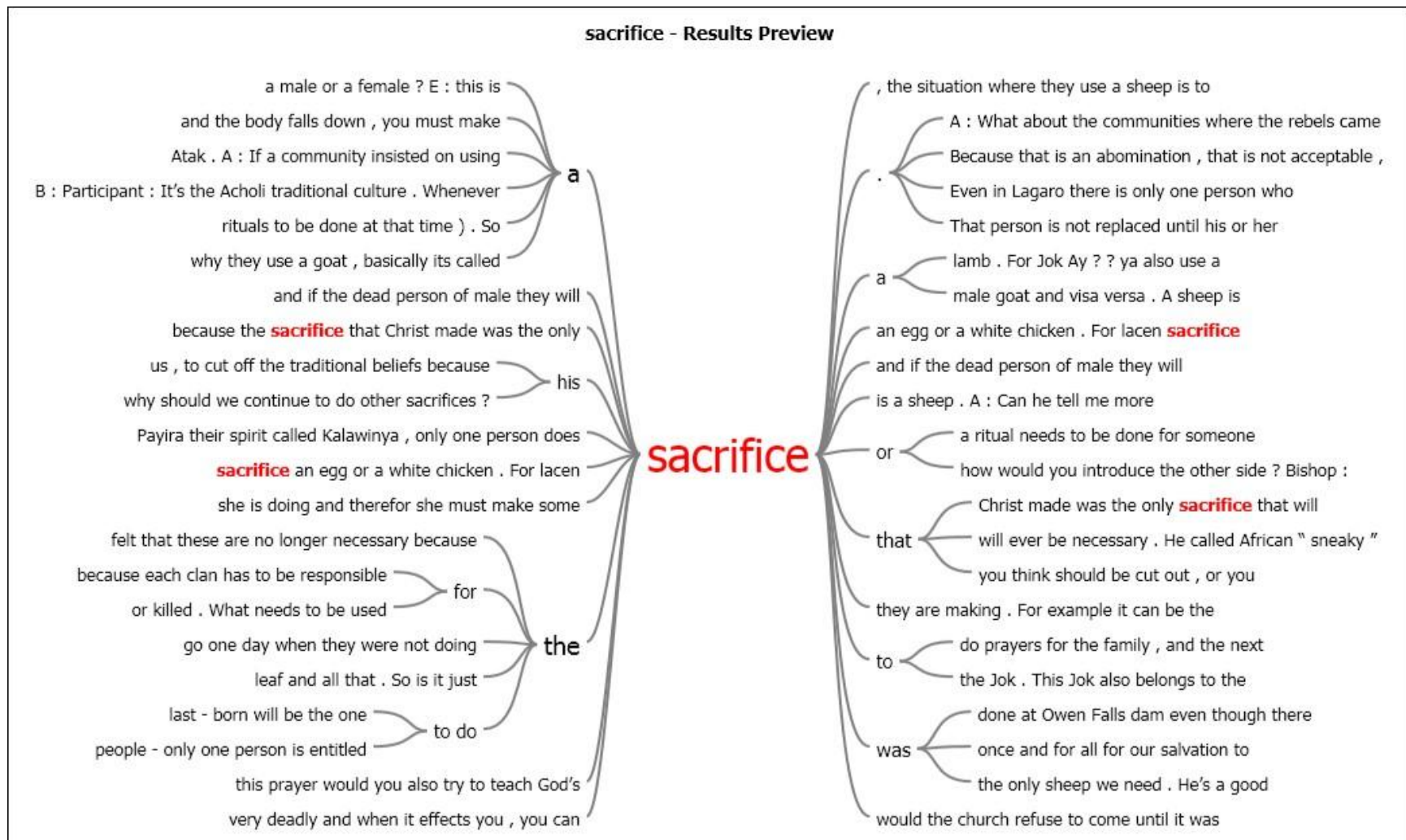
Tic ki lamak dwon? Ayee ☐ Akwero ☐

Nino dwe: / /
(Nino) / (Dwe) / (Mwaka)



Cing Ladoo Kwed:

Nino dwe: / /
(Nino) / (Dwe) / (Mwaka)



Appendix F: Figure 10: Word tree demonstrating how the term “sacrifice” was used by participants.

Vita

Adrianne Kembel was born in Miles City, Montana in 1986 to parents Tunie and Steve Kembel. She received her undergraduate degrees in Anthropology and Sociology with concentrations in Forensics, Archaeology, and Criminology from The University of Montana-Missoula in 2008. In 2015, Adrianne received her Master of Arts in Cultural Anthropology and the Graduate Certificate in Disasters, Displacement, and Human Rights.