

**MILITARISM AND MASCULINITY AMONGST THE ACHOLI  
OF UGANDA, C.1750-1986**

Lucy Rebecca Taylor

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores constructed understandings of honourable manhood and the nature of militarism amongst the Acholi of northern Uganda from c.1750 to 1986. As such, its focus ranges from a social history of warriorhood to the intersection of gender with colonial military service. Importantly, this thesis unravels multiple layers of complexity and reframes the relationship between masculinity and militarism as a contested space which encompassed local debates. It argues that over the past two hundred and fifty years Acholi men have been challenged with negotiating respectable manhood within an economy of honour that both requires and condemns the use of violence, and which in addition, has been repeatedly disputed and adapted over time.

By using a range of unique source material and a variety of disciplinary approaches, this thesis challenges a series of scholarly and popular stereotypes about African cultures of violence in general, and the Acholi people in particular. It analyses how Acholi speakers themselves have presented the nature of their society to outsiders, and exposes the sociocultural contexts which have both shaped and reshaped local understandings of military service. In addition, this thesis explores how Acholi veterans have contextualised the violence they both witnessed and participated in, and examines how different interest groups have struggled for control over the public representation of divisive, contentious historical events. As such, it further demonstrates how violent pasts can be reframed and manipulated in pursuit of contemporary aims and agendas. Overall, the long historical perspective of this thesis underscores the importance of studying cultures of violence and gendered hierarchies over the *longue durée*. Only by doing so are we equipped to identify significant fluctuations over time and examine any practices, patterns and processes relating to

masculinity and militarism which link the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|            |                                    |
|------------|------------------------------------|
| ACR.....   | Comboni Archives, Rome             |
| AHT.....   | Acholi Historical Texts            |
| BNA.....   | British National Archives          |
| CMSA.....  | Church Missionary Society Archives |
| CUA.....   | Cambridge University Archives      |
| GDA.....   | Gulu District Archives             |
| HRC.....   | Human Rights Commission            |
| HRC A..... | Human Rights Commission Archives   |
| HSM.....   | Holy Spirit Movement               |
| IWMA.....  | Imperial War Museum Archives       |
| KAR.....   | King's African Rifles              |
| KDA.....   | Kitgum District Archives           |
| KNA.....   | Kenya National Archives            |
| LOC.....   | Library of Congress                |
| LRA.....   | Lord's Resistance Army             |
| MDA.....   | Moroto District Archives           |
| NRA.....   | National Resistance Army           |
| NRM.....   | National Resistance Movement       |
| NSA.....   | National Security Agency           |
| OUA.....   | Oxford University Archives         |

UA.....Uganda Army

UNA.....Uganda National Archives

UNLA.....Uganda National Liberation Army

UPC.....Uganda People's Congress

UPDF.....Uganda People's Defence Force

UR.....Uganda Rifles



Map 0:1, Ethnic Groups of Uganda



Map 0:2, Acholiland





Map 0:3, Chiefdoms of Acholiland

## INTRODUCTION

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Since the Acholi are a people of long military tradition, everything becomes militarised: Walking, eating, talking, discussion, debate, all movements [...].<sup>1</sup>

There was relative peace and stability within Acholi society before the advent of the Arabs in the mid-nineteenth century because the Acholi regarded themselves, in a large sense, as brothers.<sup>2</sup>

[My people, the Acholi] are born with strength [...] It is in the blood of the Acholi, the [fighting] skills are in their blood and culture, that is how God decided it [...].<sup>3</sup>

The devastating and protracted conflict which engulfed parts of northern Uganda during the initial years of Yoweri Museveni's rule (1986-2006) caused a veritable explosion of writing on the Acholi.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to scholars and

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. V. Opoka, 'Traditional Values of Acholi Religion and Culture for their Evangelisation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università Lateranense, 1980), p.73.

<sup>2</sup> K. F. Uma, 'Acholi Arab Nubian relations in the nineteenth century' (unpublished bachelor's dissertation, Makerere University, 1971), p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with 144, Male, Pajule, 16 November 2016.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010); Chris Dolan, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States - A Case Study of Northern Uganda', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and*

journalists alike was the Acholi-led insurgency movement named the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, social scientists, such as Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, argued the formation of the LRA confirmed that Acholi speakers had come to represent a 'military ethnocracy', who saw 'the profession of arms as their natural vocation'.<sup>5</sup> More recently, compelling counter narratives have been written by a number of scholars seeking to undermine this facile, reductive stereotype. Anthropologist Sverker Finnström, for example, argues he found no evidence to substantiate the claim that Acholi people are particularly prone to violence and thus it is futile to speak about Acholi culture in such essentialist ways.<sup>6</sup> Although a valuable corrective, counter narratives have tended to disregard the historical importance of warfare, militarism and soldiering amongst the

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*Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (New York: Zed Books, 2002), pp.57-83; Chris Dolan, *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Mathew Green, *The Wizard of the Nile: The Hunt for Africa's Most Wanted* (London: Portobello Books, 2008); Sverker Finnström, 'Meaningful Rebels? Young adult perceptions on the Lords Resistance Movement/Army in Uganda', in *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context*, ed. by Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006), pp.203-227; Sverker Finnström, "'For God and my Life": War and Cosmology in Northern Uganda', in *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, ed. by Paul Richards (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp.98-117; Rosa Ehrenreich, 'The Stories We Must Tell: Ugandan Children and the Atrocities of the Lord's Resistance Army', *Africa Today*, 45 (1998): 79-102; Kevin Dunn, 'Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army', in *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, ed. by Morten Boas and Kevin C. Dunn (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), pp.131-150; Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1985-97* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); and Holly E. Porter, *After Rape: Justice and Social Harmony in Northern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, 'Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda', *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), 5-36 (pp.8-9); Frank Van Acker, 'Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The new order no one ordered', *African Affairs*, 103 (2004), 335-357 (pp.338-342). Also see Charles Amone, 'Reasons for the British Choice of the Acholi as the Martial Race of Uganda, 1862-1962', *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2:2 (2014), 72-77 (p.77); Ali A. Mazrui, 'Soldiers as Traditionalizers: Military Rule and the Re-Africanization of Africa', *World Politics*, 28:2 (1976), 246-272 (pp.258-261); Ali A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975), p.49; Ondoga Amaza, *Museveni's Long March from Guerrilla to Statesman* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1998), pp.213-214.

<sup>6</sup> Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p.25.

Acholi altogether. Moreover, revisionist literature has often ignored how Acholi people themselves have helped create, popularise and disseminate this enduring image of themselves as a martial community.<sup>7</sup> As the above quotes exemplify, violence has long been at the heart of both external and, importantly, internal debates regarding Acholi identity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, whilst rejecting the notion that Acholi speakers have solely represented a ‘militarised ethnocracy’, this thesis does not — as other scholarly counter narratives have tended to do — completely deny violence a place in Acholi history.

Following the Second World War (1939-1945) Fernand Braudel became one of the best-known exponents of the *Annales* School.<sup>9</sup> Through publishing a number of works which undertook a *longue durée* approach to human history, Braudel exemplified the advantages of historical writing which transverses individual people and short-term fluctuations. In particular, his work demonstrated that only through incorporating a broad historical timeframe can we fully appreciate the slow, normally imperceptible, effects of long-term trends and patterns.<sup>10</sup> Although the dramatic changes of the twentieth century, especially the significance of imperial partition and the colonial experience, continue to dominate historiography concerned with the African continent, a number of scholars have adopted a *longue durée* approach. Historians including Jan Vansina, David Schoenbrun, Rhiannon Stephens, Ronald

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<sup>7</sup> For narratives which have specifically marginalised the importance of violence during the precolonial period, see Uma, ‘Acholi Arab Nubian relations’; and Onyango-ku-Odongo and J. B. Webster, *The Central Lwo during the Aconya* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> The third extract above, provided by an Acholi elder, clearly highlights how some Acholi people draw on martial virtues when describing their culture to outsiders.

<sup>9</sup> The *Annales* School was originally founded by French historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch who first established the scholarly journal *Annales D’Histoire Économique et Sociale*.

<sup>10</sup> For example see Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à L’Époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949) ; and Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation Matérielle, Économie et Capitalisme : XVe-XVIIIe Siècle, Vol. I-III* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1979).

Atkinson and Richard Reid, for example, have published insightful accounts which showcase that our understanding of social and political structures, gendered hierarchies, conceptualisations of poverty, warring traditions and ethnic identities can be vastly improved through prioritising a broader analysis which spans a number of decades, centuries or even millennia.<sup>11</sup> Thus, taking its lead from the aforementioned scholars, this thesis employs a mixture of historical linguistics, oral traditions and comparative ethnography to document how Acholi masculine identities, military values and practices have evolved over the past two hundred and fifty years. By doing so, it is able to unravel multiple layers of complexity, trace the impact of changing historical circumstances, highlight diversity of ideas, and uncover both commonalities and differences in people's personal experiences of militarism and manhood. As a result, it provides a more nuanced analysis of the role warfare and soldiering have played in the making and performance of Acholi identity than either existing literature which labels the Acholi as inherently militarised, or revisionist antidotes, have been capable of offering.<sup>12</sup>

One of the great benefits of writing African history over the *longue durée* is that it presents the opportunity to effectively trace patterns and processes which link

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<sup>11</sup> See Jan M. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, Wisc.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Rhiannon Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Atkinson, *The Roots*; and Richard Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa: The Patterns and Meanings of State-Level Conflict in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007). Also see Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002); *Ethnicity and the Long-Term Perspective: The African Experience*, ed. by Alexander Keese (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); and Rhiannon Stephens, 'Poverty's Pasts: A Case for *Longue Durée* Studies', *Journal of African History*, 59:3 (2018), pp.399-409.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the problems which arise from essentialist and ahistorical narratives, see William Freund, 'Western Approaches to African History. A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29:2 (1987), pp. 403-407.

the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. Thus, alongside documenting the obvious ruptures and shifts which accompanied the establishment of British colonial rule and then Uganda's independence in 1962, this thesis explores continuity. In particular, it identifies practices, attitudes and behavioural patterns which initially emerged in the late eighteenth century but were still visible in some form throughout Obote's second presidency during the early 1980s. Moreover, as long-term continuity can coincide with active creation, this thesis additionally examines how Acholi speakers under both British colonial rule and Obote's second presidency made new meaning of these inherited ideas and practices, and how they reshaped them in response to contemporary challenges and opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

There are four additional aspects of this thesis which make it particularly distinctive and valuable. Firstly, due to the challenging nature of the source material, historians have largely shied away from examining precolonial military history amongst so-called 'stateless societies' such as the Acholi of modern-day north central Uganda.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the relationship between conflict, the state and political authority has long been the focus of research exploring precolonial African warfare, with both

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, Wisconsin; University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p.3

<sup>14</sup> For military histories which are primarily concerned with centralised kingdoms see Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*; Robert Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); and John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800* (New York: UCL Press, 1999; repr. London: Routledge, 2005). The Acholi were classified as stateless by both early European explorers and Christian missionaries largely because the area lacked a paramount leader, and the more centralised socio-political organisation prevalent in the interlacustrine kingdoms of Buganda or Bunyoro. See Samuel W. Baker, *The Albert N'yanza, Great Basin of the Nile And Explorations of the Nile Sources*, II (London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), p.21; John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Nile* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1863), p.575; and 'Extracts from "Mengo Notes"—V', *The Uganda Journal*, 12:1 (1948), pp.82-92, (p.84). For more recent literature which similarly describes Acholiland as stateless see Ali A. Mazrui, 'Is Africa Decaying? The View from Uganda', in Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds.), *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development* (London: James Currey, 1988), pp.336-359, (p.348).

academic and popular writing tending to fixate on centralised, regimented kingdoms and the military genius of soldier-kings such as Shaka Zulu.<sup>15</sup> Although this imbalance has begun to be addressed in relation to West Africa, ordinary warriors and patterns of conflict amongst communities with less centralised socio-political systems have remained of secondary importance within East African scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Even when so-called stateless societies have been the focus of attention, the emphasis has generally been on the experiences and initiatives of individual warlords, ‘big men’ or prophets.<sup>17</sup> Such studies have no doubt proven invaluable in terms of exploring growing militarism over the nineteenth century and how ‘big men’ created new kinds of societies in response to external threats and opportunities.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, large centralised states were not typical of most nineteenth-century African communities, and most ordinary African men’s experiences of warfare and violence were not reflected in the life trajectories of ‘big men’. In contrast, then, this thesis refutes the commonly held idea that history can only be written when archival documents are available by tracing transformations in military affairs and constructed understandings

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*; Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy*; and Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa*. For more on Shaka Zulu in particular, see Carolyn Hamilton, “‘The Character and Objects of Chaka’: A Reconsideration of the Making of Shaka as ‘Mfecane’ Motor”, in *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), pp.183-213; Dan Wylie, *Brief Histories: Shaka* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> For valuable exceptions in relation to Uganda see, William FitzSimons, ‘Warfare, competition and the durability of ‘political smallness’ in nineteenth-century Busoga’, *The Journal of African History*, 59:1 (2018), pp.45-67; and John Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). For a valuable exception in relation to East Africa more broadly see, J. G. Galaty, ‘Maasai expansionism and the new East African pastoralism’, in Thomas Spear and Richard Waller (eds.), *Being Massai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1993), pp.61-87.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on ‘big men’ see Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*, pp.73-83.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Richard Reid, ‘Mutesa and Mirambo: Thoughts on East African Warfare and Diplomacy in the Nineteenth Century’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 31:1 (1998), 73-89; and Douglas H. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

of honour and shame amongst precolonial Acholi speakers.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, whilst still recognising the effects of external pressures upon both social and military institutions, this thesis exposes instrumental internal dynamics which preceded both the arrival of Arabic-speaking slave traders during the mid-nineteenth century and the implementation of British colonial rule. As such, it examines African military history in local terms and thus heralds it as significant in its own right, rather than only when embedded within a discussion of discontinuity in the age of imperial invasion and external conquest.

Secondly, this thesis is committed to exposing African voices. Through drawing on a large number of oral interviews this thesis is able to flesh out the lives of individuals who have engaged in violence, reconstruct their personal stories, and thus uncover subjective and contradictory experiences. Through foregrounding African voices this thesis is also able to provide rich and insightful detail into the sociocultural contexts which shaped local understandings of both warriorhood and soldiering, as well as explore how Acholi speakers themselves have defined, discussed, and debated the role of violence at various points in history. In addition to this, oral histories are used to produce a more complex analysis of Acholi identity by interrogating how Acholi speakers themselves have presented their culture and the nature of their society to outsiders. Finally, by placing indigenous opinions and attitudes at the centre of its analysis this project is able to focus on relatively unstudied dimensions of soldiering and warfare which transcend the Acholi context, such as the emotional suffering and combat stress colonial soldiers experienced during frontline

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<sup>19</sup> For example



combat, and how African military recruits internally contextualised the violence they were exposed to whilst serving in colonial armies.

Thirdly, this thesis recasts the relationship between honourable manhood and militarism as a contested space. For instance, it discusses how women — a group often omitted or largely invisible within conventional history writing on warfare and soldiering — were capable of manipulating whether or not soldiering was deemed manly and honourable amongst the Acholi throughout British colonial rule. By doing so, this project makes an important contribution to African military history by challenging the pervasive portrayal of women as insignificant with regard to shaping martial virtues, economies of honour, and discourses concerning bravery and courage. The fourth and final feature of this project which makes it particularly valuable is its focus on how violence is remembered and contextualised, both within national narratives and by the protagonists themselves. It examines efforts to distort and edit memories of past violence, as well as attempts to frame personal memories of warfare and conflict to ensure they fit with pre-existing cognitive schema and locally constructed morals and values. By doing so, this thesis provides a unique insight into how memories of past violence are made and remade in pursuit of a variety of contemporary aims and agendas.

## SECTION I: THE ACHOLI IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

From c.1400 onwards, Western Nilotic Southern Luo speakers migrated in ever increasing numbers from their cradleland in modern-day South Sudan into the region

that would today be described as Acholiland.<sup>20</sup> Before they entered this area it was mostly inhabited by Central Sudanic peoples and Eastern Nilotic communities. Historically, then, Acholiland represented an internal frontier zone.<sup>21</sup> We do not know exactly how or when Southern Luo influence came to dominate this region, but between 1400 and 1900 Acholiland was gradually absorbed into the Luo world, marked in particular by a widespread shift in language.<sup>22</sup> By the late eighteenth century most inhabitants spoke Acholi, one of the eight languages which descended from proto-Southern Luo.<sup>23</sup>

During both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Acholiland represented one of the most dynamic, volatile and mobile zones of the region that would become Uganda. This era was characterised by growing ethnic consolidation, centralisation and militarisation. A new order marked by an enlargement of military authority and the spread of larger-scale polities known as chiefdoms became increasingly entrenched from the early eighteenth century onwards.<sup>24</sup> These chiefdoms were governed by hereditary rulers termed *rwodi* (meaning rulers or chiefs, sing. *rwot*), who represented the most important individuals in the polity, although social relations,

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<sup>20</sup> Luo, Lwo, Lwoo are alternative spellings of the same word. Throughout this thesis the most common spelling, Luo, will be utilised. Linguistic geography combined with oral traditions places Luo origins in South Sudan, somewhere in the broad region of Bhar el-Ghazal. For more information on the Luo cradleland in modern-day South Sudan, see *Culture History in the Southern Sudan: Archaeology, Linguistics and Ethnohistory*, ed. by John Mack and Peter Robert Shaw (Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1982); and David Nicholas, Paul Harvey and C. J. Goudie, 'Excavations in the Southern Sudan, 1979', *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 16:1 (1981), 7-54. For an alternative interpretation on Luo origins, see C. C. Wrigley, 'The Problem of the Lwo', *History in Africa*, 8 (1981), 219-246.

<sup>21</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.63.

<sup>22</sup> For more information, see Atkinson, *The Roots*.

<sup>23</sup> The other languages which derived from proto-Southern Luo are Adhola (also spelt Dhopadhola), Dholuo (also referred to as Kenyan Luo), Lango, Kumam, Alur, Labwor and Chopi. For more information on the genetic relationship between these languages, please see the fourth section of this introduction.

<sup>24</sup> Atkinson, pp.77-78.

production and reproduction continued to be organised in terms of lineages and thus lineage heads continued to exercise considerable authority. Political upheaval and military expansion were further fuelled by a series of droughts and famines which led to widespread migrations, as well as by the arrival of Arabic-speaking slave and ivory traders c.1850 which marked the beginning of capturing and exporting people from the region. On the eve of British colonial rule, then, Acholiland was to be found wrestling with the anxieties and exigencies of political and military transformation, all the while attempting to balance the impact of both outside forces and internal pressure.

By 1902, Buganda, Busoga, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole, Teso and Bugisu had all been brought under formal British governance. It was not until 1911, however, that incorporating the region north of the Nile into the territory of the Uganda Protectorate was given serious consideration. Acholiland was not officially created until 1913.<sup>25</sup> Throughout Uganda's colonial period, there existed a stark geopolitical north/south divide which was exacerbated by unequal economic investment.<sup>26</sup> The trajectory of the colonial economy both created and reinforced the view that northern Uganda was economically unviable, except as a hunting ground for army recruiters or as a pool of migrant labour to support the functioning of the southern cash crop economy.<sup>27</sup> This colonial interpretation of northern Uganda was primarily coloured by embedded cultural biases and constructed racial hierarchies. But nonetheless, many Acholi men were forced to travel to other parts of Uganda throughout British colonial rule to work on plantations or industrial enterprises, and Acholi speakers were well represented in

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.277; and D. A. Low, 'Uganda: The Establishment of the Protectorate, 1894-1919', in *History of East Africa*, vol. II, ed. by Vincent Harlow & E. M. Chilver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.103-110.

<sup>26</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.242, p.282.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

the British colonial army, termed the King's African Rifles (KAR), as well as other security forces, from the First World War onwards.

From around the Second World War (1939-45) Uganda began to bristle with boisterous and clamorous political activity. There were a number of incidences which underscored people's anger at and disenchantment with British colonial rule, as well as some feverish politicking between different indigenous organisations which underscored the development and entrenchment of ethnic and regional identities throughout this era.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, Uganda did not experience the forms of violent nationalism which Zimbabwe or Mozambique, for example, endured. In fact, Uganda's road to independence from Britain was a largely peaceful affair marked by elections which saw Milton Obote, the leader of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), installed as the new head of state in October 1962. Being from Lango, which bordered Acholiland and comprised of people who belonged to the same language family as Acholi, Obote's ascent to power instigated a nine year period during which Southern Luo-speaking northerners dominated the governance of Uganda. The defence budget rose considerably under Obote, partly in response to a short-lived mutiny in 1964, but largely due to the regime's chronic insecurity and Obote's energetic paranoia. Throughout the course of the 1960s the Ugandan army rapidly expanded, becoming the seventh largest in Africa; northerners continued to comprise the vast bulk of military recruits.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For more on this period, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.299-318; and Carol Summers, 'Ugandan Politics and World War II (1939-1945)', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. by Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.480-501.

<sup>29</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.80; and Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Motivations and Constraints* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990), p.158.

Circumstances changed in 1971 with the ousting of Obote at the hands of his long-time lieutenant Idi Amin Dada. Amin's rule (1971-1979), which was likewise characterised by authoritarianism and neuroticism, saw thousands of Acholi and Langi recruits murdered during state-directed, ethnically-based massacres, primarily aimed at consolidating the new regime through the eradication of any soldiers deemed loyal to Obote.<sup>30</sup> Most of the Acholi soldiery who escaped Amin's forces fled back to their home communities or into neighbouring Tanzania by the safest route possible. To replace the Acholi and Langi recruits, Amin enlisted large numbers of Central Sudanic-speaking men from his home region, West Nile.<sup>31</sup> Some ambitious opportunists no doubt benefitted from the chaos and instability which prevailed throughout this era, but many Acholi speakers experienced years of suffering due to the economic mismanagement, the decimation of civil society, and the constant threat of wanton state brutality which marked Amin's reign.

Idi Amin's rule came to an end in 1979 when Tanzanian soldiers, combined with a fragile coalition of Ugandan opposition forces, defeated the Ugandan army at Mpigi, sending Amin fleeing for Libya.<sup>32</sup> The implosion of Amin's rule was followed by a series of regimes during the early 1980s, most of which only lasted a few months. These may well have represented sincere attempts at crisis management and damage limitation, but they were nonetheless also plagued by 'a chronic lack of political

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Kyemba, *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1977), pp.44-47; Abdu Basajabaka Kawalya Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), p.121; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.303; and Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1987), p.104.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Branch, *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.57.

<sup>32</sup> For more information on this period, see Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey, *War in Uganda: The Legacy of Idi Amin* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1982).

confidence, ethnic mistrust, the erosion of social capital, economic collapse, and an over-mighty, swollen and unruly army'.<sup>33</sup> The most important event in regards to our discussion was the UPC's electoral "victory" in December 1980, which although widely discredited, saw Milton Obote reinstated as president, a position he would hold on to until July 1985. Obote's second stint further entrenched the militarisation of political culture and thus to some extent represented continuity with Amin's leadership. People accused or suspected of opposing Obote's return were routinely arrested or killed by the National Security Agency (NSA) in an attempt to cow the general population into submission. For many Acholi speakers, however, Obote's second presidency represented a blessed relief from Amin's rule and a chance to recover their military power and authority. Many former Acholi soldiers re-enlisted into the Ugandan army — which had been renamed the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) — while others were employed as local militia fighters.

During his second presidency Obote launched a bloody counter-insurgency against the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni, who had taken to the bush after claiming the 1980 elections had been rigged in favour of Obote and the UPC.<sup>34</sup> As this guerrilla war, or so-called 'protracted people's war', escalated throughout the early 1980s, so did state brutality. This gave Museveni the opportunity to frame his insurgency as a struggle over power between a barbarous North and a civilised South.<sup>35</sup> In reality, of course, any attempt to frame this violence purely as a form of civil war, neatly and unequivocally based along regional or ethnic lines is

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<sup>33</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.85-6.

<sup>34</sup> For more detail, see Yoweri Museveni, *Sewing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Museveni, *Sewing the Mustard Seed*; Adam Branch, 'Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence: Political Crisis and Ethnic Politics in Acholiland', in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010), pp.25-45 (pp.30-31); and Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, pp.74-75.

inherently flawed, not least because such an assumption ignores the internal conflicts which brewed between certain factions within the UNLA. In particular, there was simmering resentment and growing unrest between the different Southern Luo-speaking communities. This was largely due to Acholi soldiers' not wholly unjustified suspicions Obote was favouring his fellow Langi in terms of appointments and promotions at their expense. This discontent came to a head in 1985 when Acholi soldiers — under the direction of Lt.-Gen. Tito Okello — toppled Obote who, once again, fled into exile, this time never to return.<sup>36</sup>

Although Lt.-Gen. Tito Okello was sworn in as president, his leadership was extremely short-lived. In January of 1986, the NRA led by Museveni marched on Kampala. After overcoming some fierce resistance from Okello's troops, Museveni proclaimed a new regime with himself installed as head of state. Over thirty years later Museveni is still clinging on to power, but having to rely on ever increasing amounts of overt violence and intimidation in order to do so. For the Acholi, Museveni's rule has engendered economic marginalisation, political isolation, social deprivation and episodic violence. Importantly, rather than entering Acholiland as liberators after initially seizing power, NRA soldiers acted akin to an occupying army, treating the Acholi as an 'Other' who could only be contained through wanton brutality.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jimmy K. Tindigarukayo, 'Uganda, 1979-85: Leadership in Transition', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26:4 (1988), 607-622; Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.92.

<sup>37</sup> See Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.82; Branch, 'Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence', pp.26-34; Andrew Mwenda, 'Uganda's Politics of Foreign Aid and Violent Conflict: The Political Uses of the LRA Rebellion', in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010), pp.45-59 (pp.53-55); and Cecilie Lanken Verma, 'Guns and Tricks: State Becoming and Political Subjectivity in War-Torn Northern Uganda' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2013).

Museveni's rule has consequently given rise to a string of local insurgency movements in Acholiland, the most famous of which is the LRA led by Joseph Kony.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the 1990s the violence in Acholiland escalated dramatically meaning Acholi civilians, who were trapped between Museveni's troops and the LRA, suffered tremendously.<sup>39</sup> The LRA acted with impunity against its own people and operated largely through instilling fear. The group routinely carried out civilian massacres, physically mutilated supposedly dissident individuals through facial disfigurement and the amputation of limbs, and kidnapped children to induct them as soldiers. Museveni was either unable or unwilling to provide meaningful protection to Acholiland, instead opting to force hundreds of thousands of Acholi speakers into internally displaced person (IDP) camps which were lacking in basic facilities.<sup>40</sup> Although the LRA remains essentially undefeated, it has now abandoned its traditional recruiting grounds in northern Uganda which has provided many Acholi speakers with an opportunity to rebuild their lives.<sup>41</sup> A number of former rebel fighters, many of whom were originally child soldiers who had been forcefully recruited by violent abduction, have returned home and reintegrated back into civilian life, albeit with varying success.<sup>42</sup> From around 2008-2009 the IDP camps were slowly dismantled and dissolved, although many communities delayed moving back to their villages

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<sup>38</sup> Other important insurgency movements include the Ugandan People's Democratic Movement (UPDM) and the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) led by self-proclaimed prophetess Alice Lakwena.

<sup>39</sup> The NRA was renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force in 1995.

<sup>40</sup> Branch, 'Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence', pp.32-34. Mwenda, 'Uganda's Politics of Foreign Aid and Violent Conflict', pp.53-55; Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.141; and Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.102.

<sup>41</sup> The LRA remains active, however, in South Sudan, DR Congo and the Central African Republic where it orchestrates abductions and violent attacks.

<sup>42</sup> Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal, 'Rebels in Northern Uganda after their Return to Civilian Life: Between a Strong We-Image and Experiences of Isolation and Discrimination', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 51:2 (2017), 175-197.



from fear that it was only a matter of time before violence was renewed.<sup>43</sup> The Acholi region today is certainly not devoid of conflict, severe disputes over land have frequently been accompanied by violence, but the situation has no doubt vastly improved over the last twenty years.

## SECTION II: THE ACHOLI, MILITARISM AND MASCULINITY IN AFRICANIST SCHOLARSHIP

As briefly mentioned above, having been at the centre of a long, profoundly destabilising and almost unimaginably brutal war between 1986 and 2006, Acholi speakers have attracted unprecedented scholarly interest over the past two decades.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the rebels' use of violence was largely identified as irrational, illogical and apolitical within both local and international media coverage as well as some academic accounts. The LRA were depicted as a bizarre, syncretic, millenarian cult that utilised tactics which caused an unnecessary amount of death and destruction.<sup>45</sup> More recently, there has been a significant effort on behalf of social scientists to contextualise this violence and construct a counter-

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<sup>43</sup> Verma, p.82.

<sup>44</sup> For examples, see footnote 5.

<sup>45</sup> Gérard Prunier, 'Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986-99)', *African Affairs*, 103 (2004), 359-383 (p.359); Robert Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda: Results of a Field-Based Assessment of the Civil Conflicts in Northern Uganda* (Kampala: USAID Mission, 1997), pp.38-52; Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), p.86; Jane Bussmann, 'Joseph Kony: Uganda's Enemy Number One', *Telegraph*, 22 July 2010, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/uganda/7894594/Joseph-Kony-Ugandas-enemy-number-one.html>> [accessed 10 June 2019]; and Norman Katenda, 'Uganda is not in a Conflict- PM Mbabazi', *New Vision*, 18 March 2012, <<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/629697-uganda-is-not-in-conflict-pm-mbabazi.html>> [accessed 10 June 2019].

narrative.<sup>46</sup> Finnström, for example, has argued the violence committed by the LRA was, at least in part, the consequence of Acholiland's situation of stagnation, marginalisation and exclusion from Uganda's wider development, which left some Acholi men feeling they had no other option but to utilise physical force as a means of protest.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, there remains a severe lack of scholarly interest in properly historicising this conflict or in interrogating Acholi people's relationship with violence more broadly. The few studies which have attempted to trace the origins of Acholi militarism have been remarkably narrow in scope. They focus almost exclusively on the colonial era and do not fully explore the heterogeneous and complex nature of Acholi identity in relation to violence. For example, F. Van Acker, Ali A. Mazrui, Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot have all argued the historical use of Acholi speakers for colonial military service instigated a process of militarisation by creating a 'lumpen militariat class'.<sup>48</sup> According to this interpretation, because the Acholi were labelled a 'martial race' by the British throughout colonial rule, Acholi people themselves came to understand their ethnic identity as being inherently linked to military service and began to interpret violence as the only legitimate instrument through which deep-seated grievances could be addressed.<sup>49</sup> This analysis is wholly unsatisfactory, primarily because it suggests the ways in which Acholi identity

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<sup>46</sup> For example, see *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Allen and Vlassenroot.

<sup>47</sup> Sverker Finnström, 'An African Hell of Colonial Imagination? The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Another Story', in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010), pp.74-93 (p.76, pp.81-90).

<sup>48</sup> Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, p.8; Mazrui, 'Soldiers as Traditionalizers', pp.258-261; Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, p.49; and Amone, 'Reasons for the British Choice of the Acholi', p.77.

<sup>49</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

interacted with violence were solely the implanted product of colonial imaginations, thereby disregarding the impact of indigenous actions and initiatives. It also ignores the fact that, in reality, the emergence of a modern army during British colonial rule instigated a period of demilitarisation amongst the Acholi as bearing arms became the prerogative of relatively few men. This thesis thus offers a more historically informed and nuanced analysis of violence, militarism and masculinity amongst the Acholi, which does not simply begin in 1986 with the ascendancy of Joseph Kony and the LRA, but which culminates there.

Using the term ‘Acholi’ to refer to the people of north central Uganda is a relatively recent development. Opinion remains divided, therefore, over the extent to which we can consider the people living in this region as sharing a common identity and ethnic consciousness before the onset of colonialism. Anthropologist Tim Allen, for example, is particularly sceptical of referring to a unified Acholi identity in the precolonial period, instead claiming it to be an invention of British colonialism.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, Ronald Atkinson’s critical use of oral traditions convincingly illustrates that most of the people of present day Acholiland already shared the same chiefdom-based social and political order by the late eighteenth century, as well as a common language.<sup>51</sup> By the second half of the nineteenth century, Atkinson continues, ‘the broad unity that had been emerging was explicitly recognised and named [...] and it began to take on new uses and meanings, both for outsiders and [for] the people of Acholi themselves’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Tim Allen, ‘Ronald R. Atkinson: The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800’, *Africa*, 66:3 (1996), 472-475; Tim Allen, ‘Bitter Roots: The ‘Invention’ of Acholi Traditional Justice’, in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010), pp.242-262 (p.253).

<sup>51</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.262.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

This thesis situates itself somewhere in between these two opposing positions. On the one hand this thesis will argue that, despite experiencing a period of centralisation, for the most part individual Acholi chiefdoms retained complete autonomy and continued to function as the primary political and military unit through which formal activities and interactions of any kind were organised.<sup>53</sup> More significantly, throughout the nineteenth century distinctions between western and eastern Acholiland were much more pronounced than has previously been recognised.<sup>54</sup> The socio-politico organisation amongst some chiefdoms in eastern Acholiland, for example, continued to encompass a generation-class system likely adopted from neighbouring Eastern Nilotic peoples.<sup>55</sup> In addition to this, during the instability which characterised the nineteenth century Acholi people certainly clustered together for security and invested in larger amalgamated communities which could share the burdens of defence and food security.<sup>56</sup> But this also paralleled an escalation of local feuding which meant that Acholi society was at times further away from representing an integrated political unit than during the final years of the eighteenth century.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, although the Acholi did not consider themselves a unified single society by the onset of British colonial rule, this is neither surprising nor unusual. Identities are always in process and undergoing constant transformation. Even within

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<sup>53</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.271.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald R. Atkinson, for example, mostly ignores this in his book, *The Roots of Ethnicity*.

<sup>55</sup> This will be discussed in more detail within Chapter One. See 'Acholi Historical Texts' (AHT), collected by J. B. Webster, (unpublished interview transcripts 1970-1971), p.24, p.116; and 'Acholi Historical Texts' (AHT), collected by A. M. Garry, (unpublished interview transcripts 1972), p.47, p.138; and Jim Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi: A Legend Among the Acholi of Uganda* (Nairobi: Sahel Books, 2010), p.145.

<sup>56</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.142.

<sup>57</sup> For a similar argument in relation to the Langi people of Uganda, see John Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.108.

centralised kingdoms traditionally understood as homogenous ‘single-ethnic’ polities during the nineteenth century, identity evolution and ethnic assimilation were, in reality, ongoing.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, albeit unevenly, Acholi-speaking communities were steadily becoming more homogenous, especially in regard to the importance of war and attendant systems of militarism more broadly. This thesis argues, for example, that similar spiritual beliefs, rituals and ceremonial practices relating to conflict were becoming increasingly widespread across the region from the late eighteenth century onwards. The supplications recited and actions performed may have varied slightly from one community of neighbouring lineages to the next, but for the most part these distinctions in expression were superficial because the underlying symbolism and moral meaning were usually the same.<sup>59</sup> To take the example of the customary practices performed for those warriors who had killed in combat, although the structure of the ceremony varied from one chiefdom to another, they all unmistakably illustrated a paradoxical image of the slayer. The killer was at once celebrated as a hero and rejected as someone unclean and impure. In sum, then, despite local diversity Acholi culture was becoming increasingly uniform throughout the nineteenth century, although this process was incomplete, at times disrupted, and importantly, went unrecognised by local inhabitants.

In an attempt to move away from the notion of African victimhood, the last few decades have witnessed a significant rise in the number of studies exploring African agency. As a result we have seen a reduction in top-down approaches which over-

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<sup>58</sup> See Aidan Stonehouse, ‘Peripheral identities in an African State: a history of ethnicity in the Kingdom of Buganda since 1884’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2012); Aidan Stonehouse, ‘The Batooki in Buganda: Identity and Assimilation on the Peripheries of a Ugandan Kingdom’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 6:3 (2012), 527-543.

<sup>59</sup> Given that spiritual practices amongst illiterate societies are generally more malleable such variations are not unusual. See *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, ed. by Wim van Binsbergen and Mathew Schoffeleers (London: Routledge, 1985).

privilege officialdom while neglecting individual lived experiences. Instead, we now have access to an abundance of material concerning the ways in which local African actors devised effective coping strategies when faced with deteriorating socio-economic and political circumstances. Moreover, a number of studies have illustrated how, through striking displays of creativity and initiative, African people negotiated unique opportunities for themselves aimed at enhancing their individual, and sometimes collective, power and authority.<sup>60</sup> As John Lonsdale has effectively summarised, then, Africans have finally been placed at the heart of the continent's history, rather than reduced to merely sufferers at the periphery.<sup>61</sup> Particularly relevant to this project is the work of Timothy Parsons, which illustrates how KAR soldiers across East Africa both consciously and unconsciously exploited the inherent weaknesses of imperialism to further enhance their position within colonial society.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Michelle Moyd's monograph on 'violent intermediaries' effectively documents how African colonial soldiers disputed their subordinate position within the colonial military establishment.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Myles Osborne's study of 'martial race' amongst the Kamba of Kenya demonstrates the role colonised people played in 'creating, accentuating and projecting a martial nature', as well as how male Kamba leaders used their reputation for loyal soldiering to demand privilege and status.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For example, see Elizabeth A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007); Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1998); and *African Alternatives*, ed. by Patrick Chabal, Ulf Engel and Leo de Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> John Lonsdale, 'Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2000), 5-16 (p.12).

<sup>62</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), pp.6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Myles Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.9-11. For

To a large extent this project takes its lead from such scholars. It demonstrates, for example, how local Acholi people manipulated the context of disorder which paralleled the introduction of an external slave trade during the nineteenth century to further their political authority, economic wealth and social status. This was true not only of the traditional Acholi elite, who became trading partners with the Arabic-speaking slave traders, but also for ordinary Acholi men who accompanied the slave traders on military expeditions in exchange for a share in the spoils of war. In addition, it emphasises the weaknesses of the colonial project and illustrates how Acholi people themselves influenced colonial military recruitment patterns. Even so, although this thesis provides these local manifestations of power which shaped Acholi speakers' interactions with outsiders sufficient consideration, it does not ignore the violence, exploitation and suffering which both the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders and British colonial rule engendered. Thus, this thesis also illustrates, for example, how colonial military service exposed Acholi recruits to everyday forms of racism when on active service and therefore served, at least in part, as an unremitting reminder of their subordinate status within colonial racial hierarchies. By doing so, this thesis serves to underscore how we must not let our search for African agency conceal the more brutal and repressive nature of military service and British colonial rule more broadly.

The most important theme of this thesis is the relationship between masculinity and militarism. Masculinities are socially and historically constructed. When we explore masculinities we are not analysing men per se, but rather the cluster of norms, values and behavioural patterns which express expectations of how men should act

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an additional example, see Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

and perform in relation to others.<sup>65</sup> Masculinities both inform and are informed by other social factors such as age, socio-economic status, religion, race, sexuality, and health, making them intrinsically relational not only to femininities but also to other masculine identities.<sup>66</sup> Over the past thirty years the study of masculinities has become increasingly important for those hoping to better understand men's behaviour within the African context.<sup>67</sup> This intensified scholarly interest partly stems from Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee's seminal piece, 'A New Sociology of Masculinity'. This article proposed that although men's life trajectories are inherently varied, there remains a singular hegemonic model of masculinity within any given society. By establishing what it means to be a man, this hegemonic model silences subordinate masculine identities.<sup>68</sup> This concept was later revised by the sociologist Raewyn Connell. In her book *Masculinities*, Connell argued that dominant, subordinate, and marginalised masculinities are in constant interaction with one another, and that the dominance of a particular culturally exalted hegemonic

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<sup>65</sup> Holly E. Porter, 'After Rape: Justice and Social Harmony in Northern Uganda' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The London School of Economic and Political Science, 2013), p.488.

<sup>66</sup> Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p.68.

<sup>67</sup> Despite this project's focus on masculinities it is important to note that some scholars have questioned the assumption that gender is a cross-cultural organising principle and thus the relevance and applicability of gender analysis to the African context. For example, Oyeronke Oyewumi has argued that the absence of gender demarcation in the Yoruba language suggests gender was historically not a fundamental social category among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. Therefore to commit oneself to the assumption of gender is to remain embedded within a Eurocentric theoretical framework of critique. See Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp.15-16. A number of scholars have challenged Oyewumi's argument, however, on the basis that she ascribes undue importance to the relationship between language and social reality. For example, see Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, "'Yorubas Don't Do Gender"; A Critical Review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The Invention Of Women: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*', in *African Gender Scholarship: Concepts, Methodologies and Paradigms*, ed. by Bibi Bakare-Yusuf and Signe Arnfred (CODESRIA: Dakar, 2004), pp.61-82 (p.66, pp.70-74).

<sup>68</sup> Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee, 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', *Theory and Society*, 14:5 (1985), 551-604 (p.587, pp.590-3).



masculinity is contestable and may be eroded.<sup>69</sup> More recently there have been a number of scholars, including Andrea Cornwall, Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher, who have likewise suggested that the notion of a singular, incontestable hegemonic masculinity is no longer useful for analysing contemporary African societies where identities are increasingly fluid. They argue new opportunities and new constraints have resulted in competing hegemonic models of masculinity which make it increasingly unclear which masculinity is dominant at any one time.<sup>70</sup> In addition to this, a number of scholars, including Deevia Bhana, have argued gendered identities are 'situational', and thus which masculinity gains hegemonic status might vary depending on the context or the subjective interpretations of the individual or the observer. What is more, different groups within society can hold contrasting opinions in regards to what hegemonic masculinity comprises of.<sup>71</sup>

To some extent this thesis takes its lead from the aforementioned scholars whose research has suggested masculine identities are more complex and more

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<sup>69</sup> Connell, pp.76-81, p.198.

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Cornwall, 'To Be a Man Is More Than a Day's Work: Shifting Ideals of Masculinity in Ado-Odo, Southwestern Nigeria', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), pp.230-249 (p. 244); Stephan Miescher and Lisa Lindsay, 'Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), pp.1-31 (p. 6.).

<sup>71</sup> Deevia Bhana, 'Violence and the Gendered Negotiation of Masculinity Among Young Black School Boys in South Africa', in *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.205-221 (pp.206-11); Also, see Stella Nyanzi, Barbara Nyanzi-Wakholi and Bessie Kalina, 'Male Promiscuity: The Negotiation of Masculinities by Motorbike Taxi-Riders in Masaka, Uganda', *Men and Masculinities*, 12:1 (2009), 73-89 (p.77); For more on this argument in relation to identities more broadly, see John G. Galaty, "'The Eye that Wants a Person, Where Can It Not See?": Inclusion, Exclusion, and Boundary Shifters in Maasai Identity', in *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa*, ed. by Thomas Spear and Richard Waller (Oxford: James Currey, 1993), pp.174-195 (p.176); Ronald Cohen, 'Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 7 (1978), 379-403 (p.388); Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp.222-237, (pp.222-223); and Osborne, p.3, p.10, p.92.

flexible than Carrigan, Connell and Lee originally proposed. As this thesis will demonstrate, for example, over the past two hundred and fifty years Acholi masculinity has never been complete but rather always in process, it has thus remained in a constant state of being constructed and reconstructed, as well as contested and disputed in the context of existing power relations. Moreover, different groups in society, most notably women, have at times held conflicting opinions about how Acholi men should act and behave, and what roles they should perform. Nonetheless, this does not mean hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework should be dismissed altogether. For one, it enables us to understand normative judgements regarding honourable manhood and thus analyse both the extent and significance of any disruptions and adaptations over time and space. Moreover, it helps us explore gendered hierarchies more effectively. Thus, the concept of a dominant form of masculinity that helped define what men should aspire to and judge themselves by will be utilised throughout this thesis, although there will simultaneously be a focus on how this hegemonic model has been challenged and renegotiated.

Existing literature concerned with the historical relationship between masculinity and violence in the African context usually falls into one of two categories — both of which offer important insights into this complex relationship but are nonetheless partially flawed. The first set of scholars, who are primarily concerned with militarism in particular, tend to argue that amongst many African societies violence and the demonstration of martial virtues were envisioned as a prerequisite or precondition for securing a dominant masculine identity.<sup>72</sup> Writing against the

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Reid, for example, has argued that although notions around courage and valour differed from culture to culture, as well as over time, they were mostly seen as masculine qualities and war was often seen as a manly adventure. See Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, p.205. John Iliffe has similarly proposed that although interpretations of honour varied from one society to another, martial prowess was often used to pursue individual pre-eminence

backdrop of Idi Amin's violent regime in Uganda, for example, Mazrui argued that in most African cultures images of aggressiveness and ruthlessness were intimately related to the role of the man in both social and military affairs. Manliness, according to Mazrui, was partly defined in terms of the capacity for rough behaviour. Idi Amin's brutality and militant self-confidence, therefore, can be partially explained as a violent assertion and consolidation of manhood.<sup>73</sup> In many ways Mazrui's argument is highly significant. It takes a commendable step away from giving causal power to biological explanations — whereby men are depicted as naturally predisposed to violence and aggression — towards a rationale which emphasises the importance and impact of locally constructed gendered norms and values. Nonetheless, this interpretation is only partially applicable to Acholi speakers. At a basic level, demonstrations of bravery and physical strength have been intrinsically linked to honourable masculinity from the precolonial period through to the present day. Moreover, acts of cowardliness have been socially abhorred and closely associated with femininity. But even so, the relationship between Acholi masculinity and violence is, and always has been, complex and susceptible to change over time. For example, even during the nineteenth century an Acholi warrior's reputation was ambiguous. His ability to carve out individual distinction during war was equally as dependent upon his ability to maintain a restrained composure and conform to the moral standards governing his use of physical force, as his capacity to exhibit exceptional courage and physical strength. In addition, despite this admiration for bravery and valour, martial prowess has not always represented the most important aspect of manhood amongst Acholi speakers.

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and while heroism was often idealised, cowardliness was often ridiculed. See John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.1-2, p.147.

<sup>73</sup> Mazrui, 'The Resurrection of the Warrior Tradition', pp.67-84; Ali A. Mazrui, *The Politics of War and the Culture of Violence: North South Essays* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2008), pp.42-46, p.54; and Ali A. Mazrui, 'The Warrior Tradition and the Masculinity of War', *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 12:1-4 (1977), 69-81 (pp.69-70).

The colonial era, for example, bore witness to periods where many Acholi women rejected the notion that demonstrations of military skill were systematically compatible with honourable manhood, instead placing more emphasis upon men's responsibilities around the home.

Other scholars, whose research falls into the second category of literature exploring the relationship between masculinity and violence in Africa, are more concerned with men's use of physical force in domestic or private settings than militarism and soldiering. These scholars have tended to argue that rather than violence being an integral component of masculinity, African men have been forced to resort to violence because alternative avenues through which they could achieve their expectations concerning manhood have collapsed. This body of literature maintains that although there is little to suggest hegemonic models of masculinity explicitly encourage the use of violence, there is a correlation between normative models of masculinity and men's use of physical force. Certain contexts, such as poverty or impotency, which prevent men from fulfilling locally constructed gendered expectations, result in feelings of humiliation and resentment that can lead to an increase in violence and aggression.<sup>74</sup> For example, Margrethe Silberschmidt, Robert

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<sup>74</sup> For example, see Niki Kandirikirira, 'Deconstructing Domination: Gender Disempowerment and the Legacy of Colonialism and Apartheid in Omaheke, Namibia', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (New York: Zed Books, 2002), pp.112-138 (p.119). Antonia Porter, 'What is Constructed can be Transformed: Masculinities in Post-Conflict Societies in Africa', *International Peacekeeping*, 20:4 (2013), 486-506 (pp. 488-490); Chris Dolan, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States', pp.57-84; and David H. J. Morgan, 'Theatre of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities', in *Theorising Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (California: Sage Publications, 1994), pp.165-183 (p.170). Similarly, the violence associated with Africa's youth has likewise been depicted as a result of inadequate life chances and social marginality. For example, see John Lonsdale, 'Authority, Gender & Violence: The War within Mau Mau's fight for Land & Freedom', in *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration*, ed. by E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), pp.46-76 (p. 51); Dorothy Kizza, Birthe Loa Knizek, Eugene Kinyanda and Heidi Hjelmeland, 'Men in Despair:

Morrell and Sarah Hautzinger have all argued that within a context of women's increasing empowerment and visibility in the public sphere, the normal order of patriarchy is undermined and therefore some men, perceiving their positions to be at risk, turn to domestic violence in order to reassert their dominance and compensate for the deficit in masculine control.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in an attempt to explain the brutality associated with Shaka Zulu, Mazrui has also linked violence in African culture to thwarted masculinity. Feelings of humiliation, inadequacy and inferiority, Mazrui claims, could lead to brutal assertiveness and a violent rebellion against emasculating processes.<sup>76</sup> In relation to the Acholi, Chris Dolan's work concerning thwarted masculinity throughout the 1990s represents the most important study to date. Dolan argues that within the context of protracted war, heavy militarisation and internal displacement, the space for alternative masculine identities collapsed. As a consequence the hegemonic model of masculinity — which Dolan argues was based around marriage, the ability to create a family, and then the capacity to provide for and protect it — was bolstered and yet became increasingly difficult for most men to achieve.<sup>77</sup> This disjuncture between men's expectations and their ability to fulfil them supposedly resulted in widespread feelings of frustration and resentment, which were expressed through the use of violence against self and others, most notably women but

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A Qualitative Psychological Autopsy Study of Suicide in Northern Uganda', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 49:5 (2012), 696-717 (pp.706-7).

<sup>75</sup> Sarah Hautzinger, 'Researching Men's Violence: Personal Reflections on Ethnographic Data', *Men and Masculinities*, 6:1 (2003), 93-106 (p.101); Margrethe Silberschmidt, 'Poverty, Male Disempowerment, and Male Sexuality: Rethinking Men and Masculinities in Rural and Urban East Africa', in *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.189-205 (p.194); and Robert Morrell, 'Men, Masculinities and Gender Politics in South Africa: A Reply to Macleod', *Psychology In Society*, 35 (2007), 15-27 (pp.17-19).

<sup>76</sup> Mazrui, *The Politics of War*, pp.42-46, pp.54-55. This argument regarding emasculation has also been emphasised within popular history narratives relating to Shaka Zulu, see E. A. Ritter, *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire* (London: Longmans Green, 1955), p.14.

<sup>77</sup> Dolan, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States', pp.61-64, p.77.

also other men.<sup>78</sup> To some extent this thesis seeks to build upon Dolan's work in Acholiland as he himself has stated his research did 'not attempt to explore the historical development' of masculinity amongst the Acholi.<sup>79</sup> Predominantly, however, it seeks to challenge Dolan's claim that 'a powerful admixture of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial messages has led to a normative model of masculinity' by questioning the linear structure of development implied in this statement and assessing fluctuations in the relationship between masculinity and men's willingness to engage in violence over time.<sup>80</sup>

These arguments concerning thwarted masculinity neatly coincide with recent literature concerning the violent implications associated with feelings of abjection, disconnection, and exclusion from a normative identity.<sup>81</sup> They are no doubt important because they represent a crucial shift towards understanding men's behaviour as having been informed not only by economic and political motivations, but also by their role as fathers and husbands.<sup>82</sup> They are therefore relevant to the Acholi context. As this thesis will argue, for example, the violence committed by UNLA Acholi soldiers during Obote's second presidency likely reflected, at least in part, Acholi people's collective experience of blocked social and gendered aspirations throughout Amin's rule. But even so, manhood should still be viewed as both relative and context dependent. Although not all men will be able to live up to the same understanding of honour and manhood, that does not inevitably mean some men are denied masculinity altogether and forced to resort to violence. Men's expectations will be necessarily

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp.71-72.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp.61-4, p.82.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Vigdis Broch-Due, 'Violence and Belonging: Analytical Reflections', in *Violence and Belonging: The Quest for Identity in Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. by Vigdis Broch-Due (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.1-40 (p.10).

<sup>82</sup> Miescher and Lindsay, p.4.

distinct having been constructed through varied lived experiences.<sup>83</sup> More importantly, though, not all violence can be explained as a consequence of seemingly exceptional, intolerable circumstances. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, Acholi men have not only utilised physical force when alternative avenues through which they could meet constructed expectations had collapsed. During the nineteenth century, for example, violence performed a valuable function in everyday life. It represented a means through which warriors could protect and provide for their families, as well as a platform for securing social prestige. Willingness to engage in violence was not, therefore, always due to a context of marginality and blocked gendered expectations.<sup>84</sup>

### SECTION III: ORGANISATION AND KEY THEMES

This thesis examines warfare, soldiering and militarism amongst the Acholi through four thematic chapters. The first of these is concerned with transformations in military affairs from c.1750-1900. It examines shifts in the frequency, composition, and regulation of warfare, as well as alterations to the social and economic value of warriorhood. Importantly, it demonstrates how violent encounters increasingly came to represent a passage to social prestige, respected masculinity and maturity from the

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<sup>83</sup> For case study evidence relating to this theory, John Iliffe's research indicates that although slaves were not able to obtain the same understanding of honour and respect that their masters maintained, there was a hierarchy among slaves based on levels of assimilation. This enabled some slaves to negotiate and lay claim to alternative forms of honour and status. See Iliffe, *Honour*, pp.119-123.

<sup>84</sup> Cherry Leonardi's research likewise indicates that young people in South Sudan enlisted into the armed forces because of their aspirations to defend their community, not because of generational tensions. See Cherry Leonardi, 'Liberation or Capture: Youth in between 'Hakuma', and 'Home' during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan', *African Affairs*, 106:424 (2007), 391-412, (pp.392-3, pp.400-1).

late eighteenth century onwards due to new pressures, new opportunities and new political, economic and social aspirations. In addition, this chapter argues that changes in military affairs were not solely generated by the arrival of Arabic-speaking slave and ivory traders during the mid-nineteenth century, as is commonly suggested.<sup>85</sup> Instead, an assortment of intertwining internal factors dating back to the eighteenth century also played a pivotal role. Thus, this chapter ultimately contends that much of the military change which penetrated parts of Acholiland following its integration into the wider economic world was, in reality, only an escalation of what was already happening.

Chapter Two challenges the normative narrative concerning colonial military recruitment in Uganda by demonstrating how the Acholi were not identified from the commencement of British rule as a ‘martial race’.<sup>86</sup> It will be argued that Acholi speakers only came to be viewed as valuable soldiers gradually over time — partially as a consequence of Britain’s changing imperial agenda, and partly because soldiering became increasingly popular amongst young Acholi men. Only by conceptualising enlistment strategies in this way can we better understand why British recruitment policies were adapted over time, and why colonial judgements regarding ‘martial race’ and so-called ‘loyalty’ were unfixed and malleable. In addition, this chapter explores

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<sup>85</sup> For example, see Odongo and Webster, pp.163-166; Uma, pp.19-22; Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1890-1979* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.68-70; Reuben Anywar, *The Acholi and Their Chieftoms* (Kampala: [n.pub.], 1947), p.8; Bethwell A. Ogot, *History of the Luo-speaking people of Eastern Africa* (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 2009), pp.278-9; and Okot p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), p.135.

<sup>86</sup> For scholars who conform to this normative narrative, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.158, pp.188-189, p.282; Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.61, p.79; Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, p.8; Mazrui, ‘Soldiers as Traditionalizers’, pp.258-261; Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, p.49; Amone, ‘Reasons for the British Choice of the Acholi’, p.77; and Cambridge, Cambridge University Archives (CUA), M. M. Louise Pirouet, Dinwiddy Papers, MMLP/DINW, Box 1, Folder MMDP/DINW/1, photocopy entitled ‘The Uganda Coup: Some Insights’, written by Hugh Dinwiddy, 12.08.85.



why the idea of soldiering only began to resonate amongst Acholi men from around the First World War onwards. It argues that many Acholi men were discouraged from initially enlisting into the KAR because military service required long periods of absence from home, meaning soldiers had to leave their families and in particular their wives unprotected. As the colonial period wore on, however, many Acholi men were inspired to 'fight for Britain' because colonial military service, in a similar way to warriorhood in the past, had come to be imagined as a platform for acquiring individual distinction through the expression of embedded martial virtues. Moreover, due to a reconfiguration of ideas surrounding defence and security, a number of Acholi men enlisted into the KAR because they associated colonial military service with performing the role of protector. Lastly, this chapter evaluates the Second World War which engendered a particularly complex and unique set of circumstances. It will be argued that although some Acholi men who envisioned themselves as stoic providers of peace and stability were further inspired to join the KAR, others became increasingly reluctant. As will be illustrated, this was partially due to Acholi women stressing that soldiering no longer coincided with established gendered norms and values. Instead, Acholi women argued respected masculinity revolved around a variety of duties included farming and siring children, which required men to remain or return home and take care of their families in a more practical way.

Chapter Three begins by examining the ways in which Acholi soldiers made meaning of the violence they engaged in whilst serving in the KAR. More specifically, it evaluates how Acholi recruits coped with emotions such as fear and guilt whilst still attempting to conform to locally constructed gendered stereotypes which presented men as uncompromisingly brave. It will be argued that Acholi soldiers' personal experiences of war often entrenched an abhorrence of physical violence and the

devaluation of war and conflict. This chapter thus demonstrates that, contrary to popular opinion, violent contexts do not invariably breed more violence or systematically promote versions of masculinity characterised by exaggerated militarism. In addition, this chapter engages critically with recent scholarship which has endeavoured to demonstrate how certain ethnic groups were able to exploit their image as loyal military recruits to enhance their own position within colonial society. In contrast, this chapter demonstrates that soldiering did not always generate the economic advantages or social rewards Acholi recruits had initially anticipated, and thus a number of Acholi men who served in the KAR found their capacity to access respectable masculinity obstructed. For example, veterans who suffered from serious physical injuries found it increasingly challenging to lay claim to honourable manhood as they had become reliant on their wives to care and provide for them. Similarly, this chapter demonstrates how KAR soldiers who suffered from sexually-transmitted infections were likewise unable to conform to the hegemonic model of masculinity as their capacity to father children and extend their household had been compromised. As a result, they experienced new forms of marginalisation and exclusion.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis is concerned with UNLA brutality during Obote's second presidency. It deconstructs the Ugandan national narrative, which predominantly blames Acholi soldiers for the atrocities committed throughout the early 1980s, and highlights instead that the extreme forms of violence associated with the LRA provided the ideal backdrop for reconceptualising and reframing UNLA brutality as simply another example of Acholi savagery. In addition, this chapter explores how Acholi UNLA soldiers themselves remember and contextualise the extreme forms of violence commonly associated with Obote's second regime. It argues that veterans use a combination of standardised and locally constructed

techniques to defend their own individual behaviour and expel any feelings of guilt or shame. Finally, this chapter considers the ways in which social conflict and economic collapse impacted how UNLA violence played out on a local level. It argues, for example, that violent crime such as looting offered disaffected Acholi soldiers an opportunity for personal enrichment, and through that upward social mobility and respected manhood. Moreover, it will be argued that UNLA brutality must be partially understood as a violent reaction against a loss of domestic power during Idi Amin's regime, and thus an attempt on behalf of some Acholi soldiers to reassert their authority and manhood through violence. Ultimately, then, this chapter argues that some soldiers likely saw the violence they engaged in as restorative, aimed at the reclamation of a superior past where Acholi people held more military power.

In addition to what has been outlined above, this thesis explores a number of important cross-cutting themes which transcend the individual chapters and will thus be discussed throughout. One of these themes is the production and reproduction of imagery. This thesis challenges the historiographical assumption that Acholiland was systematically identified as a land of savagery inhabited by bellicose natives within European accounts. It does so by showcasing the complex and often conflicting imagery produced by early western observers in relation to Acholi-speaking peoples. More importantly, though, this thesis focuses on the limits of colonial invention in regard to the evolution of Acholi identity. It emphasises how European understandings also reflected the form and content of local African discourses, as well as internal historical dynamics. It thus argues that Acholi people were not only able to influence and manipulate the nature of their interactions with colonialism, but also colonial thinking in regard to their military value and martial worth. As such, this thesis demonstrates that Acholi speakers came to be associated with the imperial label

‘martial race’ under British colonial rule partly as a result of pre-existing values and the way they presented themselves to western observers. This theme of imagery is again addressed within the conclusion which shows that, even today, many Acholi speakers actively contribute to this carefully crafted image of themselves as inherently brave, physically formidable and naturally skilful in battle — a stereotype which is then eagerly consumed and reproduced by many outsiders.

Throughout the chapters concerning British colonial rule there is a focus on comparing idealised public perceptions about colonial military service with individual lived realities.<sup>87</sup> This thesis initially evaluates, for example, the range of motives that encouraged Acholi men to enlist into the KAR. It argues these included lucrative military wages; the prospect of using their income to marry and extend their household; the opportunity to earn individual distinction through the demonstration of normative martial virtues; and finally the prospect of proving themselves to be ‘real men’ who were capable of caring for and protecting their communities. In sum, Acholi men’s motivations revolved around romanticised images of what military service would engender for both their communities and for them as individuals, be that economically or socially. In reality, however, as this thesis later illustrates, Acholi recruits’ ability to lay claim to an honourable masculine identity was partially thwarted by the constructed racial hierarchies which underpinned colonial armies. Moreover, individual Acholi soldiers’ experiences of returning to civilian life were complex. Although some Acholi soldiers were able to enhance their social position within their

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<sup>87</sup> This phrase comes from David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*, with Martin Plaut (New York: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2010).

own communities upon their return home, others were feared or experienced alienation, scorn, and even physical harassment.

As a final point, this thesis places emphasis on how violence has been contextualised by the perpetrators themselves, as well as the remembrance of violent pasts. Analysing what tools warriors or soldiers have used to internally cope with and justify the violence they both witnessed and participated in is just as important as interrogating why men choose to participate in war and conflict in the first place, and yet it receives far less scholarly attention. To appreciate how practitioners of violence contextualised and rationalised their behaviour we must seek to better understand spiritual belief systems and local healing practices already embedded within society. Amongst the Acholi, rituals and ceremonies in particular have helped prevent troubling or distressing events from paralysing witnesses and perpetrators. Both KAR and UNLA veterans, for example, cannot simply forget or ignore their violent pasts, but by drawing on locally prescribed spiritual belief systems and healing practices they have been able to modify and regulate how they think about certain events, which in turn has helped them to cope.<sup>88</sup>

The importance of conflict and violence in popular memory is profound. The struggle surrounding the remembrance of violent moments in history is thus often as important as the events themselves.<sup>89</sup> Remembrance is frequently concerned with the control of historical knowledge, which can prove critical in terms of forging identities

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<sup>88</sup> The Dinka also use ritual for controlling understandings of the past, see Ronald Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p.201. For more information on how remembrance can act as a path to recovery, see Jay Winter, 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.40-60 (p.43).

<sup>89</sup> For more on this argument, see Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, pp.22-23.

and carving out legitimacy, power and authority. This thesis deals specifically with the politics of remembering and how the past can be reshaped, rearranged and distorted in pursuit of contemporary aims and agendas. As such, it further demonstrates how collective memory and the public representation of violent pasts can be significantly influenced by the present. This is especially true for the violence performed by UNLA soldiers during Obote's second presidency, which has been falsely characterised within the Ugandan national narrative as simply the consequence of murderous and revengeful Acholi recruits: a theory which has — not uncoincidentally — justified and defended Yoweri Museveni's claims to power and his treatment of northern Uganda during his protracted presidency. In addition, this thesis will conclude by arguing the way past violence is remembered amongst Acholi people today has proven critical for further fostering a collective identity. Some Acholi people use their reputation as brave and formidable soldiers, for example, to create a space for themselves in the present, and to further popularise their valuable contribution to Uganda's past. Overall, it is only through adopting a broad historical timeframe that this thesis is able to analyse these important cross-cutting issues in meaningful ways.

#### SECTION IV: THE SOURCES

This thesis draws on a vast array of both indigenous and European source material. Unfortunately, we are faced with very few written accounts of the precolonial era. The Acholi, who relied on the oral transmission of knowledge prior to the onset of British colonialism, left no contemporary written records of their precolonial history. Nor did missionaries seek to evangelise, or document, the Acholi before the imposition of

British rule, preferring the relative security associated with a hierarchical state such as Buganda. This absence of documentation, alongside the inevitable unevenness and opacity of the source material we do have available, is one reason why communities such as the Acholi have remained relatively marginalised within precolonial military histories. Those accounts which do exist, such as reports and diaries written by early European travellers, only date back to the latter half of the nineteenth century and are littered with generic racial assumptions. Nonetheless, it remains important not to disregard what is available. Albeit problematic and limiting, early European written accounts can prove both informative and revealing if approached from a critical perspective.

As Carolyn Hamilton has effectively argued, to dismiss sources written by Europeans as simply examples of colonial discourse is to obstruct the possibility of recovering vital material about Africa's past and preliterate peoples.<sup>90</sup> This is especially true when we consider the fact that imagery and stereotypes are produced through a process of dialogue and negotiation, meaning that European interpretations were also shaped by the various African views they encountered.<sup>91</sup> Thus, through careful and methodical sifting, early European accounts can help us understand how Acholi speakers presented themselves to imperial observers, as well as how other Ugandan people understood the Acholi. For example, missionary accounts give us a clearer idea of how people from Uganda's Bantu-speaking southern kingdoms, such as Bunyoro or Buganda, portrayed Acholi speakers to Europeans. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary T. L. Lawrence, for instance, wrote that a woman from Bunyoro who travelled to Acholiland in 1905 had told him 'she went in

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<sup>90</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, p.28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

fear and trembling among the then wild Acholi'.<sup>92</sup> Missionary accounts also help us better understand how the Acholi presented themselves to outsiders. CMS missionary Albert Lloyd, for example, wrote in the early 1900s that before entering Acholiland for the first time he had received a message from *Rwot* Awich of the Acholi chiefdom Payira. In his message, Awich had seemingly described his own people as warlike.<sup>93</sup>

The coverage provided by official colonial administrative and military records held at the British National Archives, the Imperial War Museum and the Uganda National Archives is both uneven and incomplete. Some archival collections were lost or unintentionally destroyed, whilst others were subjected to rigorous, retrospective censorship by the British government during its withdrawal from Uganda and thus made unavailable to researchers. Moreover, indigenous voices are inevitably missing due to the late adoption of literacy in Acholiland, even amongst the chiefly class. Nonetheless, archival material of this kind still provides us with vital information regarding the nature of colonial military service, recruitment strategies, military campaigns, and certain aspects of military life such as the wages paid and food rations provided.

The anthropologist Frank Girling's book *The Acholi of Uganda*, originally published in 1960, is the best known ethnographic account of the Acholi and has thus represented a valuable resource, especially when combined with Girling's private research notes which I personally tracked down and sought special permission to access. Unpublished descriptive accounts held at the Church Missionary Society Archives in Birmingham and the Comboni Archives in Rome also provided rich data,

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<sup>92</sup> Birmingham, Church Missionary Society Archives (CMSA), CMS/ACC84/F4, Arthur Fisher, Unofficial Papers, 'Gulu Files', Letter from Lawrence, Gulu I, p.8.

<sup>93</sup> Albert B. Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum: Life and Adventure on the Upper Nile* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), p.160.



as did photograph collections and personal papers held in archives at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Recent newspaper editorials stored online, as well as newspaper collections stored at the Library of Congress, the British Library and Makerere University Library in Kampala, provided a wealth of material on how the Acholi have been imagined and stereotyped within social memory and public discourse throughout both the colonial and postcolonial era. They also exposed how soldiers have been conceptualised within popular memory. A range of written resources stored at several local Ugandan district archives, as well as unpublished material held at the head office for Uganda's Human Rights Commission, provided useful data on the UNLA and the violence which characterised Obote's second regime. Finally, local newspapers including *Bukedde*, *Ebifa mu Uganda* and *Munno*, as well as resources held at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Gulu, Rubaga Cathedral in Kampala, and Uganda's Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs record centre were also consulted.

In terms of indigenous material, the use of recorded oral traditions for reconstructing precolonial African history has been hotly debated for some time.<sup>94</sup> The term 'oral traditions' is used here to refer to stories or folktales which have been passed down from one generation to the next. It is thus distinct from oral history. The problems with using African oral traditions for better understanding a region's military history are well known; 'victories are exaggerated, even invented, defeats are reworked into heroic sacrifices, the very nature of war itself given misleading

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<sup>94</sup> For example, see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973); Jan Vansina, 'Once upon a Time: Oral Traditions as History in Africa', *Daedalus*, 100:2 (1971), 442-468; J. D. Fage, 'Some Notes on a Scheme for the Investigation of Oral Tradition in Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1 (1956), 15-19; Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Investigating Oral Tradition', *The Journal of African History*, 27:2 (1986), 203-213; and David William Cohen, 'The Undefining of Oral Tradition', *Ethnohistory*, 36: 1 (1989), 9-18.

prominence'.<sup>95</sup> Oral traditions cannot, therefore, be interpreted as straightforward, uncomplicated narratives of historical events.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, early indigenous histories — which were often written by local Acholi leaders and intellectuals who kept half an eye on the present — should likewise not be mistaken for impartial, objective accounts of the past.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, despite the potential for manipulation and reinterpretation, both oral traditions and early indigenous histories can be used to form convincing historical arguments when deployed with caution.<sup>98</sup> Most importantly, they provide us with a rich insight into the role of warfare amongst precolonial Acholi-speaking communities, and the importance Acholi speakers attached to military endeavours.

Alongside written resources, this thesis relies heavily on 165 personal accounts collected through semi-structured, one-to-one interviews.<sup>99</sup> This method was chosen because, whilst still allowing for flexibility and in-depth discussions, it ensured certain important themes were always covered and that the qualitative data collected would prove comparable. All of the interviews were electronically recorded, whilst I, the author, made additional handwritten notes in relation to nonverbal communication, such as body language. Participants were generally recruited through word of mouth and referrals, although local radio announcements were used to locate former KAR

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<sup>95</sup> Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, p.15.

<sup>96</sup> Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood*, p.29.

<sup>97</sup> For example, see Anywar, *The Acholi and Their Chiefdoms*; and Lacito Okech, *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi* (Kampala: Eagle Press, 1953). For more information on how people retell history based on contemporary objectives, see Justin Willis and G. Gona, 'Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya', *African Affairs*, 112 (2013), 48-71.

<sup>98</sup> For those who use oral traditions effectively in relation to Acholi history, see Atkinson, *The Roots*; and Odongo and Webster, *The Central Lwo*.

<sup>99</sup> As the interviews centred around sensitive topics the decision was made to grant all the participants who took part in this study anonymity. Thus, instead of using their name, each participant will be referred to by the specific number they were allotted. When an interview is referenced within the footnotes the information provided will include the individual's designated number, their gender, where the interview took place, and finally the date the interview was conducted.

soldiers. The sample included both males (144) and females (21), soldiers (59) and civilians (106), elders (73) and young adults (22). Although the vast majority of participants were Acholi (159), a number of interviews were conducted with former British KAR officers (3), as well as individuals from Buganda and Bunyoro (3). Some participants were visited more than once when there was a need to eliminate the possibility of misinterpretation. These subsequent interviews usually included cross-checking evidence, collecting more detail on particular ideas or concepts, or clarifying how the participant had intended any ambiguous terms or phrases relating to violence, gender or emotions to be interpreted.

Most of the interviews were carried out in the vernacular before being transcribed into English. Although I, the author, did learn to speak and read basic Acholi whilst residing in Uganda, to ensure accuracy and that the connotations embedded within certain lexical units, proverbs, songs, and folktales were fully understood, interpreters and translators were required nonetheless. In terms of positionality, as a white European I represented a foreigner, or a visitor, throughout my stay in Acholiland. My outsider status no doubt made certain aspects of the research process, such as initially accessing and recruiting participants, more challenging. Nonetheless, because local residents tended to view me as an external observer whose stay in Acholiland was only temporary, they were usually very willing to disclose sensitive information and share their personal experiences of soldiering and violence with me because they felt comfortable that doing so would not jeopardise their reputation or status within their communities.

The interview transcripts represented the basis for textual analysis, with the predefined themes of the thesis serving as a guide for grouping interviewees'

responses into categories based on similar ideas or topics. Nonetheless, data collection and data evaluation were conducted in parallel meaning a preliminary analysis of transcripts was used to identify alternative areas of interest which required more extensive exploration. In addition to this, more in-depth discourse analysis was carried out through paying close attention to different uses of and shifts in language, which could reflect distinct interpretations or dissimilar individual experiences. Finally, specific quotes from the transcripts were selected and incorporated within the thesis in order to illustrate the findings.

This interview data has proven invaluable for reconstructing Acholi history and for exploring uses of violence as well as subjective and interactional concepts such as honour and masculinity in meaningful ways. The primary purpose of the interviews in relation to precolonial Acholi-speaking communities was to reconstruct a 'history from below' through collecting information regarding social and gendered norms, as well as local practices, customs and rituals relating to warfare and violence more generally.<sup>100</sup> Interviews of this kind rely heavily on the effective transmission of data from one generation to the next, and reconstructing the past through traces left in the present. Moreover, 'traditional' practices are not only subject to change and manipulation over time, but can also become less flexible as a response to novel situations, such as the onset of colonialism. As Terence Ranger has indicated, social groups can appeal to so-called fixed 'traditions', which used to be more fluid, in order to retain or increase their access to power and prestige.<sup>101</sup> As a consequence, the data

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<sup>100</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); and E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136.

<sup>101</sup> Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.211-263 (pp.254-5).

resulting from oral histories is always open to varying interpretations and can never be fully comprehensive. Nevertheless, it is important to exploit the type of data this methodology provides, as it can prove incredibly valuable. For example, oral histories enable us to construct a counter-narrative to early European discourses, which alongside their embedded racist undertones, provided typically generic, normative judgments on the conduct of African warfare and indigenous warriors. In addition, data of this kind allows us to uncover voices which are largely silent in archival records and thus adopt a less 'state-centric' approach to African military history.

The tendency for oral memory to be shaped, in part, by recent history, is potentially particularly problematic when conducting historical research amongst societies such as the Acholi, where a desire to correct negative stereotypes concerning cruelty and brutality might produce references to a purer, less violent past. To moderate such tendencies oral testimonies were evaluated against evidence drawn from archival records, comparative ethnography, historical linguistics, and oral histories collected in the 1970s, before the recent cycle of violence erupted in association with the Acholi Historical Texts (AHT) project.<sup>102</sup> In reality, though, interviewees did not systematically present an image of precolonial Acholi-speaking communities as inherently peaceful. Although many Acholi elders argued violence was subjected to certain rules and regulations throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some simultaneously depicted a starkly contrasting perspective, whereby precolonial warriors were accused of also acting akin to powerful and ferocious animals.<sup>103</sup> As will be discussed at length in the conclusion, this imagery is largely an

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<sup>102</sup> The Acholi Historical Texts project was conducted during the 1970s as part of the History of Uganda Project. It involved the collection of hundreds of interviews by Ronald R. Atkinson, A. M. Garry, P. M. L. Owot, F. K. Uma and J. B. Webster.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with 62, Male, Ajali, 9 September 2016.

attempt by some Acholi speakers to carve out authority in the present by promoting an image of precolonial Acholi communities as formidable and influential throughout the region. Thus, the fact that recollections of a particular event or historical period are actively constructed rather than simply narrated can also prove highly revealing. As Justin Willis' work on rural Uganda has successfully demonstrated, inconsistencies, discrepancies and dissonances can actually tell us much about 'the ways in which people structure and understand the past — that is, about ways in which they turn disparate fragments of knowledge into history'.<sup>104</sup> Thus, interview material not only carries the potential to reconstruct a more complete version of the deep past, but also reveals how the past is contested within a community. It exposes diverse attitudes and interpretations of the past which reflect areas of tension in the present, and even how individuals struggle to make sense of conflicting societal pressures, and conflicts between social norms and personal experience.

When using oral histories for deconstructing the colonial period, it is important to note that a sense of frustration towards the British government figures prominently in many interviews conducted with former KAR soldiers. This is probably a result, as Killingray has argued, of veterans' experiences of 'deliberate misinformation, vague promises, misunderstandings and/or rumours' in regards to post-service gratuity payments and/or pensions.<sup>105</sup> Former KAR soldiers, especially those who served during the Second World War, tend to argue the British government has failed to

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<sup>104</sup> Justin Willis, 'Two Lives of Mpamizo: Dissonance in Oral History', *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), 319-332 (pp.321-322); See also Katherine Luongo, *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.192-198.

<sup>105</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.64.

adequately financially compensate them for the sacrifices they made.<sup>106</sup> As one Acholi KAR veteran who served between 1939 and 1946 exclaimed to me during an interview:

We are now in the village, we are now very dirty [...] We want the leaders who were ruling [meaning the British] [...] They should help us. We helped them with the war. You see? [...] We helped them against the Italians<sup>107</sup>

It is plausible, therefore, that some of the KAR veterans may have fixated on the negative aspects of soldiering under British colonial rule in an attempt to demonstrate their anger and resentment at having fought and suffered for British imperial interests without having been properly reimbursed for their efforts. Nevertheless, former KAR soldiers still provided detailed and revealing accounts regarding their motivations for enlistment, their experiences of violence, their understanding of military service more broadly, their reasons for eventually opting for discharge, and finally their post-service careers.

Finally, this thesis draws on historical linguistics data. Without access to written source material linguistic evidence based on reconstructed vocabularies can prove crucial for understanding institutions such as warfare amongst communities long dead. Language is in itself an archive which enables us to reconstruct the past. We are able to exploit the fact that developments in language, such as adaptations in vocabulary or semantic form, often coincide with changes in society.<sup>108</sup> Proto-

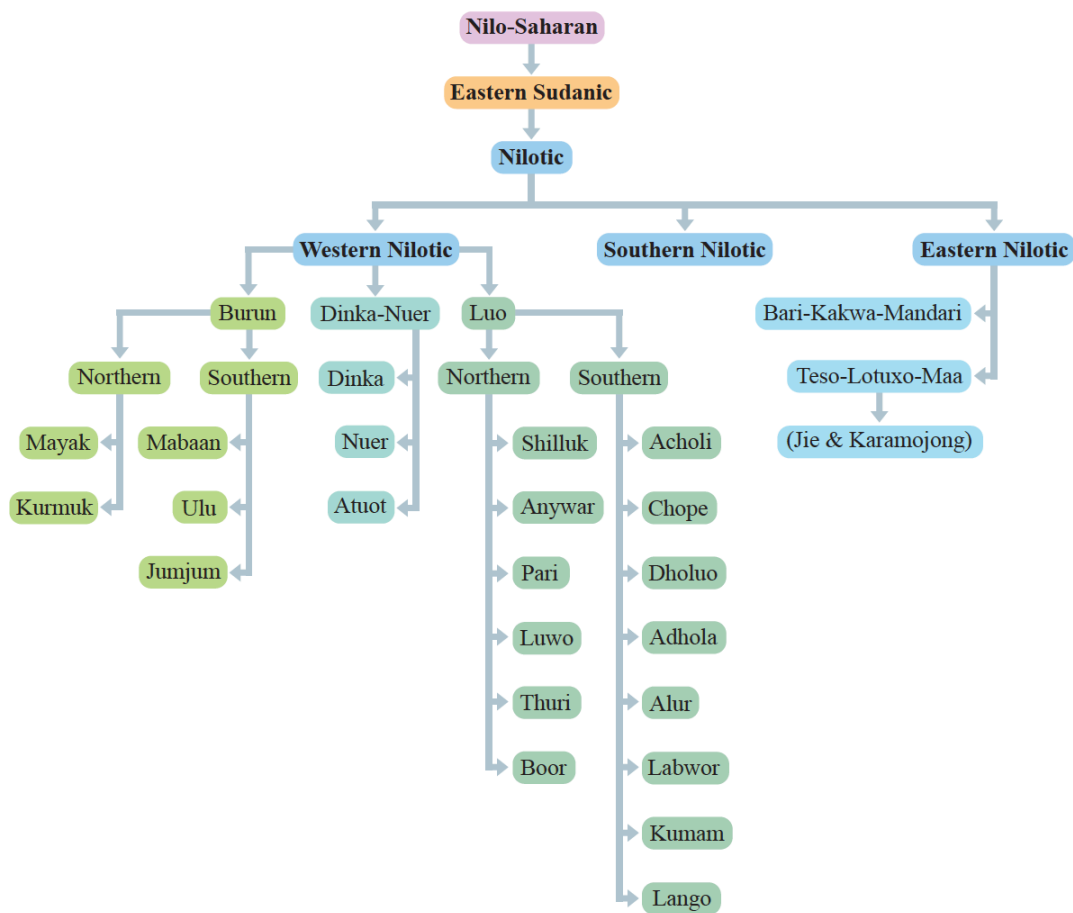
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<sup>106</sup> Others have also found this when conducting interviews with former KAR soldiers. For example, see Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p.8; and Osborne, p.134.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>108</sup> As has been successfully demonstrated by Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*; Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*; Schoenbrun, *A Green Place*; Kathryn M. De Luna, 'Hunting Reputations: Talent, Individuals and Community in Precolonial South Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 53:3 (2012), 279-299; and Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood*.

Southern Luo, which was probably first spoken c.1200-1300 A.D., is the ancestral language from which Acholi descended. Other languages which derived from the same ancestral language include Adhola (also spelt Dhopadhola), Dholuo, Lango, Kumam, Alur, Labwor and Chopi. This genetic relationship between languages is best imagined using the kinship metaphor. Acholi, Adhola, Dholuo, Lango, Kumam, Alur, Labwor and Chopi are siblings, they are in turn the children of proto-Southern Luo which also has its own siblings and parent, (see the graph below).



Graph 1:1, Genetic Relationship between Nilotic Languages



By comparing Acholi vocabulary with that of its siblings, as well as the lexical reconstructions for proto-Southern Luo, we are able to detect similarities and differences in language and thus by extension historical experience. Similarities would imply Acholi speakers inherited the knowledge, practice or object from proto-Southern Luo speakers, whereas differences would suggest the ideology, institution or item was innovated or borrowed. This process usually involves identifying any semantic shifts, internal innovations, or loan words. A semantic shift simply implies a change in meaning and can reflect the acquisition of new knowledge or new ways of thinking, conceptualising and categorising. An internal innovation refers to a newly created word. Sometimes we are also able to trace the etymology of new words which enables us to better understand the attitudes of the people who first used them. Etymologies tell us something about how the speech community understood the new, or recently adapted, institution, concept or object which prompted the creation of a new word. Loan words are those which have been borrowed from other speech communities and usually, albeit not always, suggest the practice, ideology or thing is of foreign origin. It is this comparative method which allows us to make inferences regarding the diversity, complexity and uniqueness of warfare and militarism amongst the Acholi, as well as track changes and developments over time. In turn, with the help of ethnographic data we are able to construct a deeper historical narrative.

Despite this, there will be those who will question the rationale behind incorporating this methodology to gain further historical insight into a region where Central Sudanic, Eastern Nilotic and Southern Luo worlds collided. Precolonial Acholiland was not home to homogenous communities who shared common geographic and ethno-linguistic origins, or a single history. As mentioned above, regardless of contemporary claims of historical Luo origin, the people living in

present-day Acholiland are not all direct descendants from proto-Southern Luo speakers. Many of them will have descended from Central Sudanic speakers or Eastern Nilotic speakers.<sup>109</sup> As Atkinson has argued, even up until the late seventeenth century Acholiland was only a peripheral part of the Luo sphere of influence.<sup>110</sup> Even so, although the timing of Southern Luo influence over the Acholi region can, and has been, questioned, it cannot be denied altogether.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of their official ancestral history the people living in present-day Acholiland came to imagine and identify themselves as culturally belonging to the Luo world.<sup>112</sup> More importantly, Southern Luo, or more specifically Acholi, became the *lingua franca* across the entire region. Historical origins are never clear-cut; rigid categorisations are arguably more often scholarly fabrications than empirically relevant social groupings for everyday life.<sup>113</sup> Acholiland is not unique, many areas across Africa were defined by the mixing and mingling of peoples, and the resultant plurality of cultural institutions, political ideologies and social ideals. It is in fact this complex mixture of social groupings which makes drawing comparisons between Acholi vocabularies with those of its siblings and ancestral language, proto-Southern Luo, such a worthwhile pursuit. It enables us to identify more easily the impact and influence of different speech communities and cultures across the region, as opposed to attributing diversity to different levels of contact with the outside world. In summary, then, historical linguistics, in combination with other sources and methods, enables this thesis to

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<sup>109</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.63; and Frank K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1960), p.54.

<sup>110</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, pp.63-66.

<sup>111</sup> For example, see Atkinson, *The Roots*.

<sup>112</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, pp.36-7.

<sup>113</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.36.

provide unique insights into transformations in warfare, militarism and social hierarchies over the *longue durée*.

# CHAPTER ONE

## WARFARE AND MILITARISM AMONGST PRECOLONIAL ACHOLI-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES: CHANGES TO THE PATTERN, ORGANISATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFLICT

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The Acholi originally came to be associated with coercion and military power due to their perceived dominance within both the colonial and postcolonial armed forces.<sup>114</sup>

The destructive conflict in Acholiland during the initial years of Yoweri Museveni's rule (1986-2006), however, later caused this association to be refined into one of Acholi barbarity and savagery.<sup>115</sup> The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and in particular its Acholi leader Joseph Kony, were represented as the embodiment of darkness and violent primitiveness, especially within national and international newspapers.<sup>116</sup> As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, this imagery has

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with 160, Male, Kampala, 14 April 2017; Interview with 161, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017; Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017. For more information on this topic, see Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>116</sup> For example, see Vision Reporter, 'Uganda to head new military force to hunt for Kony', *New Vision*, 19 March 2012, <<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/629718-uganda-to-head-new-military-force-to-hunt-for-kony.html>> [accessed 25 May 2019]; BBC Reporter, 'Joseph Kony - Child kidnapper, warlord, "prophet"', *BBC News*, 27 July 2018, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17299084>> [accessed 25 May 2019]; Ben Keesey, 'The fight to end the Lord's Resistance Army violence', *The New York Times*, 15 December 2014, <[https://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/15/the-fight-to-end-the-lords-resistance-armyviolence/?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FKony%2C%20Joseph&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=13&pgtype=collection](https://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/15/the-fight-to-end-the-lords-resistance-armyviolence/?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FKony%2C%20Joseph&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=13&pgtype=collection)> [accessed 25 May 2019]; Jane Bussmann, 'Joseph Kony: Uganda's enemy number one', *The Telegraph*, 22 July 2010, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/uganda/7894594/Joseph-Kony-Ugandas-enemy-number-one.html>> [accessed 25 May 2019]; and Vision Reporter, 18 March 2012, 'Uganda is not in a conflict- PM Mbabazi', *New Vision*,

generated scholarly counter narratives which have endeavoured to refute and challenge this stereotype.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, however, this has resulted in precolonial warfare amongst Acholi-speaking communities not being allocated the attention it deserves — despite being first published in 1994, Ronald Atkinson’s monograph entitled *The Roots of Ethnicity* remains our most valuable study of precolonial political and military organisation amongst the Acholi to date.<sup>118</sup>

In general, revisionist approaches have tended to ignore or disregard the political, economic and social significance of violence amongst precolonial Acholi speakers, most likely due to an underlying fear of perpetuating existing stereotypes. A report written in the 1990s by the independent consultant Dennis Pain, for example, contains this assertion: ‘The strong anti-violence values in traditional Acholi society are reflected in the fact no-one who kills can be respected as a leader. Military victory is not seen to confer high status on a person.’<sup>119</sup> Pain’s report thus serves as an apt example of how international commentators have often ignored the importance of precolonial warring traditions in their hope to dislodge misplaced images of the Acholi as inherently violent. The underlying aim of Pain’s report was to promote and endorse local and so-called ‘traditional’ Acholi judicial practices as a response to the LRA war. It was written during the 1990s, a period when restorative, as opposed to retributive, justice was being heralded as a continent-wide phenomenon in Africa and thus unsurprisingly suggests traditional Acholi methods for conflict resolution implicitly

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<<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/629697-uganda-is-not-in-conflict-pm-mbabazi.html>> [accessed 25 May 2019].

<sup>117</sup> For example, see Otunnu, pp.68-70; Uma, ‘Acholi Arab Nubian relations’; Odongo and Webster, *The Central Lwo*; and Dennis Pain, *“The Bending of Spears”: Producing Consensus for Peace and Development in Northern Uganda* (London: International Alert, 1997).

<sup>118</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*.

<sup>119</sup> Pain, p.80.

revolved around repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, through using a combination of historical linguistics data and oral histories, this chapter will argue that from the eighteenth century onwards, warfare became increasingly central to internal struggles for economic dominance, hierarchical distinction and masculine superiority. In fact, in direct opposition to Pain's claim, this chapter will illustrate how Acholi warriors who had killed in battle actually began to be individually decorated and honoured in novel ways.

When scholars have studied precolonial warfare and militarism amongst Acholi speakers in more detail, their focus has been almost exclusively on the role and impact of external forces during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus, although a number of studies acknowledge that Acholi-speaking communities experienced a steady increase in military activity during the late precolonial period, scholarly research intent on interrogating the nuances of this phenomenon remains wholly insufficient. Most historical interpretations explain this escalation of Acholi militarism through the region's violent integration into the wider economic world. In particular, scholars emphasise the impact of Arabic-speaking traders, who first arrived in Acholiland during the 1850s in search of ivory and slaves, as well as Sudanese soldiers, who were later installed across parts of northern Uganda as part of the expanding Anglo-Egyptian presence.<sup>121</sup> But what internal dynamics generated transformations in military affairs? Was this expansion in scale confined to the nineteenth century? Did violence also become more destructive, more akin to so-called 'total' war? Did shifts in military organisation parallel the escalation in violence?

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<sup>120</sup> Pain, p.2. For further discussion on this topic, see Tim Allen, 'Bitter Roots', pp.242-3, pp.246-247.

<sup>121</sup> For example, see Odongo and Webster, pp.163-166; Uma, pp.19-22; Otunnu, pp.68-70; Anywar, p.8; Bethwell, pp.278-9; Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, p.135; Atkinson, *The Roots*, pp.169-170.

Were Acholi speakers' experiences of military changes homogenous, or did they impact people in different ways, at different moments in history? Did any Acholi-speaking people benefit from this context of disorder and upheaval, and if so, how? None of these questions have been adequately addressed within existing historiography.

This chapter additionally aims, then, to refute a popular discourse which characterises military change in Acholiland as merely the by-product of interactions with the outside world. This scholarly fixation with external impetuses has inhibited our understanding of innovations which preceded the modern era. Nineteenth-century observers typically associated African military practices with durability, and wrote about them as timeless and ahistorical in nature.<sup>122</sup> In reality, warring traditions were surprisingly malleable and susceptible to internally generated change. As this chapter will demonstrate, significant transformations in the frequency, organisation, regulation and, most importantly, the social value of warfare had already been set in motion before the introduction of the Arab trade in slaves and ivory. Simultaneously, however, some elements of Acholi military culture proved far more enduring than we might expect, regardless of more extensive contact with outsiders. The continuous use of local weaponry despite the steady increase in firearms is an apt example. This is not to say the impact of the Arabic-speaking newcomers was wholly inconsequential. The arrival of external traders did have a significant impact over the commercialisation of violence. Nonetheless, much of the military change which penetrated parts of

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<sup>122</sup> For example, see Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: A Picture of Explorations*, 2 vols (London: Londgman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1995), p.515.

Acholiland following its integration into the wider economic world was just an expansion of what was already happening.

This chapter will be divided into six sections. The first section will argue that changes to the frequency and scale of precolonial warfare were not wholly due to the arrival of outsiders during the mid-nineteenth century: a variety of interlinking political and climatological factors dating back to the eighteenth century also played a significant role. The second section challenges the commonly cited notion that warfare amongst Acholi-speaking communities became more destructive with the arrival of Arabic speakers and the subsequent trade in firearms.<sup>123</sup> It demonstrates how gun ownership did not become widespread amongst local populations during the Arab occupation, and argues that the few firearms which were utilised by Acholi speakers during the nineteenth century did not result in a discernible rise in casualties. The third section provides a more nuanced understanding of changes to precolonial military organisation. It illustrates how some areas of Acholiland witnessed unprecedented transformation, especially in terms of military leadership patterns and the size and scale of military alliances, although such developments did not always enhance military capacity.

The fourth section explores how violence was regulated and controlled amongst Acholi speakers throughout the nineteenth century. It will be argued that behaviour in war was shaped and defined, at least to some extent, by a moral economy of violence.<sup>124</sup> This shared set of cultural values was sanctioned through spiritual

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<sup>123</sup> For example, see Ogot, p.278; Anywar, p.8.

<sup>124</sup> For more information regarding a 'moral economy', see Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd'; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1977); Elizabeth Isichei, *Voices of the Poor in Africa: Moral Economy and the Popular Imagination* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002); and John Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau:



beliefs and ritual, and helped differentiate between acceptable and non-acceptable uses of physical force within combat situations. However, this section also explores in what ways the moral economy of violence was adapted and renegotiated during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in response to the particular dynamics and drivers of the era. The fifth section looks at an area where the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders did have a significant impact, namely the use of violence for economic power and prosperity. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed an undeniable growth in experiments of entrepreneurial violence and warfare being used by Acholi speakers in pursuit of economic authority. This was not necessarily unusual, across the continent the introduction of an external slave trade proved strategically advantageous and enabled the political and military ascendancy of some African communities, and indeed some African individuals.<sup>125</sup> The sixth and final section of this chapter demonstrates how warfare in Acholiland increasingly came to represent a platform for reputation building and for acquiring individual honour and respected masculinity. This phenomenon was mainly a response to interactions with other Nilotic communities lying to the east of Acholiland. Neighbouring African peoples are rarely credited with playing a fundamental role in stimulating change when compared with outsiders or colonialism more broadly. Yet in the case of Acholiland, interactions with Eastern Nilotic communities had a lasting impact over Acholi military affairs, especially in terms of the social value of warfare.

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The Problem, in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, ed. by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (London: James Currey, 1992), pp.265-315.

<sup>125</sup> Paul Ellsworth Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.22.

## SECTION I: THE FREQUENCY AND SCALE OF WAR AND CONFLICT

The nineteenth century bore witness to a substantial shift in both the frequency and scale of warfare across large swathes of the African continent. Acholiland was no exception to this general trend. However, as mentioned above, most scholars have mistakenly attributed this shift in the deployment of violence solely to the arrival of external actors. Both the Arabic-speaking traders and the Sudanese soldiers who replaced them, have been described as ‘ravaging wolves’ who raped and abducted local women, sodomised men, ravaged livestock, destroyed villages and generally engaged in ‘limitless violence and treachery’.<sup>126</sup> Importantly, these outsiders have been charged with becoming embroiled in local wars and disputes, which supposedly generated unprecedented levels of antagonism and internal strife amongst the different Acholi chiefdoms, and had seismic and catastrophic results for local populations.<sup>127</sup> In reality, scholars who attribute this escalation of violence solely to external intervention both distort and misrepresent the nature of precolonial Acholi society prior to the arrival of outsiders. In particular, they incorrectly insinuate the people living in Acholiland had formed a singular unit, which only deteriorated over the course of the nineteenth century due to the Arab occupation and the actions of Sudanese soldiers. Historian Ogenga Otunnu, for example, has argued the Arabic-speaking slave traders ‘dislocated the [Acholi] political systems that had rested on consensus politics, democratic practice and negotiations’.<sup>128</sup> Scholars Onyango-Ku-

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<sup>126</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.164-8.

<sup>127</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.163-66; Anywar, p.8; Ogot, pp.278-9; p’Bitek, *Religion*, p.135; Otunnu, pp. 68-70; Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.268; Uma, pp.56-62; John Milner Gray, ‘Acholi History, 1860-1901-III’, *The Uganda Journal*, 16:2 (1952), 132-145 (p.134).

<sup>128</sup> Otunnu, p.70.

Odongo and J. B. Webster have similarly argued the Acholi were ‘*torn apart* by feuds and internal strife, created and encouraged by the traders’.<sup>129</sup> Finally, academic researcher K. F. Uma has suggested that before the arrival of Arab traders there was peace and stability amongst Acholi-speaking communities because ‘the Acholi regarded themselves, in a large sense, as brothers’.<sup>130</sup> But, as was discussed in detail within the introduction to this thesis, although by the late eighteenth century the people of present day Acholiland increasingly shared the same chiefdom-based social, political and military order, the people living in this emergent Acholi society did not as yet think of themselves as a unified community, never mind understand their relationship to one another in kinship terms and act accordingly.<sup>131</sup>

The arrival of outsiders no doubt had some impact over the extent of war and conflict amongst Acholi-speaking communities. In 1886, for example, Sudanese soldiers became involved in a local dispute by joining the Acholi chiefdom of Padibe in an attack against the chiefdom of Payira. This event instigated a period of enduring hostility between the two Acholi-speaking communities that reportedly cost many lives.<sup>132</sup> When reflecting on the Arabic-speaking traders today, Acholi elders generally focus on the violence and disorder which developed. One such elder stated, for example, ‘It was the Arabs that came to disturb the Acholi [...] It was the Arabs who made the people of Acholi become aggressive [...] [it] was the Arabs who showed the Acholi their aggression’.<sup>133</sup> In terms of cultural forms, some Acholi oral poems specifically refer to conflicts that arose as a result of Arab influence. According to local Acholi intellectual Opira p’Oria Moris, the following song recalls the

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<sup>129</sup> Odongo and Webster, p.164. Emphasis added.

<sup>130</sup> Uma, p.21.

<sup>131</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.262, pp.270-273.

<sup>132</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.164-66.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016.

deterioration of good relations between two Acholi chiefdoms following foreign intrusions.<sup>134</sup>

Oh oh oh lweny pa lorem ocoro kunyango,

Oh oh oh war between friends rose from the East

Lweny pa lorem do ocoro kunyango Atoji,

War between friends came from the East under Atoji Mountain

Mony Galla lorem oyee lweny,

Arab warriors, friends have accepted to fight,

[...]

Coo oromo ki coo wadigi [...] mon woo ki koko.

Men meet men [...] the women wail in agony.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Opira p'Oria Moris, 'History and meaning of some Acholi songs' (unpublished bachelor's dissertation, Makerere University, 1976), p.20.

<sup>135</sup> Moris, p.20.

The fenced villages and lookout posts, which have been labelled a distinctive feature of Acholiland during the nineteenth century, similarly suggest there was an increasing need to protect and secure residential communities from invaders during this period.<sup>136</sup> Presumably these fortifications looked little different to the structure in the photograph below, taken by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Rev. Fisher in Acholiland c.1906-1911.



Figure 2:1, Watch Tower, Acholi Village <sup>137</sup>

Finally, Samuel Baker's accounts of his travels during the late 1860s and early 1870s famously describe Acholiland as 'half ruined' and 'depopulated' by the plundering and abducting carried out by foreign traders. According to Baker 'all tribes were rendered hostile by the slave-hunters' and the 'blackened ruins of villages and

<sup>136</sup> Ronald R. Atkinson, 'The Evolution of Ethnicity among the Acholi of Uganda: The Precolonial Phase', *Ethnohistory*, 36:1 (1989), 19-43 (p.21).

<sup>137</sup> CUA, RCS/Fisher/Y3045C, Uganda, c.1906-11.

deserted fields bore witness to the devastation committed'.<sup>138</sup> Caution is, however, required here. Baker was mainly in Acholiland to open up the area for Anglo-Egyptian imperial expansion and trade, which was central to the development of European industrialisation.<sup>139</sup> Suppressing the slave trade constituted just one element of this underlying objective. Thus, having held an interventionist agenda it is possible Baker deliberately implicated the slave trade for the violence which plagued Acholiland during this period, and exaggerated the devastation caused by the Arabic-speaking traders, in an attempt to justify the necessity of colonial conquest, as well as legitimise the often brutal military action he himself employed. As Reid has rightly argued, 'there was a tendency [...] [especially amongst the anti-slave trade movement] to describe something akin to a "merrie Africa", a "golden age" in which primitive tribes lived in idyllic ignorant bliss, which the slave trade disrupted violently'.<sup>140</sup> Even so, Emin Pasha, the governor of Equatoria from 1878, similarly attributed the violence and destruction of this era to outsiders, although his focus was on the Sudanese soldiers who, rather ironically, were stationed at the Egyptian garrisons by Samuel Baker to maintain the peace after his departure.<sup>141</sup> An entry from Emin's diary written in 1887 reads:

[The Sudanese soldiers have attacked] Acholi villages, destroyed them, and unfortunately [...] inflicted quite unnecessary cruelty [...] Every station has

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<sup>138</sup> Samuel Baker, *Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, Organized by Ismail, Khedive of Egypt*, vol. II (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), pp.94-5, p.112, p.125; Baker, *The Albert N'yanza*, pp.263-4.

<sup>139</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.59.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Reid, 'Revisiting Primitive War: Perceptions of Violence and Race in History', *War and Society*, 26:2 (2007), 1-25 (p.7).

<sup>141</sup> Equatoria was an Egyptian province which incorporated parts of South Sudan and northern Uganda.

indulged in plunder [...] and slowly things have come to the present state of affairs.<sup>142</sup>

Thus, there is a clear suggestion within early European accounts that Acholi-speaking communities suffered as a result of external forces, although whether this was mainly due to the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders, or the installation of Sudanese soldiers, remains unclear.

Nonetheless, the impact of both the Arab trade in slaves and ivory, and the installation of Sudanese soldiers, was remarkably uneven across the Acholi region. The Arabic-speaking newcomers, for example, only set up three stations in Acholiland: one near the chiefdom of Patiko, one near the chiefdom of Pabo, and the other near the chiefdom of Padibe (see map below).<sup>143</sup>



Map 2:1, Arab Trading Stations in Acholiland.

<sup>142</sup> 'The Diaries of Emin Pasha-Extracts VII: Emin as Governor of Equatoria, 11 July 1886-1 July 1887', ed. by Sir John Gray, *The Uganda Journal*, 28:1 (1964), 75-99 (p.80).

<sup>143</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.267.

Unsurprisingly, those areas located within close proximity of these stations were most affected by the violence which ensued. For other chiefdoms, however, some of which were situated over one hundred kilometres away from one of these trading stations, military activity remained largely unaltered by the Arab presence.<sup>144</sup>

More importantly, there had been a steady increase in the scale and scope of warfare amongst Acholi-speaking communities which preceded the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders and the era of capturing and exporting people from the region. From as early as the eighteenth century Acholiland was increasingly characterised by political and social upheaval. The consolidation and expansion of a new order based around chiefdoms created a widening of political ambitions and aspirations encapsulated by violent struggles over people, polity and power. Although certainly not the case for all, some lineages explicitly acknowledge within their traditions having been incorporated into a chiefdom following a defeat or after having been threatened with violence.<sup>145</sup> Feuds between different chiefdoms could encompass an extended period of intermittent warfare, raiding and general disorder.<sup>146</sup> A period of antagonism between the Acholi chiefdoms Palabek and Pajok during the eighteenth century, for example, manifested in a series of wars lasting for over a quarter of a century.<sup>147</sup>

Climatological phenomena also played a decisive role. Droughts and famines, which initiated extensive population movement, transformed the geopolitical landscape of the region and produced more intensive interactions between neighbouring societies. One particularly destructive famine, locally referred to as

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with 44, Male, Alero, 31 August 2016.

<sup>145</sup> Atkinson, 'The Evolution', p.24.

<sup>146</sup> Webster, 'AHT', p.109, pp.119-20.

<sup>147</sup> Ogot, p.255.



*Nyamdere*, most likely occurred in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It was followed by another little more than a generation later which is remembered in Acholi traditions as *Laparanet*.<sup>148</sup> Food shortages and migrations which placed communities under severe strain often resulted in the deterioration of traditionally peaceful relationships. According to John Lamphear, for example, relations between the Eastern Nilotic Jie and the Acholi progressively worsened during this period in response to the natural disasters and the subsequent competition over valuable resources.<sup>149</sup>

In sum, then, the escalating violence amongst Acholi-speaking communities throughout the late precolonial period was rooted in a long, complex past. Due to a number of destructive famines and the expansion of a new political order based around chiefdoms, there had been a steady increase in war and conflict since the eighteenth century. Thus, although the arrival of outsiders from the 1850s onwards certainly exacerbated this existing trend, they were not solely responsible for changes in the way violence was deployed throughout this turbulent era.

## SECTION II: WEAPONRY AND TOOLS OF WAR

A number of scholars have argued the Arab trade in slaves, guns and ivory also caused warfare amongst nineteenth-century Acholi-speaking communities to become more destructive and devastating, more akin to so-called ‘total war’ whereby the accepted

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<sup>148</sup> Lamphear, p.159.

<sup>149</sup> Lamphear, pp.233-234.

methods of conflict are disregarded and thus the number of deaths rises dramatically. Kenyan historian Bethwell Ogot, for example, has suggested the exchange of rifles for ivory and slaves from the 1850s onwards, and the military imbalances which resulted, made warfare amongst the Acholi more lethal than ever before.<sup>150</sup> Local Acholi historian Reuben Anywar has similarly claimed that Arabic-speaking traders ‘brought guns which encouraged [Acholi] fighters to kill many more people’.<sup>151</sup> The following section refutes this commonly cited argument. Firearms never wholly replaced indigenous weaponry, nor is there any valid evidence to suggest the introduction of guns increased the number of casualties violent encounters engendered. Moreover, guns did not become widespread amongst the general Acholi population until after the Arabic-speaking traders were driven out in 1872.

Evidence certainly suggests firearms were initially introduced into Acholiland by either Arab or Swahili traders. First, Acholi speakers use a loanword, *mùdùku* or *luduku* — a modified version of the Arabic *bunduqia* or the Swahili *bunduqi* — to describe a gun.<sup>152</sup> Second, firearms were relatively unknown across large areas of Sudan and South Sudan before the nineteenth century and thus it is highly unlikely proto-Southern Luo speakers had access to them before reaching Acholiland.<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, early European narratives indicate firearms did not become widespread in Acholiland until the eve of the colonial moment. Samuel Baker’s descriptions of his expeditions during the Arab occupation, for example, reveal gun ownership at this time was relatively rare amongst the Acholi, reserved for those *rwodi* who had been

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<sup>150</sup> Ogot, p.278.

<sup>151</sup> Anywar, p.8.

<sup>152</sup> Alexander Odonga, *Lwoo English Dictionary* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2005), p.321; Joseph Pasquale Crazzolara, *A study of the Acooli language: Grammar and Vocabulary* (London: International African Institute, 1938), p.296, p.312.

<sup>153</sup> Humphrey J. Fisher and Virginia Rowland, ‘Firearms in the Central Sudan’, *The Journal of African History*, 12:2 (1971), 215-239 (p.222).

able to individually benefit from contact with the Arabic speakers through trading ivory tusks for guns, or through providing them with assistance during a hunt or raid in exchange for firearms.<sup>154</sup> Even Emin Pasha writing in the late 1870s and 1880s — so after the Arabic-speaking traders had been driven out of Acholiland — recorded that the Acholi were armed with ‘two spears only’ and that ‘One piece of luck is that the Acholi do not possess many weapons’.<sup>155</sup> In contrast, throughout the final years of the nineteenth century and during the beginning of the colonial period, guns became much more widely accessible. Captain Sykes, a military officer and avid hunter who travelled to Uganda in 1897, described a clash with a group of Acholi warriors who were ‘all armed to the teeth’ with rifles as well as spears, bows and arrows.<sup>156</sup> Early colonial reports are similarly littered with claims such as, ‘the majority of [Acholi] natives are in possession of guns’.<sup>157</sup> Of course aggregations concerning the number of firearms the Acholi had obtained, as well as accounts of widespread gun ownership, were likely exaggerated by British officials in order to justify colonial disarmament policies. One annual report, for example, claimed that all the casualties from a fight between the Acholi chiefdoms Padibe and Lakung ‘were caused by gun shot or rifle wound’, and yet tellingly went on to stress that, ‘The disarmament of the Acholi [...] should make fights of this nature more and more rare’.<sup>158</sup> Even so, there can be little

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<sup>154</sup> Baker, *The Albert N'yanza*, pp.265-266; Baker, *Ismailia*, p. 88. Also, see Atkinson, ‘The Evolution’, pp.35-6.

<sup>155</sup> *Emin Pasha in Central Africa: Being a Collection of his Letters and Journals*, ed. by Georg Schweinfurth, trans. by R. W. Felkin (London: George Philip & Son, 1888), pp.244-246; ‘The Diaries of Emin Pasha-Extracts VII’, ed. by Gray, p.80.

<sup>156</sup> Clement Arthur Sykes, *Service and Sport on the Tropical Nile: Some Records of the Duties and Diversions of an Officer among Natives and Big Game during the Re-occupation of the Nilotic Province* (London: John Murray, 1903), pp.95-6.

<sup>157</sup> Kampala, Uganda National Archives (UNA), Northern Province Annual Reports (1910-1927), A46/806-817, 1910-1911.

<sup>158</sup> UNA, Northern Province Monthly Reports (1911-1927), A46/786-798, January 1913.

doubt that during the early years of colonial rule Acholiland was home to far more firearms than it had been during the Arab occupation.

In addition, the degree to which firearms marginalised indigenous weaponry has been over estimated within recent historiography.<sup>159</sup> Amongst Acholi speakers, even when gun-ownership became more common, firearms were used side-by-side in unison with indigenous weaponry such as spears. Published in 1907, the CMS missionary Albert Lloyd's account of an inter-village conflict in Acholiland is probably one of the most detailed written accounts of a battle we have access to. Although we cannot be assured of its accuracy in full, Lloyd's description clearly indicates indigenous items such as spears, arrows and shields continued to represent the weaponry of choice for many Acholi speakers, and were still commonly used in war even into the early twentieth century:

[F]rom the village behind me I saw a number of dark forms gathering together carrying spears, the great iron heads of which reflected the moon's rays [...] Then from the other village in front of me I saw a similar crowd collecting with spears and shields, and even as I watched, wondering what it all meant, there was the twang of a bow, and an arrow flew past my tent into the dusky crowd beyond; it was answered by a dozen others, and then an excited yell from the warriors of both sides, as they crashed into each other, using their spears and lances with deadly effect.<sup>160</sup>

In addition, as the table below highlights, the number of Acholi lexical units to describe spears of varying size and weight is evidence of their unrivalled prevalence

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<sup>159</sup> For a discussion of this argument in relation to East Africa more widely, see Richard Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, p.42.

<sup>160</sup> Lloyd, p.203.

and usage amongst Acholi speakers. As renowned historical linguist David Schoenbrun has argued, typically the more vocabulary there was relating to a particular subject or object the more complex that institution or item and the more important it was to the speech community. In contrast, the use of very few lexical units to describe a specific topic or item suggests the institution or object was less sophisticated, less common or less significant to the speakers.<sup>161</sup>

Table 2:1, Name and Description of Acholi Spears

| <b>Name of spear:</b> | <b>Description:</b>  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>là.rwè</i>         | A light spear, with quite a small blade.   |
| <i>álwííí</i>         | A spear with a short blade and long neck.  |
| <i>àtùm</i>           | A heavy spear, with a broad flat blade.  |
| <i>àgà:à</i>          | A heavy spear, with a thick blade. This spear was used when fighting at close proximity. |
| <i>dzùlé</i>          | A medium sized spear.  |

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<sup>161</sup> David Schoenbrun, 'Violence, Marginality, Scorn & Honour: Language Evidence of Slavery to the Eighteenth Century', in *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa*, ed. by Henri Médard and Shane Doyle (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), pp.38-76 (pp.41-2).

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>kàbà</i> | A spear with a long, narrow blade. <sup>162</sup> |
|-------------|---|

The basic weaponry used by Acholi-speakers throughout the nineteenth century thus appears to have varied little from what was common amongst proto-Southern Luo speech communities. The weapons favoured by proto-Southern Luo speakers were similarly spears, \**tɔŋ*, and shields, \**kwot*. These are terms of some antiquity, proto-Western Nilotic-speakers were using \**tɔŋ* for spear, and \**kuot* for shield c.4000 B.P., suggesting these tools of war had been in use for thousands of years.<sup>163</sup>

How influential the Arabic speaking newcomers were in regard to the arms trade in Acholiland has also been exaggerated within existing historiography. Arabic speakers are easier for historians to identify within both written and oral source material because of their language, dress, religion, and the scale of their business. They have thus attracted more attention than black African traders.<sup>164</sup> But guns were also reaching Acholiland during the nineteenth century from the coast via Bunyoro, as well as through Abyssinian merchants. Webster, for example, has suggested the so-called *Cumpa* traders, who arrived in Acholiland to exchange guns for cattle and ivory during the latter half of the nineteenth century, were reported to be black Ethiopians.<sup>165</sup> In addition, Lamphear's research indicated that the Acholi would capture Jie children during the nineteenth century and exchange them with Ethiopian merchants for

<sup>162</sup> Crazzolara, *A study of the Acooli language*, p.399, p.243.

<sup>163</sup> Franz Rottland, 'Lexical Reconstructions within Nilotic', *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 52 (1997), 139-173 (pp.166-7).

<sup>164</sup> Henri Médard, 'Introduction', in *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa*, ed. by Henri Médard and Shane Doyle (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), pp.1-38 (p.11)

<sup>165</sup> J. E. Lamphear and J. B. Webster, 'The Jie-Acholi War: Oral Evidence from Two Sides of The Battle Front', *The Ugandan Journal*, 35:1 (1971), 23-43 (p.32).

muzzle-loading muskets.<sup>166</sup> Further evidence to validate Lamphear and Webster's claims comes from the scattering of references to alternative traders within early colonial records. In an annual report from 1910-1911, for example, one colonial official wrote, 'There is a considerable amount of gun and ammunition running done by Swahili Agents of Abyssinia on the borders of this district [...] I consider it a great danger, and [it] should be recognised as such'.<sup>167</sup> Judging by the term 'Swahili Agents of Abyssinia', it seems even colonial commentators were either confused or unsure who exactly the traders were. Nonetheless, whether it was through Swahili-speaking coastal merchants, or Ethiopian traders from Abyssinia, firearms reached Acholiland through a variety of long-distance trade routes, not simply through exchanges with the Arabic-speaking slave traders.

Finally, but most importantly, it is almost impossible to identify any changes over time in the number of casualties resulting from military action given the limited number and type of sources we have access to. For example, Albert Lloyd recorded depleted male populations in Acholiland at the start of the colonial period, reckoning the proportion of women to men to be about three to one.<sup>168</sup> It is unlikely, however, this statement was based on any official statistical data collection. Moreover, even if Lloyd's statement was accurate, there is no way of knowing for sure why there were so few men in comparison to women in the early twentieth century. Labour migration was not yet sufficiently common to account for such an extreme imbalance, and it clearly seems unlikely that natural causes of death such as disease or famine would have only impacted the male population. But even if we assume these men were killed

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<sup>166</sup> Lamphear, p.234.

<sup>167</sup> UNA, A46/806-817, 1910-1911.

<sup>168</sup> CMSA, Extracts From Annual Letters, Albert Lloyd, Patigo 13 Nov 1907, p 238.

through violence, how do we know whether these men met their death through a bullet from a gun or the tip of a spear? In addition to this, firearms did not always prove more effective or more lethal in battle than indigenous tools. Jie oral traditions suggest the eastern Acholi military unit who waged war against them c.1900 comprised of warriors mainly armed with muskets. This Acholi force, however, was defeated by the much smaller Jie fighting unit, who were solely equipped with local weaponry.<sup>169</sup> As was often the case in Africa, climatic conditions impeded the firearms' effectiveness: the Acholi having been hit by a rainstorm were left with drenched, and thus useless, gun powder.<sup>170</sup>

The introduction and impact of firearms has received unrivalled attention amongst Africanist scholars.<sup>171</sup> This is predominantly because new weapons had the potential to influence approaches to fighting, alongside local political structures and social hierarchies. And yet, as this section has illustrated, amongst the Acholi local weaponry continued to dominate most battle scenes and thus the capacity for firearms to stimulate change in terms of approaches to fighting, or indeed the consequences of violent encounters, remained limited. This is not to say, however, that innovation in terms of military organisation was absent throughout the nineteenth century, as the following section will highlight.

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<sup>169</sup> Lamphear, pp.234-5.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>171</sup> For example, see W. A. Richards, 'The import of firearms into West Africa in the eighteenth century', *The Journal of African History*, 21:1 (1980), 43-59; Robin Law, 'Horses, Firearms, and Political Power in Pre-Colonial West Africa', *Past & Present*, 72 (1976), 112-132; R. W. Beachey, 'The arms trade in East Africa in the nineteenth century', *Journal of African History*, 3:3 (1962), 451-67.



### SECTION III: MILITARY ORGANISATION AND METHODS OF WAGING WAR

The southern monarchical kingdoms of Uganda have received much attention from scholars analysing adaptations in military affairs over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>172</sup> This is largely because in places like Buganda and Bunyoro, military strength increasingly underpinned political authority in more visible and thus more easily measurable ways. In contrast, although valuable exceptions do exist, adaptations to military organisation amongst more segmentary societies have not received the same amount of consideration.<sup>173</sup> And yet as will be illustrated below, some areas of Acholiland similarly witnessed unprecedented change in terms of levels of professionalisation, regimental formation and leadership patterns. Thus, precolonial military innovation required neither political centralisation nor an absolute monarchy. However, as will be additionally demonstrated, there was considerable variation across the Acholi-speaking region and developments did not always endure the test of time. Moreover, change did not always generate an improvement in military capacity.

Given the poorly-developed, or at least ill-defined, military culture amongst proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities, it is clear that substantial developments in military organisation occurred after Acholi became a distinct language from c.1700. Proto-Southern Luo speakers had a lexical unit, *\*lwén*, which they used to describe ‘a conflict’.<sup>174</sup> However, there was seemingly no terminological distinction and thus in all likelihood no physical distinction between a war, raid or battle. In addition,

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<sup>172</sup> For example, see Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*.

<sup>173</sup> For a notable exception, see Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda*.

<sup>174</sup> Rottland, p.172.

although we can reconstruct lexical units for certain weapons, such as a spear (*\*tɔŋ*), a knife (*\*pala*), and a shield (*\*kwot*), which were probably used in both hunting and war, we lack terms to describe any standardised military strategies or formal military organisational patterns, suggesting they were not widely used. Moreover, as the table below suggests, proto-Southern Luo communities only had one term to describe a warrior, *\*jà lwén*, which is simply a prefixed derived noun from the term for conflict, *\*lwén*.<sup>175</sup> The lack of synonyms to distinguish between different fighters suggests all men who fought were conceived as similar. Different terms would have implied different realities. But there was not, for example, a linguistic distinction between men who fought for their community as opposed to men who fought for more independent objectives. Thus, proto-Southern Luo speech communities contained neither a distinct military class nor a group of professional fighters. Instead all able-bodied men acted as warriors and provided military service when circumstances arose. Once the fighting was over, each man would have reverted to his civilian activities.

Table 2:2, Reflexes of the proto-Southern Luo root word *\*jà lwén*

| <b>Language:</b> | <b>Term:</b>  | <b>Translation:</b>        | <b>Prefix Semantics and Etymology:</b>  |
|------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Acholi</b>    | <i>làlwén</i> | ‘warrior’,<br>‘person-war’ | la- (sg.), agent noun. Might represent a loan from a common Eastern Nilotic prefix. Or it might |

<sup>175</sup> A new lexical unit *àdwíí* is used in some form within nearly all of the languages which descended from proto-Southern Luo to describe an unconventional fighter or rebel. But as opposed to being a reflex, the term is almost certainly a loan word derived from the Swahili term *adui* meaning ‘enemy, foe or opponent’.

|               |                            |                            |  |
|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|
|               |                            |                            | derive from the widespread Western Nilotic root for ‘visitor, traveller’, reconstructed as *jal (sg.).                                       |
| <b>Lango</b>  | <i>àlwén</i>               | ‘warrior’,<br>‘person-war’ | a- (sg.), agent noun. Most likely derives from the widespread Western Nilotic root for ‘visitor, traveller’, reconstructed as *jal (sg.).    |
| <b>Alur</b>   | <i>jà.à</i><br><i>lwín</i> | ‘warrior’,<br>‘person-war’ | jara- (sg.), agent noun. Most likely derives from the widespread Western Nilotic root for ‘visitor, traveller’, reconstructed as *jal (sg.). |
| <b>Adhola</b> | <i>jà lwén</i>             | ‘warrior’,<br>‘person-war’ | ja- (sg.), agent noun. Most likely derives from the widespread Western Nilotic root for ‘visitor, traveller’, reconstructed as *jal (sg.).   |
| <b>Dholuo</b> | <i>jà lwén</i>             | ‘warrior’,<br>‘person-war’ | a- (sg.), agent noun. Most likely derives from the widespread  |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  | Western Nilotic root for ‘visitor, traveller’, reconstructed as *jal (sg.). <sup>176</sup> |
|--|--|--|--|

The proto-Southern Luo military taxonomy was thus relatively limited. This strongly indicates that military activity was unsophisticated, most likely taking the form of intermittent raiding. This assumption is supported by oral traditions relating to the period of migration which suggest Southern-Luo expansionism was mostly characterised by peaceful assimilation.<sup>177</sup> In particular, oral traditions reveal the absorption of Acholiland into the Luo world was largely a non-violent affair. Odongo and Webster, for example, found no tradition indicating violence was used during the spread of Luo rule into eastern Acholiland.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, Joseph Pasquale Crazzolaro, an early twentieth century Comboni Fathers missionary and avid collector of oral traditions, likewise argued that the Luo spread into northern Uganda was ‘a remarkable instance of peaceful penetration, transformation and assimilation of a much larger population by the “absorbing” and ruling Lwoo element’.<sup>179</sup>

From the eighteenth century onwards, however, military organisation became increasingly complex, with many Acholi chiefdoms adopting a more centralised and

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<sup>176</sup> Gerrit Dimmendaal, ‘The Role of Bilingualism in Nilotic Sound Change’, *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 9:1 (1994), 85-109 (pp.102-3); Mechthild Reh, ‘Reconstructing Proto-Western Nilotic and Proto-Nilotic Lexicon’ (unpublished [?] thesis, University of Cologne, 1985); Anne Storch, *The Noun Morphology of Western Nilotic* (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2005), p.346, pp.355-357.

<sup>177</sup> As noted in the introduction to this thesis, for reasons not yet fully understood proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities travelled south from c.1400, eventually splitting up and settling over an extensive area stretching from South Sudan to Southwest Kenya.

<sup>178</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.335-356.

<sup>179</sup> Joseph Pasquale Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo: Part I, Lwoo Migrations* (Verona: Istituto Missioni Africane, 1950), p.85. Also, see Wrigley, ‘The Problem of the Luo’, p.35.

hierarchical military command structure. Webster mentions a number of specific war leaders, notably Akut, Tongotut and Can Gala, who led fighting units in the battle against the Jie c.1900.<sup>180</sup> Such men, who were often referred to as *twon mony* (literally meaning ‘war bull’), were not granted political power or authority as chieftaincies were hereditary, but they were nonetheless held in high esteem for their skills in battle and enjoyed greater social leverage through their enhanced masculine status.<sup>181</sup> In addition, although Acholiland never housed an integrated army comprising of professional soldiers, a specialised fighting force did emerge within the chieftdom of Payira under *Rwot Camo* who ruled between c.1859-86.<sup>182</sup> Camo supposedly controlled a group of warriors armed with muskets who always remained close to him.<sup>183</sup> Camo’s successor, *Rwot Awic*, likewise kept soldiers armed with guns at the palace. This royal bodyguard was likely somewhat akin to the professional force created by Kabalega in Bunyoro, albeit on a much reduced scale. The *abarusura*, as it was termed, was also under Kabalega’s personal command.<sup>184</sup> This innovation within the Acholi chieftdom of Payira was, however, short-lived. Under *Rwot Alier*, who took over from his father Awic when he was imprisoned by the British, no such bodyguard existed.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Lamphear and Webster, p.34.

<sup>181</sup> Dent Ocaya-Lakidi, ‘Manhood, Warriorhood and Sex in Eastern Africa’, in *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa*, ed. by Ali A. Mazrui (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp.134-166 (p.142); Webster, ‘AHT’, p.36, p.89; and Ocitti, p.41.

<sup>182</sup> The dating for *Rwot Camo*’s leadership comes from J. B. Webster, ‘Noi! Noi! Famines as an Aid to Interlacustrine Chronology’, in *Chronology, Migration and Drought in Interlacustrine Africa*, ed. by J. B. Webster (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1979), p.31.

<sup>183</sup> John Orr Dwyer, ‘The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1972), p.39; *Emin Pasha, his life and work*, ed. by Georg Schweitzer (Westminister: A Constable, 1898), p.69.

<sup>184</sup> J. W. Nyakatura, *Anatomy of an African Kingdom: A History of Bunyoro-Kitara*, ed. by Godfrey Uzoigwe (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p.xv.

<sup>185</sup> Anywar, pp.28-30.

Distinctions in military developments are most evident when comparing the east of Acholiland with the west. One key example is the age-set system in eastern Acholiland and the subsequent regimental formation based, at least in part, around it. Webster's research implies a military force in eastern Acholiland would comprise the two main fighting age-sets, and thus exclude boys as yet uninitiated as well as those considered too elderly to fight.<sup>186</sup> Age-sets were not prevalent amongst proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities and were thus absent from the vast majority of Acholi polities. The incorporation of such a distinct social and military pattern of organisation by a number of eastern Acholi chiefdoms therefore represents a remarkable development. This structural change was driven by contact with Eastern Nilotic communities, namely the Jie and the Karamojong, whose social and military order revolved around a highly elaborate age-generation system closely tied to cattle herding.<sup>187</sup> As has been mentioned previously, interactions between these different language communities escalated over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when a series of droughts and subsequent famines hit the north-eastern quadrant of present day Uganda, causing huge population movement.<sup>188</sup> Ronald Atkinson has argued the response of eastern Acholi communities to this situation was to increasingly identify themselves with the similarly organised chiefdoms to their west and, in turn, to differentiate themselves from the dissimilar Eastern Nilotic polities.<sup>189</sup> Even if this was the case in part, it does not satisfactorily explain the remnants of Eastern Nilotic culture which are identifiable amongst a number of Acholi-speaking communities. In reality, then, throughout the late eighteenth and

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<sup>186</sup> Webster, 'AHT', pp.52-56; Lamphear and Webster, p.34.

<sup>187</sup> Ogot, p.244.

<sup>188</sup> Atkinson, 'The Evolution', p.32.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. pp.33-4.

nineteenth century an ad hoc mixture of hostility and assimilation marked interactions between Acholi-speaking communities and their Eastern Nilotic neighbours. The age-set system and the military pattern of organisation based around it was therefore most likely a legacy of Jie or Karamojong individuals, or even full clans, initially seeking refuge amongst Acholi chiefdoms but eventually coming to identify themselves as Acholi.<sup>190</sup> In fact, Ogot provides us with numerous examples of Acholi lineages who claim Eastern Nilotic heritage.<sup>191</sup>

The size of precolonial military units amongst heterarchical societies can prove incredibly difficult to establish. As there was not a unified standing army in Acholiland, what we are really attempting to calculate is the number of able-bodied men there were per chiefdom. Yet the numbers cited by European explorers, missionaries, and early colonial officials were based on speculation and guesswork at best. In reality the fighting strength each chiefdom was capable of raising would have varied considerably. A chiefdom, over which a *rwot* exercised his authority, consisted of a collection of villages which ranged from as few as five, to as many as fifty. Likewise, the number of individual households each village consisted of could range from twenty to one hundred and fifty.<sup>192</sup> A chiefdom's military capacity thus partly depended upon the total number of households it contained and, more specifically, upon the percentage of men deemed old enough, or indeed young enough, to participate in a war or raid. Moreover, fighting strength was contingent upon how much influence and authority an individual *rwot* could exercise over his people, and thus the number of able-bodied men who would actually adhere to a request to go to war. As one might

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<sup>190</sup> Personal correspondence with Ronald Atkinson.

<sup>191</sup> Ogot, pp.248-253.

<sup>192</sup> Girling, pp.8-9. See also, Edinburgh, F. K. Girling Family Archives, Acholi Surveys.

expect, therefore, it is not always possible to trace change over time with any sense of accuracy or precision.

Despite this, it remains possible to identify an innovation which would have contributed to a significant increase in the size of Acholi military units throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: namely, the rise in frequency, scale and geographical extent of multi-polity cooperation. References to chiefdoms combining forces and functioning as a collective in military affairs from the eighteenth century onwards are scattered throughout the primary sources we have access to, including cultural forms such as songs and oral traditions, descriptive histories produced by Acholi intellectuals, as well as European accounts.<sup>193</sup> Notably, it was a multi-polity Acholi force of considerable size which prompted the final withdrawal of the Sudanese troops based at the Egyptian garrisons in 1888.<sup>194</sup> In addition, according to oral histories collected by Webster, the Acholi force which fought the Jie c.1900 involved no less than four large chiefdoms and five smaller chiefdoms. It thus comprised of over two thousand fighters, a huge number in relative terms.<sup>195</sup> Proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities living in modern-day South Sudan c.1300-1400 A.D. may have occasionally joined forces to conduct a raid. There is a proto-Luo term, *\*jwAk*, which

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<sup>193</sup> For example, see Anywar, pp.15-25; Baker, *Albert Nyanza*, p. 264; Alfred Malandra, *Tekwaro Acholi*, trans. by C. A. R. Oywa (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957); UNA, A43/90, Disquieting News from Mission at Fatiko, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1907; and London, Imperial War Museum Archives (IWMA), 77217, 29(676.1)/2, Military report on the Uganda protectorate 1909, pp.173-4.

<sup>194</sup> Atkinson, 'The Evolution', pp.35-6; Ogot, p.278. A similar example of multi-polity functioning in response to external threats also occurred amongst the Langi residing in the Moroto Valley who, as noted by John Tosh, 'set aside their differences and prepare[d] to resist the next attack [made by the Sudanese traders in ivory and slave]'. See Tosh, p.98. Likewise Evans-Pritchard has suggested the Nuer and the Dinka 'united occasionally to make war against the Egyptian Government'. See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p.130.

<sup>195</sup> Lamphear and Webster, p.34.



might have been used to describe a situation whereby two (or possibly more) groups joined together to attack a common enemy. The term today is used in various capacities amongst speech communities descended from proto-Luo including ‘to gather and fight one thing or person’, ‘to attack together’, ‘to combine efforts’, ‘to do something together’, and ‘to share’.<sup>196</sup> The different meanings attached to the term \**nwAk* at least infer the term was used in the past to denote a situation whereby people did something together. However, it is unclear whether or not that definitely included fighting. Moreover, even if proto-Southern Luo speakers did occasionally form military collaborations, people were not as yet organised into chiefdoms and thus such collaborations would have involved a few villages joining together at most. The collective functioning beyond even the level of individual chiefdoms amongst Acholi-speaking communities from the late eighteenth century onwards, therefore, vastly expanded the size and scope of military units.

While the arrival of both the Arabic speaking traders and the Sudanese soldiers clearly escalated the frequency of multi-polity groupings, they were not the only driving force behind this change in military organisation. The major droughts and resultant population movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also accelerated the number of military alliances and confederations, with communities clustering together to share the burden of defence.<sup>197</sup> For example, from the eighteenth century onwards a large number of small chiefdoms came to settle among or near the largest chiefdom in Acholiland named Payira, which by this time consisted of almost

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<sup>196</sup> For example, see Crazzolaro, *A study of the Acooli language*, p.339; John Gray and Joy Adhiambo Gwendo, *Dictionary: English-Dhuluo, Dhuluo-English* (Nairobi: John Gray and Joy Adhiambo Gwendo, 2006), p.37; G. Okonye, *Lango-English Dictionary* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2012), p.82; Peter C. Ringe, *A Simple Alur Grammar and Alur-English-Alur Vocabularies* (Kampala: Eagle Press, 1948), p.51. This term also appears in Shilluk, and Anywa.

<sup>197</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.266.

thirty village-lineages and between 10,000-15,000 people.<sup>198</sup> This was partly because the central zone where Payira was situated experienced more reliable rainfall, but also because due to its size Payira offered these smaller chiefdoms a greater degree of security and protection. By the early nineteenth century, then, Payira had begun to exert an unprecedented degree of influence and authority over these nominally independent chiefdoms, often calling on them for their assistance in war.<sup>199</sup> Thus, multi-polity military alliances, and consequently larger Acholi-speaking armies, had begun to form before the era of external intervention, even if these confederations were only temporary in nature.

It is, however, important to note that numbers do not always accurately represent military strength: larger armies do not necessarily improve military capacity. Women or other dependents who were present to perform certain ritualistic practices, help feed the fighters during prolonged expeditions, or simply help carry the loot robbed from the dead, could also account for swollen numbers.<sup>200</sup> The eastern Acholi force which attacked the Jie c.1900 supposedly outnumbered the Jie at least four to one, and yet witnessed a decisive defeat. This alone highlights how numerical advantage is not always synonymous with heightened levels of military power, but can, in some cases, even hinder military capacity. Nonetheless, as this section has ultimately demonstrated, much in line with developments across southern parts of Uganda Acholiland experienced its share of military transformation from the late

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, p.81; Interview with 70, Male, Padibe, 13 September 2016; Interview with 61, Male, Patongo, 9 September 2016; Interview with 13, Male, Gulu, 7 May 2016; and Interview with Participant 159, Male, 2 February 2017.

eighteenth century onwards. Military change was no doubt inconsistent and unstable, but it remains a key feature of the region throughout this period nevertheless.

#### SECTION IV: METHODS OF REGULATING AND CONTROLLING

##### WARFARE: THE MORAL ECONOMY OF VIOLENCE

In the age of high imperialism, war amongst ‘stateless’ societies was viewed as anarchic, savage and unrestrained.<sup>201</sup> The following section refutes this evolutionist discourse which associates statelessness with chaos and disorder, and assumes state formation was synonymous with civilisation and the production of chivalry. By deconstructing the nuances embedded within understandings of honour in relation to physical force, this section will demonstrate that violence amongst Acholi-speaking communities was subjected to predefined restrictions with distinctions being articulated regarding acceptable and unacceptable actions. Thus, even within cultures where warfare and masculinity were intimately intertwined, the performance of violence required restraint. Not all forms of violence, even in the context of war, were deemed heroic. Equally, violence as a culturally constructed concept is both disputed and relative: among Acholi speakers, understandings of what constituted legitimate or appropriate forms of violence were complex, and to some extent contradictory. Moreover, the nineteenth century was by no means a period of unchallenged moral standards. Normative behaviour in war existed as a concept, but adaptations and disruptions to the status quo were as much a feature of the precolonial period as they

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<sup>201</sup> For a nuanced and detailed examination of this theme, see Reid, ‘Revisiting Primitive War’.

were of the colonial era. Thus, this section will additionally illustrate how there were no fixed boundaries; interpretations regarding acceptable forms of violence were susceptible to change and were renegotiated over time in response to the specific drivers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Participation in warfare, even when socially sanctioned, did not systematically bestow glory and social prestige upon Acholi-speaking warriors. Their reputation was ambiguous — dependent upon both their capacity to exhibit exceptional physical strength and courage, and their ability to conform to the culturally constructed military ethics governing their conduct. European observers had a tendency to depict precolonial African societies that resembled Acholiland in terms of socio-political structure as lacking the common legal code which was supposedly required for defining acceptable and unacceptable uses of physical force.<sup>202</sup> However, as the philosopher René Girard once proposed, any given community has to differentiate beneficial violence from actions deemed harmful, continually promoting the former at the expense of the latter.<sup>203</sup> Despite cultural pluralism, Acholi speakers were not devoid of shared values in regard to the use of violence. Acholi-speaking communities may not have possessed the rule of law, but the locally constructed moral economy provided, to some degree, an alternative, effective method for regulating violence through stipulating normative behaviour in war.

Amongst Acholi speakers, judgements regarding the use of physical force were mostly based on factors such as the extent of the violence employed, the justification

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<sup>202</sup> For example, see Speke, pp.197-24. Even Evans-Pritchard suggested of the Nuer, ‘In a strict sense Nuer have no law [...] there is no authority with power to adjudicate on such matters or to enforce a verdict’, see Evans-Pritchard, p.162. Compare with Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1922), p.29.

<sup>203</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.37.

and the identity of the victim. Richard Reid has argued that the nature of African warfare meant distinctions were not drawn between combatants and non-combatants, and that terrorising tactics, which included the killing of the most vulnerable members of society, were common.<sup>204</sup> Across African communities, however, opinions regarding different uses of violence varied tremendously. Certain forms of physical force perceived as culturally legitimate by one society may have been interpreted as particularly cruel by another. For example, although it certainly did occur on occasion, most Acholi-speaking communities considered it an abomination for a warrior to kill an elderly person, a woman, child, or a person with a disability – particularly those with leprosy or kyphosis – during battle.<sup>205</sup> Outsiders, who allegedly ‘killed indiscriminately’ during wars, were labelled ‘barbarians’ and ‘savage’ by Acholi-speakers.<sup>206</sup> It is plausible that the elderly and people with disabilities were not considered a legitimate target as they posed less of a threat to the invading warriors and their capacity to defend themselves was limited. For women and children, their abduction for distribution amongst the warriors represented an underlying military objective, making killing them somewhat incongruous.<sup>207</sup> As Lonsdale has argued,

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<sup>204</sup> Richard Reid, *Warfare in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.11.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017; Interview with 57, Male, Pader, 8 September 2016; Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016; Interview with 76, Male, Paibona, 14 September 2016; Interview with 118, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016; Odongo and Webster, p.162; Charles Amone, ‘Colonialism and the creation of Acholi ethnic nationalism, 1910-1962’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Makerere University, 2004), p.58; Charles Y. L. Ocaya, ‘The Other Face of Acholi’ (unpublished bachelor’s thesis, Makerere University, 1973), p.19; Webster, ‘AHT’, p.152; and Geoffrey Willy Anywar-Latim, ‘Acholi Symbols: Recorded in their Traditional Songs’ (unpublished diploma thesis, Makerere University, 1969), p.21. Conventions of this sort were not unique to the Acholi, as Evans-Pritchard noted in relation to ‘inter-tribal’ fighting amongst the Nuer, ‘women and children were not molested, huts and byres were not destroyed, and captives were not taken’. See Evans-Pritchard, p.121.

<sup>206</sup> Webster, ‘AHT’, p.152, p.170.

<sup>207</sup> UNA, A44/307, Northern Province Reports, Letter entitled ‘Tour through Madi-Acholi countries’, 1908; UNA, A43/90.

restraint in the exercise of force was necessary for precolonial warriors, lest they destroy the very resources they came to exploit.<sup>208</sup>

Local belief systems and ceremonial customs likewise proved important for defining and enforcing precedent regarding uses of violence and thus for moderating the behaviour of ambitious young men.<sup>209</sup> As Acholi political scientist Ocaya-Lakidi has argued in relation to Africa more broadly:

[Indigenous] religion was the ultimate internal control in the behaviour of the warrior [...] without courts, and without “law” as we think of it, there is a powerful force compelling people to lead their lives properly. The real driving force comes from within, from the knowledge that every wrong act, however slight, will bring its punishment.<sup>210</sup>

Amongst Acholi-speaking communities, embedded spiritual beliefs and rituals certainly dictated understandings of the serious repercussions infringements on the standard of conduct would engender, and thus encouraged men to strive to abide by the moral economy of violence. Acholi speakers believed, for example, that any transgression from the socially constructed boundaries governing their use of physical force could manifest in harm, misfortune or even death. More specifically, it was believed that any warrior who violated the moral economy of violence during a battle was more susceptible to being slaughtered by his opponents. The old Acholi proverb ‘*lok oloyo latoo*’, for example, corresponds to ‘the one dead, was the one in the

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<sup>208</sup> John Lonsdale, ‘States and social processes in Africa: a historiographical survey’, *African Studies Review*, 24 (1981), 139-225 (p.151).

<sup>209</sup> For comparable ways in which spiritual belief systems have manipulated warfare amongst alternative African societies see Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience*; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; and Evans-Pritchard.

<sup>210</sup> Ocaya-Lakidi, pp.143-4.

wrong'.<sup>211</sup> A similar notion was described by an Acholi elder in the following interview extract:

There were rules for the Acholi army of those days [...] Mature people were killed, but a woman [...] That brought about bad luck, so if you killed her, even you in that war, you were not going to come out [alive], you were also going to be killed.<sup>212</sup>

In addition, if an attack was waged on false premises it was believed the warriors would encounter difficulties in battle and most likely witness a decisive defeat.<sup>213</sup> Thus, when accounting for their historical defeat to the Jie of north-eastern Uganda c.1900, Acholi elders admitted frankly that, 'the Acholi were in the wrong. They had gone to disturb the Jie in their own country without provocation'. The elders claimed that when a man or people act in this way, they will not be supported or assisted by the spirits, and thus will most likely lose the battle.<sup>214</sup> Thus, even though on the surface Acholi speakers sometimes laid blame on particular spirits for a defeat in war or the death of a warrior during a raid, the interference or indeed lack of interference of external forces remained ultimately a consequence of the individual or group's own conduct.

Amongst Acholi speakers such adversity or misfortune as a result of wrongdoing could impact the offender himself, or importantly, his community more widely. This notion that transgressions not only caused grave consequences for the perpetrators themselves, but could also spread and prove detrimental to the wider

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<sup>211</sup> Festo Okidi, *Acholi Proverbs: With Annotations by the Author* (London: Pilato, 2012), p.139.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017.

<sup>213</sup> Anywar-Latim, p.20; and Webster, 'AHT', p.96.

<sup>214</sup> Lamphear and Webster, p.35.

society, further discouraged men from acting contrary to the constructed moral economy of violence. An individual warrior who killed someone with a disability, for example, was believed to thenceforth produce children with the same illness. This process was described as dragging the disease or disability back to the community with a spear. It reflected the notion that if a warrior killed a person with, for example, symptoms of leprosy, the disease would then infiltrate the offender's community.<sup>215</sup>

Despite pressure to conform, it would be unwise to presume just because such a standard of conduct existed, no violence outside of that which was socially sanctioned ever occurred. Acholi elders' claims regarding how violence was regulated in the deep past should not be interpreted as simply a protective gesture, or as a romanticised vision of precolonial Acholi culture. Instead, such references should be understood as expressions of what warfare was supposed to look like, in theory. They articulate how violent interactions would have played out had Acholi warriors always adhered to the predefined restrictions governing their use of physical force within combat situations. Of course, this interpretation is in itself problematic, predominantly because it ignores the circumstances during which constructed boundaries were both dismantled and eroded. In practice, then, the moral economy of violence could be temporarily ignored, permanently adapted or disregarded altogether. Sometimes personal ambitions and individual aspirations were prioritised over the rules and regulations of the chiefdom. To take the example of targeting women, despite the evidence that killing women even in the context of war was normally regarded as unnecessary and illogical, there remains a significant amount of evidence that it did occur, albeit less commonly. Oral testimonies collected for the Acholi Historical Texts

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<sup>215</sup> Interview with 58, Female, Pader, 8 September 2016; Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016; and Interview with 76, Paibona, 14 September 2016.



(AHT) project, as well as early colonial archival records, provide a number of references to instances where women were killed during a war or raid.<sup>216</sup> One explanation for this use of atypical violence must revolve around the accidental intermingling of women and children with legitimate military targets — being any man judged capable of fighting — during clandestine raids usually conducted at night. As one elder from the chiefdom of Ajali proposed during a recent interview:

Some women were strong minded. If you [meaning the warrior] went to fight her husband, she did not permit it. She also came out and attacked you. And so you [the warrior] said, “If you have also come to fight me, I will kill you.” The man then killed [the woman].<sup>217</sup>

When later asked how the warrior’s community would treat him in such circumstances, the elder replied ‘They [the community] did not look at that man in a bad way, but he had to complete the ritual’.<sup>218</sup> As the following quote highlights, the cleansing ritual a warrior was normally required to participate in following the killing of a woman was regarded as a particularly challenging process.

They say to cleanse the blood of a woman is very difficult, it is like a taboo. So in warfare usually women were spared, and children [...] during the cleansing,

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<sup>216</sup> See the introduction to this thesis for an explanation of the Acholi Historical Text Project. Webster, ‘AHT’; UNA, A45/153, Nile District: Native Affairs, undated; UNA, A16/1-A1-5, Shuli, Acholi correspondence, inward, VOL I-V, Monthly Report, Nile Province, 1903; and ‘A Collection of Traditions about Puranga’, compiled by Apolo Olango, Cimayo Omuno, Gidion Ocito and Danieri Odur, trans. by Charles Okeng, (unpublished collection, 1970), pp.15-16.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with 63, Female, Ajali, 9 September 2016.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

you sort of [had to] carry out the chores of women. Yes like you know, sweeping the house [...] a tiresome process! [...] people did not like it.<sup>219</sup>

Nevertheless, such a rationalisation fails to explain references which suggest large numbers of women and even children were killed, or accounts which imply that such categories of people were explicitly targeted. Acholi traditions recall the chiefdom of Pajule, for example, intentionally slaughtering many women and children during a war with the Labongo people during the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>220</sup>

Alternatively, then, it is clear that certain actions such as slaying women and children, ordinarily considered unacceptable, were permissible against people living outside of the constructed social unit, those who were essentially considered foreign or alien.<sup>221</sup> The moral economy of violence in Acholiland established and dictated how people should behave amongst ‘themselves’. It did not prescribe how people should act in relation to ‘others’.<sup>222</sup> As one informant for the AHT project explained, ‘If they [meaning men from another region] killed one of ours, we killed one of theirs, but if the killer was from one of our own clans then we did not [take] revenge with spears, but sat down and discussed the matter’.<sup>223</sup> Webster has argued the Acholi only considered non-Luo speakers as foreign.<sup>224</sup> However, as has been demonstrated,

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with 61, Male, Patongo, 9 September 2016.

<sup>220</sup> Garry, ‘AHT’, p.20, p.35.

<sup>221</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.51-2, p.162.

<sup>222</sup> London, British National Archives (BNA), FO/2/804, Intelligence Report by F. A. Knowles, May 1902; and UNA, A46/683, Northern Province Monthly Report, 1912. John Tosh has argued inter-clan fighting amongst the Langi was also ‘starkly distinguished from battles with non-Langi by certain conventional restraints’, see Tosh, p.47, p.89; Similarly, Evans-Pritchard has written of the Nuer, ‘Men of the same village or camp fight with clubs, for it is a convention that spears must not be used between neighbours’, and ‘We may therefore say that there is law, in the limited and relative sense [...] between tribesmen, but no law between tribes.’ See Evans-Pritchard, pp.151-156, p.121.

<sup>223</sup> Garry, ‘AHT’, p.128.

<sup>224</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.51-2, p.162.

ethnic assimilation was ongoing and the practical application of this emergent collective Acholi identity remained limited into the twentieth century. Thus, defining who was included in the moral economy, and in turn who was outside it, was a constant challenge.<sup>225</sup> Some Acholi speakers, then, would likely have still considered any people not living within their chiefdom, or within the lineages that formed part of a single socio-political unit, as aliens and thus outside of the moral order.

In addition, interpretations surrounding certain forms of violence can be adapted and renegotiated over time according to the context. It is noteworthy that many of the references to women and children being killed found in the original interview transcripts from the AHT project were acknowledged to be the result of, and to some extent defended by the story teller as vengeance for, some similarly malicious and normally unacceptable act committed against the culprit or culprits at an earlier date.<sup>226</sup> Reid has argued the Ngoni in East Africa set new precedents in the standards of violence through their use of mutilation and their targeting of women and children. Different forms of violence, therefore, which had previously been considered unacceptable, began to be utilised by other groups in the region.<sup>227</sup> In a similar way, there were periods when one Acholi chiefdom or lineage violated the status quo, and thus a context arose where normally despised forms of violence began to be used legitimately in retaliation. As has been indicated, the moral economy of violence in Acholiland represented a collection of rights and expectations in relation to the use of physical force. It laid out a set of standards by which behaviour in war was judged. Any contravening of these standards undermined the existing social insurance pattern

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<sup>225</sup> Johnson's work suggests this was an issue for Nilotic societies more generally. See Johnson, p.56.

<sup>226</sup> For example, see Garry, 'AHT', p.78, p.137.

<sup>227</sup> Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, pp.214-5.

and thus provoked resentment. As Douglas Johnson has similarly argued, the maintenance of a moral community depended upon its members adhering to basic social values.<sup>228</sup> Ultimately, then, it was the notion that their rights had been violated which induced the initial victims to engage in further violence usually deemed unacceptable and thus periodically modify the moral economy of violence.

Finally, the criteria which measured the legitimacy of physical force was also adapted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in response to the specific dynamics of the era. Unsurprisingly, some scholars have ascribed any transgressions from the locally constructed military ethics to the arrival of Arabic-speaking merchants during the mid-nineteenth century. Webster, for example, has argued the situation of upheaval created by the trade in ivory, firearms and human beings broke all the former conventions which had provided Acholi people with security.<sup>229</sup> Likewise, Uma has contended the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders weakened the belief amongst members of the Acholi traditional elite that raiding expeditions should be organised solely for reasons deemed justified by the community, and when peaceful negotiations had proven unsuccessful.<sup>230</sup> Legitimate motives for violence had included revenge for some previous misconduct, defending the community — especially in terms of thwarting any attempts to abduct women and cattle — and protecting the lineage or chiefdom's rights to hunting and grazing grounds. In times of relative scarcity, raiding expeditions for livestock had also been regarded as justified.<sup>231</sup> According to Uma, however, the sphere of functional or constructive

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<sup>228</sup> Johnson, p.57.

<sup>229</sup> Odongo and Webster, pp.164-166.

<sup>230</sup> Uma, p.22.

<sup>231</sup> CMSA, Extracts From Annual Letters, Letter from Kitching, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1905; CMSA, ACC/84, Letter from Mrs. Fisher to her son, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1912; BNA, CO927/158/4, Letter from F. K. Girling entitled 'Study of the Acholi, a report on ten months of fieldwork', 1950; and Interview with 119, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

conflict expanded during the Arab occupation as violence was increasingly employed for the economic and political benefit of traditional elite, rather than for the wellbeing of the wider community.<sup>232</sup>

The above arguments regarding the Arab trade in slaves are certainly true in part. And yet, as has been discussed above, precolonial African warfare has been subjected to a great deal of causal determinism, with a clear emphasis on the impact of external forces, when assessing adaptations and change over time.<sup>233</sup> Embedded in abolitionist discourses, as well as some more recent literature, is the notion that the external slave trade disrupted African people's idyllic, blissful way of life, by turning their societies into militarised slave hunting organisations which disregarded any formerly accepted rules of war and engaged in violence solely for the profit potential from selling slaves.<sup>234</sup> This is of course in contrast to the way in which some commentators, most notably Ali Mazrui, have described Africa's postcolonial violence as a consequence of the removal of colonial oversight.<sup>235</sup> For Acholiland, internal dynamics and mechanisms proved just as significant as the arrival of Arabic-speaking traders in regard to periodic adaptations to the moral economy of violence. Once again, of crucial importance were the droughts and famines which engulfed the region from the eighteenth century, prompting some Eastern Nilotic groups who were unsuccessful in maintaining their herds during such hardship, to move in a westerly direction, either to torment emergent Acholi chiefdoms as troublesome raiders, or to settle as destitute refugees.<sup>236</sup> As will be discussed in more detail during the final

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<sup>232</sup> Uma, pp.19-22.

<sup>233</sup> For more detail on this argument, see Thornton, p.5.

<sup>234</sup> Reid, 'Revisiting Primitive War', p.7; and Thornton, pp.128-9.

<sup>235</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, 'The Resurrection of the Warrior Tradition in African Political Culture', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 13:1 (1975), 67-84.

<sup>236</sup> Atkinson, 'The Evolution', pp.32-33.

section of this chapter, it was during this period of more intensive interaction with Eastern Nilotic communities that a number of unique ways to decorate and honour a warrior who had killed in battle – such as praise names, *jij -moi* – were first introduced into Acholi-speaking communities.<sup>237</sup> By the late nineteenth century these commemorative practices had spread across the region and were employed by numerous chiefdoms in both eastern and western Acholiland. These celebratory customs further distinguished warriors who had killed in war by labelling them as particularly skilled and thus unique assets to their communities. One consequence of this innovation, however, was that violent practices previously deemed unacceptable began to be utilised more frequently, and were by extension socially sanctioned and approved of by the wider community. This phenomenon was largely unrelated to the arrival of outsiders and the emergent external slave trade.<sup>238</sup>

It was during this period, for example, that some individuals or small groups of warriors began to kill unsuspecting victims for the sole purpose of obtaining honour in the form of a praise name.<sup>239</sup> Reuben Anywar wrote in his historical narrative that between 1880 and 1890 members of the Acholi chiefdom Padibe began ambushing and killing people belonging to the Acholi chiefdoms of Pajule, Patiko and Payira, because in the absence of open warfare it was a very easy way of acquiring a praise name.<sup>240</sup> Anthropologist Frank Girling likewise later observed that, albeit less common, an Acholi speaker could sometimes acquire social prestige and individual

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<sup>237</sup> Garry, 'AHT', p.45.

<sup>238</sup> John Tosh has similarly emphasised the impact of internal dynamics during the late nineteenth century upon the definition of justified violence amongst the Langi. According to Tosh, the rinderpest epidemic and subsequent reduction in cattle resulted in all restraints on fighting and traditional rules of war being abandoned, 'Those without livestock used whatever means they could to make good their losses'. See Tosh, pp.103-5.

<sup>239</sup> See Okot p'Bitek, 'Oral Literature and its Social Background among the Acholi and Lango' (unpublished bachelor's thesis, University of Oxford, 1963), p.93.

<sup>240</sup> Anywar, p.82.

distinction in the form of a praise name (*nij -moi*) as a result of ‘the solitary killing from ambush of women and even children of another domain’ – domain being Girling’s term of phrase for an Acholi chiefdom.<sup>241</sup> This use of violence was not historically considered a legitimate use of physical force, nor was it regarded as a ‘manly deed’ worthy of praise or admiration.<sup>242</sup> The fact that transgressions from the locally constructed military ethics reportedly occurred more frequently throughout the nineteenth century, and were additionally publicly endorsed in some contexts through the bestowing of praise names, underlines how the socially constructed boundaries surrounding the definition of justified violence were expanded and reconfigured over time and space. Violence was being utilised not only more frequently during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but at times also in novel, or at least less familiar, ways. What was previously thought of as cruel and barbaric behaviour came to be seen within certain contexts as justified and acceptable.

## SECTION V: ENTREPRENEURIAL VIOLENCE AND MERCENARY SOLDIERING

Up until this point, this chapter has argued that the introduction of an external slave trade c.1850 did not have as significant an impact over warfare and violence as has previously been suggested. One area which was meaningfully influenced by the Arab occupation, however, was the relationship between war and economic wealth. The trade in slaves and ivory certainly brought devastation and impoverishment for some,

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<sup>241</sup> Girling, p.102.

<sup>242</sup> Ocaya, pp.19-20.

but it bought economic wealth, social prestige and political power for others. As was the case in many African societies, there was a particular convergence of interests between the traditional Acholi elite (*rwodi*) and the Arabic speakers, who became trading partners, as well as political and military allies. In Acholiland however, African agency was not limited to those who had previously wielded political power and authority: some members of the general populace were also able to negotiate a space for themselves and benefit economically from this rapidly changing environment.

We cannot, of course, afford to disregard the economic importance of violent encounters prior to the nineteenth century. The reality is that war and raiding were never trivial or inconsequential amongst African communities, but rather a source of economic growth and stability for the victor. Accumulating key resources and the incorporation of people, which represented control over both the means of production and reproduction, underpinned a community's ability to survive and prosper. The acquisition of livestock and foodstuffs no doubt sometimes represented an opportunistic outcome of a raid which was rooted in much deeper internal grievances, but the spoils of war represented vital economic assets nonetheless. Even proto-Southern Luo speech communities who lived c.1300-1400 A.D., then, had terminology to describe the act of plundering, *\*yak*.<sup>243</sup> Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated below, the arrival of Arabic-speaking newcomers meant that from the mid-nineteenth century violence amongst Acholi speakers began to be mobilised in increasingly ambitious ways in pursuit of economic dominance.

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<sup>243</sup> This term, according to historical linguist Christopher Ehret, stems from the proto-Nilo-Saharan word *\*ha:k<sup>hw</sup>*, literally meaning 'to pick up many things'. See Christopher Ehret, *A Historical-Comparative Reconstruction of Nilo-Saharan* (Köln: Köppe, 2001).



As Reid reminds us, war causes great suffering and social misery, but it can also act as a major force for innovation.<sup>244</sup> For many communities across the African continent, the external trade in ivory and human beings, and the increase in warfare which often accompanied it, was hugely disruptive and damaging. But it could also prove economically and commercially advantageous to those Africans who not only witnessed this upheaval, but participated in it. Robin Law, for example, has demonstrated how the European trade in slaves also provided an enormous stimulus to the development and commercialisation of domestic economies along the Slave Coast in West Africa.<sup>245</sup> Rather than passive subjects, then, many Acholi-speaking people likewise proved themselves to be active agents who created innovative ways of benefitting both economically and politically from the context of disorder. The Arab presence provided *rwodi* in particular new opportunities to increase their wealth and authority. Through allying with the traders and assisting them in wars by providing porters and warriors, *rwodi* would receive cattle, guns or even captives in return.<sup>246</sup> For example, a Comboni Fathers missionary named Alfredo Malandra detailed an episode whereby the Acholi chief of Pabo received ‘fifty cattle, fifty goats, ten girls and ten boys’ from Arabic-speaking traders after providing them with support during a battle.<sup>247</sup> Of course numerical specifics must be accepted with caution, but such stories clearly imply *rwodi* received some form of economic subsidy from the traders for their assistance. In addition, *rwodi* would sometimes induce the Arab traders, and later the Sudanese soldiers, to act as their allies and support them in their own raiding expeditions against other Acholi chiefdoms or another ethnic group.<sup>248</sup> Unsurprisingly,

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<sup>244</sup> Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, pp.234-5.

<sup>245</sup> Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.219-224, p.346.

<sup>246</sup> Ogot, pp.267-8, p.278.

<sup>247</sup> Malandra, p.11.

<sup>248</sup> Anywar, pp.73-4.

the outsiders usually accepted such offers, during which they could exploit the opportunity to capture cattle and slaves. Finally, *rwodi* living within close proximity to a trading station often wielded considerable influence over the Arabic-speaking community. This placed them within a particularly powerful political and economic position. Other chiefs who wanted the Arab traders to assist them in war, for example, first approached these geographically well-placed *rwodi* to help them construct such an alliance. In exchange for their diplomacy, the well-placed *rwodi* were provided with gifts and economic rewards.<sup>249</sup>

The capacity of traditional elite to enrich themselves through negotiation with outsiders during periods of rapid change or turmoil has often been the focus of research concerned with African agency.<sup>250</sup> And yet many “ordinary” Acholi speakers were also able to benefit from the arrival of foreign traders. Acholi-speaking men would often willingly act as fighters for the Arab traders or help transport goods. When describing an attack on the Langi, for example, Samuel Baker indicates the Arab traders were joined by a large number of Acholi-speaking allies.<sup>251</sup> Acholi speakers offered their assistance partly in the hope they would also be rewarded with war booty, and partly because such expeditions offered them the opportunity to plunder consumables such as sorghum and millet.<sup>252</sup> Baker’s diary indicates the indigenous warriors would sometimes even outnumber the slave raiders during these military exploits. Baker noted, for example, that an Arab slaving expedition launched from the Acholi chiefdom Patiko involved ‘a detachment of 103 men, together with about 150

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<sup>249</sup> Malandra, pp.11-12.

<sup>250</sup> For example, see T. C. McCaskie, ‘The Consuming Passions of Kwame Boakye: An Essay of Agency and Identity in Asante History’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2000), 43-62; and Richard Rathbone, ‘Native Courts, Local Courts, Chieftaincy and the CPP in Ghana in the 1950s’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2000), 125-139.

<sup>251</sup> Baker, *Ismailia*, pp.104-105.

<sup>252</sup> Anywar, p.14; Ogot, pp.267-8.

natives'.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, an elderly informant interviewed for the AHT project claimed when the Arabic speakers attacked an Acholi chiefdom named Lira Paluo, 'there were many of them, but far more African followers.'<sup>254</sup> In sum, then, the Arabic-speaking traders instigated a growth in mercenary soldiering and the commercialisation of violence.<sup>255</sup> This phenomenon continued even after their departure. For example, during the final years of the nineteenth century, when British colonialism was still in its infancy, large numbers of Acholi warriors fought alongside the Jie in exchange for plunder.<sup>256</sup> For these Acholi-speakers, violence had become a profession.

## SECTION VI: THE SOCIAL VALUE OF WAR AND VIOLENCE

Wealth and economic power are intimately intertwined with social prestige. Ocaya-Lakidi once noted that in East Africa the impulse for war was primarily economic, 'war was generally waged and the warriors willingly participated for no other reason than to acquire booty: slaves, women and especially cattle.'<sup>257</sup> Such an argument unfairly disregards the social aspects of war and warriorhood. Within Acholi-speaking communities it was often the desire for inclusion and social status which drove men to seek wealth, especially in the form of women and other dependents, which would

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<sup>253</sup> Baker, *Ismailia*, p.211.

<sup>254</sup> Webster, 'AHT', p.120.

<sup>255</sup> Such a phenomenon was not unique to Acholiland, Law argues the commercialisation of violence also characterised the trade in slaves, and subsequent increase in violence and disorder along the Slave Coast in West Africa by the end of the seventeenth century. See Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa*, p.346.

<sup>256</sup> Lamphear's research reveals that groups of Acholi musketeers used gifts to induce the Jie leader Loriang to accept them into his army and thus allow them to share in the spoils of war. See Lamphear, pp.238-9, pp.242-3.

<sup>257</sup> Ocaya-Lakidi, p.148.

ultimately enhance their claims to respected manhood. Economic and commercial incentives for mercenary soldiering or even private banditry, therefore, must also be viewed as social impetuses. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, warfare in Acholiland had become indelibly intertwined with the acquisition of social prestige, honour, and individual distinction. Acholi men could use warfare as a platform for reputation building and for asserting their position within local hierarchies. As mentioned above, this was a period when military organisation amongst some chiefdoms took on an increasingly hierarchical command structure, which enabled individual men to gain recognition through military skill.<sup>258</sup> Martial prowess, demonstrations of bravery and physical strength were thus celebrated and actively encouraged more than ever, whilst displays of cowardliness were strongly associated with femininity and rendered shameful.<sup>259</sup> Acholi men who failed to conform to the expected behavioural patterns were subjected to humiliation, which often took the form of degrading the individual's manliness. As will be demonstrated below, in large part this phenomenon was another response to increasing interactions with Nilotic communities lying to the east of Acholiland. External traders did therefore not create militarism amongst the Acholi, they were simply able to tap into or harness a military culture which was already in the making.

Notions of honour can tell us much about social hierarchies and organising principles, as well as strategies for inclusion and public recognition. In turn,

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<sup>258</sup> Ocitti, p.41. Ogot has even claimed a new military institution in the form of a war council was created in Paimol (a chiefdom in east-central Acholiland) sometime between 1829-1856. Ogot argues this military council, whose members were chosen on the basis of bravery and skill in war, assumed considerable power and autonomy over whether war should be declared. See Ogot, p.250.

<sup>259</sup> Such attitudes regarding bravery and cowardice were not distinct to the Acholi, see FitzSimons, 'Warfare, Competition and the Durability', pp.57-59; Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, p. 205, pp.210-211; and Iliffe, *Honour*, pp.1-2, p.147.

deconstructing understandings of honour can help us uncover what motivates social interactions and human behaviour. Yet, historicising notions of honour, which is fundamentally interactional, requires unearthing the changing historical contexts which underpinned understandings of, and approaches to, gaining honour.<sup>260</sup> Schoenbrun's research has highlighted that a number of Bantu speech communities derived a term to describe 'honour, respect, dignity, pomp, majesty or authority' from the verb *kutíia*, which means 'to fear'.<sup>261</sup> A similar derivational process occurred most likely amongst proto-Southern Luo speakers, but possibly even earlier. The reflexes of the proto-Southern Luo root word *\*lwoɿ* describe a lexical set of semantically related terms which suggest fear effectively generated, and produced the recognition of, honour, (see the table below). Someone who was feared thus acquired respect and social status.

| Language | Term       | Translation                             |
|----------|------------|---|
| Acholi   | lwoóíó (V) | 'to fear, to honour, to respect'        |
| Lango    | lwóíó (V)  | 'to fear, to be afraid of, to respect'  |
| Kumam    | lwóíó (V)  | 'to fear, to be in awe of'              |
| Alur     | lwóíó (V)  | 'to fear, to avoid, to quail, to dread' |

<sup>260</sup> Schoenbrun, p.47.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., pp.47-8.

|        |            |   |
|--------|------------|---|
|        |            |   |
| Adhola | lwó.íó (V) | ‘to fear, to honour’  |
| Duoluo | luó.íó (V) | ‘to fear, to be afraid of, to respect, to be in awe of <sup>262</sup> |

Table 2:3, Reflexes of the proto-Southern Luo root word *\*lwo.ɿ*

As Schoenbrun reminds us, how and why a community links the abstract qualities of honour with the physical qualities of fear is circumstantial, and yet the relationship between honour and the fear which generated it universally shaped gendered aspirations for manhood and womanhood. We may never fully appreciate the subtle ways this relationship between fear and honour impacted behaviour and social interactions amongst proto-Southern Luo speakers: the words themselves cannot tell us everything about the contexts they were used in and they cannot help us recover individuals’ actions from the past. Yet, language is not a value-free tool; it reflects choices, and choices express the interests, attitudes and the values of the speakers.<sup>263</sup> Thus, we can sensibly assume this relationship between fear and honour shaped behaviour during war and other violent moments. Proto-Southern Luo speakers, striving for public recognition and social inclusion, likely felt compelled to prove

<sup>262</sup> Crazzolara, *A study of the Acoli language*, p.301; Okonye, p.67; Osamu Hieda, *Kuman Vocabulary and Grammatical Notes* (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2011), p.394; Ringe, p.48; Father William, *Dhopadhola Dictionary: Adhola-English* (Bodergraven: Watertoren Productives, 2009), p.103; and Gray and Gwendo, p.24.

<sup>263</sup> Schoenbrun, p.59.

themselves during raids through demonstrations of physical strength and courage, lest they be exposed as weak, cowardly and consequently not people to be feared.

Despite this, violence did not offer the same platform for reputation building amongst proto-Southern Luo speakers as it did amongst Acholi speech communities from the eighteenth century onwards. As mentioned, a community's vocabulary can reveal ideas regarding who could wield authority and power within different hierarchies and social groups. It can thus help us understand how supposedly skilled people were identified, why they merited a unique title, and how individual distinction was achieved. More importantly, however, changes in language – such as shifts in meaning or the invention of new terms – can expose innovative ideologies concerning social worth and talent, alongside new outlets for individual aspiration and ambition.<sup>264</sup> For example, through interrogating the complex semantic history of the lexical unit *\*-pàdó*, Kathryn De Luna has demonstrated how ability in hunting – a once common activity – turned some Botatwe men into people of great renown.<sup>265</sup> In a similar way, the innovation of a new lexical form *ḍtéchá*, reveals an intriguing story regarding the importance of war and violence amongst the Acholi during the latter part of the precolonial period.

During the nineteenth century, or possibly even earlier, physically strong and courageous Acholi men came to be referred to as *ḍtéchá*. It was also the word utilised in some areas of Acholiland to describe the main protagonist or most successful fighter in a raiding expedition. Moreover, as the extract below taken from an Acholi oral poem

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<sup>264</sup> See De Luna, 'Hunting Reputations'.

<sup>265</sup> De Luna, pp.279-80.

demonstrates, *òtéxá* was even translated to mean ‘hero’, or more specifically ‘war hero’.

Orobo ka Nyum ocoro,

Orobo ka Nyum, ba *òtéxá* lweny

The young man of Nyum has stormed in,

The young man of Nyum, oh the war hero<sup>266</sup>

The term *òtéxá* was an internal innovation based on the root word *\*ték*, meaning ‘strong’ or ‘hard’. According to Ehret’s research *\*tek* is a particularly ancient term stemming from the proto-Nilo Saharan word *\*sef* meaning ‘to be strong’.<sup>267</sup> The semantic history and use of *òtéxá* during the late precolonial period thus exposes how both mental and physical strength became increasingly important for cultivating individual prestige and honour. Men striving to demonstrate courage and physical strength whilst fighting was evidently nothing new, but the invention of a word to delineate men deemed particularly successful in fighting was. Simultaneously, the platforms – such as war – through which talent and skill in this regard could be demonstrated, and thus publicly acknowledged and ratified by the wider community, became increasingly significant. War started to hold new value, serving an alternative purpose outside of defence, revenge, and economic gain. It provided young men with an opportunity to fulfil their personal gendered ambitions and assert their position within local social hierarchies.

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<sup>266</sup> Okot Mark Benge, ‘Gender representation in Acoli oral poetry’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Makerere University, 1994), pp.73-4.

<sup>267</sup> Ehret, *A Historical-Comparative*.



On one level, the celebrations and rituals performed throughout the nineteenth century by Acholi-speaking communities further illustrate that the employment of certain forms of violence became to be deemed not only acceptable, but desirable. Successful warriors returning from war would be greeted with gaiety; women ululated as the warriors approached, alcohol was brewed, food was cooked, and dances were performed to celebrate the warriors' victory in battle.<sup>268</sup> As briefly mentioned above, by the nineteenth century warriors who had killed were also being individually decorated in a variety of ways, ranging from securing special praise names termed *nij -moi*, to undergoing a unique scarification process referred to as *agora* or *agor*. Earning a *nij -moi* was a source of great pride. Through suffixing the term *-moi* to the end of a common verb, the name articulated how the warrior had killed an enemy and reminded the community of the warrior's strength in battle.<sup>269</sup> The most famous Acholi man to receive a *nij -moi* was Awic of Payira, who was christened Lutanymoi after killing a man in battle against the people of Padibe c.1889.<sup>270</sup> The scarification process, *agora*, most often took the form of incisions made across the upper arm of the killer and denoted the number of people the warrior had killed.<sup>271</sup> Elders today suggest men with *agora* were granted a heightened level of respect within the community, and describe it as akin to an army rank, a visible symbol exemplifying the warrior's achievements.

If you go to school, study and obtain a diploma or degree, that is a great achievement. That is the same way it was for the people who were called -

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with 59, Male, Patongo, 9 September 2016; Interview with 119, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016; and Interview with 76, Male, Paibona, 14 September 2016.

<sup>269</sup> Rome, Comboni Archives (ACR), B/186/6, File entitled 'Cultura Acioli, Kitgum', 1985; and Webster, 'AHT', pp.25-26, p.36. For an early archival recording of *nij -moi*, see UNA, A16/1-A1/5 /153, Report from Wadelai, 1901.

<sup>270</sup> Girling, p.103; Anywar, p.20.

<sup>271</sup> Garry, 'AHT', p.10, p.27.

*moi*. They were then referred to as heroes [...] They cut them here [...] They called it *agor* [...] If they cut two, that meant two. That meant you had killed two people [...] You then acted as though you were wearing a rank.<sup>272</sup>

At least to some extent, then, these celebratory customs further distinguished warriors who had killed in war by labelling them as particularly skilled individuals and unique assets to their communities.

As also briefly mentioned above, the adoption of commemorative rituals, such as christening successful warriors with praise names (*nɪŋ -mòì*) and making incisions into their upper-arms or chest (*àgò.à*), was driven by interactions with other African peoples.<sup>273</sup> Just as the tools used and strategies employed during war fluctuated over time, so did the rituals and customs which so often accompanied, and helped define, violent encounters and those who participated in them. If these customs honouring certain warriors occurred amongst proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities, and were thus inherited by Acholi speakers, we would expect to find linguistic or ethnographic data verifying their existence amongst other speech communities which descended from the same ancestral language. The quality and quantity of ethnographic material concerning speech communities classified as genetically related to the Acholi is generally regarded as inadequate. And yet the sheer lack of references to these celebratory rituals amongst communities such as the Alur or the Luo of Kenya,

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<sup>272</sup> Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016.

<sup>273</sup> For another example of communities adopting scarification techniques, see Mark Leopold, 'Legacies of Slavery in North-West Uganda: The Story of the 'One-Elevens'', *Journal of the International African Institute*, 76:2 (2006), 180-199 (p.181).

indicates that endowing successful warriors through these techniques was likely only introduced after Acholi became a distinct language and community.<sup>274</sup>

We can sensibly assume the custom of decorating successful warriors was a phenomenon adopted by Acholi speakers from Nilotic speech communities living to the East of Acholiland. References to awarding talented warriors with praise names and cicatrices are exceptionally common within colonial descriptions and more recent scholarly accounts of Eastern Nilotic communities, such as the Lotuxo, Jie and Karamojong.<sup>275</sup> Lamphear, for example, clearly describes this custom in his study of precolonial Jie military culture, writing that, ‘Personal bravery was greatly admired and encouraged, and men who killed an enemy in battle were honoured with a ‘battle name’, and were allowed to scar their breasts and shoulders’.<sup>276</sup> Likewise, Rennie Bere, a colonial administrator, wrote in relation to the Karamojong:

Their young men of the warrior grade [...] were only too inclined to make forays across the border for the sole purpose of killing the first defenceless man or woman they happened to see. The murderer was then admitted to the

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<sup>274</sup> For example, see C. G. Seligman and Brenda Z Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1932); G. A. S. Northcote, ‘The Nilotic Kavirondo’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 37 (1907), 58-66; C. W. Hobley, *Eastern Uganda: An Ethnological Survey* (London: Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1902); John Roscoe, *The Northern Bantu: An Account of Some Central African Tribes of the Uganda Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915); Sir Harry Johnson, *The Uganda Protectorate*, vol. II (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1902); Aiden W. Southall, *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1956). The only other speech community descended from proto-Southern Lwo which awarded praise names and cicatrised warriors who had killed in battle was the Lango. The Lango are thought to either have originally descended from, or at least have been historically heavily influenced by, Eastern Nilotic communities. Thus, references to ‘war names’ and the ‘cicatrised of [...] killers’ amongst Lango-speaking communities further supports the author’s argument above. See Jack Herbert Driberg, *The Lango: A Nilotic Tribe of Uganda* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1923).

<sup>275</sup> For a reference to these practices amongst the Lotuxo, see Seligman and Seligman, p.322. Also see Pamela Gulliver, *The Central Nilo-Hamites* (London: International African Institute, 1953), p.78.

<sup>276</sup> Lamphear, p.207.

full state of manhood, allowed to adopt the highly prized ‘killer name’ ending in –moi and was given some additional cicatrised tattoo marks [...].<sup>277</sup>

Linguistic data provides further evidence that the praise names (*ɲíɲ -mòì*) were incorporated into Acholi culture after extensive contact with Eastern Nilotic communities. Phonology tells us that the Acholi term *-mòì* is a loan word as the sound patterns are irregular. This indicates that the custom it represents — the celebratory naming of those who killed during war — is likely of foreign origin as people are unlikely to borrow a word to describe an indigenous practice. The term *-mòì* most likely comes from the Nga’Karamojong noun for enemy, *emoit*, which is pronounced with a silent ‘t’ when sounded aloud. In contrast, the Acholi term *àgò.à* was developed from an indigenous Acholi word *gò.à*, meaning simply ‘to make incisions’. It is relatively easy to trace the etymology of *gò.à* to the proto-Nilotic word *\*gwor* or *\*gwor*, meaning ‘to scarify (an adolescent)’, as well as the even older proto-Nilo-Saharan term *\*ǵwór*, meaning ‘to puncture or pierce with a blade or point’.<sup>278</sup> The fact the Acholi opted to widen the semantic field of the verb *gò.à* to also include the cicatrised of those who had killed in combat, as opposed to adopting a loan word from Nga’Karamojong, should not be taken as an indication that the practice itself was indigenous, rather than borrowed. As Acholi speakers already had a term to describe the act of making incisions, it is not unusual that they chose to utilise this root word to describe a new practice which also revolved around the cutting of flesh, albeit within a unique context.

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<sup>277</sup> Oxford, Oxford University Archives (OUA), MSS.Afr.s.1744, Rennie Bere, A Spear for the Rhinoceros, pp.57-58.

<sup>278</sup> See Ehret, *A Historical-Comparative*.

Neither linguistic data nor the ethnographic record can tell us exactly when praise names and ceremonial scarring were introduced into Acholi speech communities. Language evidence in particular is a precarious foundation for offering specific calendar dates. It seems unlikely, however, such practices were widely employed before the eighteenth century. As has been mentioned, famines which struck the region sometime between 1700 and 1840 are known to have prompted some Eastern Nilotic groups to move in a westerly direction.<sup>279</sup> Interactions between Acholi speakers and these contrasting societies was thus accelerated during this period, which as we have already noted, sometimes led to conflict over claims to territory and valuable resources, but also resulted in individuals as well as whole lineages of Eastern Nilotic origin being assimilated into the newly founded Acholi chiefdoms.<sup>280</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that custom and linguistic borrowing occurred gradually throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when more and more Acholi-speaking communities were introduced to the concept of christening and scarring successful warriors through contact with Eastern Nilotic peoples. It is also possible, however, that the proto-Southern Luo speakers who originally migrated into Acholiland during the early to mid-fifteenth century borrowed such practices from the Eastern Nilotic communities who were already living in large parts of present-day southeast Acholiland.<sup>281</sup> Either way, the ritualistic practices began being employed by Acholi speech communities living in the eastern part of the region and then gradually spread to chiefdoms situated at a greater distance from this contact zone.

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<sup>279</sup> See Atkinson, 'The Evolution', p.33; and *Chronology, Migration and Drought*, ed. by Webster.

<sup>280</sup> Ogot, p.244, pp.248-253.

<sup>281</sup> Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.63.

As Schoenbrun has insightfully suggested, just as desire for honour and public recognition is a social force, humiliation and scorn, which represent a community's way of depriving a person of honour, also impact human behaviour. Novel opportunities for cultivating individual prestige simultaneously bring forth new forms of marginality and patterns of exclusion from local social hierarchies. Negative terms in particular act as dehumanising strategies and are an effort to restrict social incorporation while influencing public opinion and social values.<sup>282</sup> Amongst Acholi speakers, being labelled a coward, *làlwò.ò*, came to represent both a disrespectful and humiliating term, and was often reserved for those who demonstrated fear during war. As illustrated by the extracts below, numerous songs and oral poems were constructed throughout the nineteenth century to shame men who deserted or refused to fight. Such degrading or demeaning language served to emasculate Acholi-speaking men considered cowardly, denying them access to respected manhood. Displays of fear thus came to be strongly associated with femininity and consequently songs often additionally drew comparisons between cowardly men and women. The following extract is from a song sung by the people of Pader, a chiefdom in eastern Acholiland. The song was originally crafted to insult the people of Koc, who migrated west to avoid further hostilities arising between the two chiefdoms.

The [chief's people] fear fighting,

The women are even better than them,

[...]

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<sup>282</sup> Schoenbrun, p.49.

E – these people are cowards for they run away.<sup>283</sup>

In addition, the lament written out below was constructed to deplore the cowardly acts of warriors which seemingly led to a defeat. The poet positions themselves as a Patongo woman – Patongo being a chiefdom in eastern Acholiland – whose clansmen were defeated as a consequence of their cowardly retreat to a mountain fastness. The song was most likely composed when the Eastern Nilotic Jie blockaded the people of the Acholi chiefdom Patongo at Amyel during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>284</sup>

There are no more men at the foot of Mount Amyel,

[...]

The Patongo men have climbed Mount Amyel,

Up there, they look like men,

The men I trusted.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, a disdain for cowardice or lack of courage is also illustrated within several Acholi proverbs which date back to the nineteenth century. For example, '*lalworo, odok i meni*', meaning 'let the coward return to his mother's womb', was understood by Acholi speakers as equating cowardice with worthlessness, implying that a cowardly man was undeserving of maleness and should thus be reborn as a woman.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Daniel Ongo, 'Drum Songs of Some East Acholi Kingdoms', trans. by Charles Okeng (unpublished collection, 1971), p.9.

<sup>284</sup> Webster, 'AHT', pp.11-12, p.44, p.157.

<sup>285</sup> Charles Nelson Okumu, 'The genres of Acoli oral literature: II' (unpublished master's thesis, Makerere University, 1975), p.255.

<sup>286</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Acholi Proverbs* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1985), p.8; Okidi, p.118; Interview with 159, Male, Kampala, 2 February 2017.

Such songs and proverbs encapsulate a growing contempt for actions and behaviours which were regarded as demonstrations of psychological and physical weakness within Acholi society. This raises questions about the local historical circumstances which caused this phenomenon. Of course, as mentioned above, this must have been partially linked to the growing vocabulary surrounding honour. For respectability to be increasingly associated with bravery and physical strength, there had to be a credible, universally accepted alternative. It is also important to note, however, that despite the increase in violence and warfare during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there remained no permanent professional armies in Acholiland. Acholi chiefdoms continued to rely on all physically-able men — who were otherwise occupied with hunting, farming or herding animals — voluntarily offering their services when circumstances arose. This is despite of the fact a chiefdom's capacity to defend itself from attack had become unprecedentedly vital to its survival. Within such a context, then, there was likely an overwhelming need for men to feel not only obligated to fight, but actually afraid of the social consequences of refusing to do so. It may well have been the pressure to conform, the threat of humiliation, and the prospect of social exclusion from constructed gendered hierarchies, which ensured the village or chiefdom was supplied with voluntary warriors which it relied upon for relative security.

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, violence had become an integral component of Acholi manhood. For men to acquire respect they had to demonstrate martial qualities such as bravery, as well as be willing and have the physical capacity to perform violence. Fear of acquiring the label coward further motivated men to conform to conventional gendered behavioural patterns concerning violent



engagements. Violence thus performed a valuable function in everyday life by representing a platform for securing social prestige.

## CONCLUSION

To briefly return to the original research questions outlined in the introduction to this chapter, what this discussion has ultimately revealed is that internal dynamics — such as widespread famines and extensive population movement — significantly influenced military affairs amongst Acholi-speaking communities from the eighteenth century onwards. This is especially true for the frequency and scale of conflict, the extent to which the moral economy of violence was abided by, and the social value of war. This is not to say the Arab trade in slaves and ivory did not generate any military transformations during the final decades of the precolonial era. Its role in intensifying the relationship between militarism and economic prosperity is noteworthy. Nonetheless, the impact Arabic-speaking traders had over war and conflict has been inflated within existing literature, especially in regards to the arms trade and the extent to which violence became more destructive to human life. As was noted in section three, the introduction of firearms into Acholi-speaking communities did not have much of an effect over military efficacy.

In addition, this chapter has demonstrated that shifts in military organisation did indeed parallel the escalation of violence. Military structures became more professionalised with an increase in hierarchical command structures and even the emergence of a small standing military unit amongst the Acholi chiefdom Payira.

Moreover, violence was increasingly deployed in more creative and ambitious ways for economic, political, and most notably, social ends. Despite this, military change was uneven. As has been noted, eastern Acholi chiefdoms were no doubt more heavily influenced by other Nilotic communities with whom they shared a border.

More generally, this chapter has illustrated the value of utilising innovative methodologies when trying to extract information about oral communities for which we lack an adequate amount of written resources. It was only through using historical linguistics that this chapter was able to assess how military affairs amongst precolonial Acholi speakers differed from those of proto-Southern Luo-speaking communities, as well as the extent to which military transformations amongst the Acholi were driven by more intensive interactions with other Ugandan communities. The following chapter further expands this discussion regarding the evolution of militarism amongst the Acholi by evaluating the impact of British colonial rule. In general, it is concerned with the imperial ideology 'martial race' and colonial military recruitment in Uganda. More specifically, it interrogates why the British military administration leaned so heavily on the Acholi to fill the rank-and-file of the King's African Rifles (KAR), as well as why Acholi men opted to serve a foreign power.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE KING'S AFRICAN RIFLES AND COLONIAL MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN UGANDA

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From 1902 until 1964 the King's African Rifles (KAR) was the armed force that supported foreign rule in Kenya, Malawi (formerly known as Nyasaland), Tanzania (formerly known as Tanganyika) and Uganda.<sup>287</sup> Excluding Kenya, the British army was never stationed in East Africa. Due to fiscal austerity the KAR was composed almost exclusively of Africans, who were supervised and directed by just a handful of British officers. One early exception in regard to Uganda was the Indian contingent, which was initially brought in to suppress a revolt by Sudanese soldiers in 1897 and secure British colonial rule during its infancy.<sup>288</sup> Throughout the early 1900s a number of East Africa-based senior military officers and colonial officials, including the special commissioner Sir Harry Johnston, questioned the wisdom of disbanding the Indian battalion and relying entirely on African peoples. But East African colonies were not valuable enough to justify the expense of retaining regular soldiers of foreign origin who required a special diet and higher wages than indigenous recruits.<sup>289</sup> Thus, by 1912 all of the Indian troops had been withdrawn, which meant the stability of British colonial rule in East Africa going forward depended largely upon subject peoples alone. During peacetime the KAR consisted of only five to seven battalions,

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<sup>287</sup> Prior to 1902 the colonial army in Uganda was named the Uganda Rifles. This later joined with the Central Africa Rifles and the East Africa Rifles to form the King's African Rifles.

<sup>288</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.282.

<sup>289</sup> For example, see BNA, FO2/797, Letter from Brigadier General, 1903. For more information on the Indian contingent and the financial pressures impacting colonial rule in East Africa, see Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p.3, p.15.

containing around 400 to 600 recruits each. The KAR was, however, drastically expanded during both the First and Second World Wars. Between 1914 and 1918 the KAR contained almost 32,000 East African recruits, and during the Second World War over 320,000 East African men served as *askari*, a term for colonial soldier.<sup>290</sup>

During a number of early punitive expeditions aimed at establishing British colonial rule in East Africa, Baganda levies were employed in vast numbers.<sup>291</sup> Some of these Baganda recruits were later incorporated into the KAR, where they initially formed almost one fifth of the 4<sup>th</sup> (Ugandan) Battalion.<sup>292</sup> Acholi speakers, in comparison, were wholly absent from the KAR at this point. In fact, even as late as 1908, not one Acholi soldier had been enlisted into the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>293</sup> Why, then, just ten years later, had the military administration begun to lean so heavily on the Acholi to fill the rank-and-file of the KAR? How did the Acholi come to possess an ostensibly uncomplicated reputation for sterling military service and loyal soldiering when they had previously been excluded from the colonial armed forces? This chapter addresses these questions by examining how Britain's imperial interests intersected with local manifestations of African agency, especially in regard to colonial military recruitment patterns and processes of identity production.

Early historiography concerning the colonial encounter typically depicted European actions and initiatives to be both dominant and decisive. The African component, in contrast, was routinely characterised as passive, dependent, and

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<sup>290</sup> It is important to note that during the First World War many East Africans also served as military porters. For a more detailed account of the KAR, which the preceding paragraph has summarised, see Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp.1-53.

<sup>291</sup> Omara-Otunnu, pp.16-17.

<sup>292</sup> BNA, FO 881/7749, KAR Inspection Report, 1902.

<sup>293</sup> BNA, CO 534/9, Military Report, 1908.

exploited.<sup>294</sup> More recent literature has strived to demonstrate how the categories of ‘colonised’ and ‘coloniser’ constantly shifted, meaning African people were often able to influence and manipulate the nature of their interactions with colonialism, and in turn shape their own identities and life trajectories under colonial rule.<sup>295</sup> Taking its lead from more recent scholarship, then, this chapter emphasises that we cannot ignore the ways in which colonised people influenced European understandings of ‘martial race’, and by extension, colonial recruitment strategies. Only by incorporating an exploration of how Acholi communities impacted colonial discourse can we garner a better understanding of why it was the Acholi in particular who came to represent the epitome of martial superiority and pre-eminence in Uganda.

Nonetheless, as this chapter will additionally demonstrate, the extent to which local African communities were able to manipulate European thinking in regard to their military value was partly determined by Britain’s imperial agenda. The Acholi were only able to exert a significant amount of influence over recruitment policies, therefore, because the British were already seeking to enlist soldiers from non-centralised Nilotic societies. The central argument embedded within this chapter, then, is that the nature of military recruitment in Uganda was characterised by interdependence: it represented a process of negotiation and mediation between the British government and local African peoples. An ethnic group’s enthusiasm for military service and willingness to enlist certainly had the capacity to impact colonial

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<sup>294</sup> For example, see Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>295</sup> For example, see Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*; Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*; Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*; Hamilton, ‘The Character and Objects of Chaka’. For a useful analysis which relates to another context, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

recruitment patterns. But African people's demands regarding their martial status were usually only met if they coincided with British imperial interests.

Neither Acholi attitudes towards military service nor Britain's objectives in East Africa were uncompromising or inflexible. Significant shifts over time which impacted colonial recruitment practices and the ideology of 'martial race' are discernible. This chapter has thus been organised to emphasise these important alterations in colonial thinking, and to underscore these changes to indigenous perspectives on soldiering. The first section is concerned with the era of conquest, c.1890-1905. It illustrates why recruitment policies during the establishment of British colonial rule cannot be properly explained in terms of early western descriptions and racialised stereotypes concerning warlike reputations. It will be argued that how a community was written about within early European accounts was not always consistent with, nor did it necessarily impact, how they were perceived in terms of martial value throughout the early colonial period. Primarily, though, this section explores why the Acholi were not the focus of colonial recruitment campaigns at this time. First it will be argued that this era of subjugating and subduing the Ugandan population required the use of colonised people who could be quickly and efficiently recruited and deployed in large numbers, such as those men who hailed from the centralised, monarchical state Buganda. It will also be argued, however, that this initial hesitancy to employ Acholi recruits both coincided with and stemmed from a reluctance on behalf of Acholi speakers themselves to serve in the KAR.

The second section of this chapter deals with the significant shift in military recruitment patterns which began around 1905 but became increasingly recognisable from the First World War onwards. It will demonstrate that during this period Nilotic

communities such as the Acholi were increasingly lauded as unrivalled in terms of martial value and relied upon to fill the ranks of the KAR. This was in stark contrast to the Baganda, whose increasingly fractious relationship with the British meant they were gradually excluded from military service and labelled over-educated ‘bible punching’ ‘gentlemen with no heart for soldiering’.<sup>296</sup> More generally, this section explores what shaped colonial judgements regarding ‘martial race’, including subjective concepts such as loyalty and reliability, as well as why such terminology was used in reference to the Acholi. It will be argued that although military and colonial officials drew upon ‘martial race’ discourse in order to rationalise and defend modifications to existing recruitment patterns, in reality these shifts were mostly driven by Britain’s evolving imperial objectives.<sup>297</sup> In effect, then, the military administration in Uganda manipulated recruiting practises within the KAR, before then proceeding to use language which framed newly-targeted groups, such as the Acholi, in terms of innate characteristics and qualities.<sup>298</sup>

The third section of this chapter will illustrate how, through their increasing enthusiasm for military service, Acholi people themselves manipulated colonial recruitment patterns and the ‘martial race’ rhetoric from c.1905 up until Uganda’s independence in 1962. Although Acholi people’s increasing interest in soldiering did not necessarily initiate the marked shift in military enlistment practices, it did establish Acholiland as the primary focus of colonial recruitment safaris as opposed to other regions in northern Uganda. It will be argued that Acholiland’s precolonial experience proved fundamental in regard to how the region came to be understood within imperial

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<sup>296</sup> IWMA, report entitled ‘Notes on the History and Organisation of the King’s African Rifles and East Africa Command’, from Lt Col. T H Birkbeck, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1951.

<sup>297</sup> Heather Streets has proposed a similar argument in regards to India, see pp.156-8, p.173, p.184.

<sup>298</sup> Streets, p.173.

imaginings. This was primarily because the militarisation the region experienced from c.1750 influenced Acholi men's willingness to enlist into the KAR from the First World War onwards, which proved crucial in terms of their perceived martial status and military value. Overall, this section challenges the notion that 'martial race' ideologies initiated a self-fulfilling cycle whereby the Acholi came to identify themselves as martial, at the expense of pre-existing norms and values.<sup>299</sup> Such an interpretation ignores how European understandings were also shaped and determined by existing identities, as well as the form and content of local African discourses.

The fourth and final section of this chapter is concerned with the distinctiveness of recruitment patterns during the Second World War and how gender intersected with colonial military service throughout this period. During the Second World War the colonial government had to move beyond its traditional recruiting grounds and enlist a much wider variety of Ugandan peoples. This was partly due to the unprecedented demand for troops, but also to some Acholi men's reluctance to enlist, or to re-enlist, into the KAR during this era of conflict. Women were central to Acholi men's decision-making with regard to military service throughout the Second World War and thus by extension, proved themselves capable of influencing the concept of 'martial race' within colonial discourse. Seldom have the ways men and women fought over definitions of honourable manhood, or how women attempted to regulate and control the behaviour of men, been at the centre of in-depth analysis regarding military service. And yet, Acholi women commented on and scrutinised men's behaviour throughout British colonial rule. Rather than promoting a militarised

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<sup>299</sup> For scholars who have suggested 'martial race' ideologies can instigate self-fulfilling cycles, see Streets, pp.6-7; Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p.10; Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, pp.8-9; Mazrui, 'Soldiers as Traditionalizers', pp.258-261.



form of Acholi masculinity, many women instead endorsed a version of manhood throughout the Second World War which placed emphasis upon men providing for their homestead in alternative ways. The responsibilities women desired men undertake could range from farming to siring children, but they all underscored that taking care of one's wife and family necessitated men being at home.

## SECTION I: REVISITING WARLIKE REPUTATIONS: THE ERA OF CONQUEST

The ways in which colonial rulers identified and categorised indigenous peoples, and the impact this stereotyping had upon official patterns of recruitment, has dominated scholarly discussions regarding colonial military service.<sup>300</sup> In terms of Uganda, historiography generally contends colonial recruitment practices were infused with, and shaped by, a localised application of British 'martial race' theory which identified the peoples living north of Lake Kyoga — such as the Acholi — as inherently warlike, perennially backward and violently primitive. According to this scholarly interpretation, then, rather than their allegedly more civilised and intellectually sophisticated neighbours to the south, it was communities such as the Acholi who were

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<sup>300</sup> For example, see A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, "'Damnosa Hereditas': Ethnic Ranking and the Martial Races Imperative in Africa", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 3:4 (1980), 393-414; and David Killingray, 'Imagined Martial Communities: Recruiting for the Military and Police in Colonial Ghana, 1860-1960', in *Ethnicity in Ghana* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.119-136; R. Marjoma, 'The Marital Spirit: Yao Soldiers in British Service in Nyasaland (Malawi), 1895-1939', *The Journal of African History*, 44:3 (2003), 413-432 (pp.420-421, p.431). For examples in relation to the Indian context, see Lionel Caplan, "'Bravest of the Brave": Representations of "the Gurkha" in British Military Writings', *Modern Asian Studies*, 25 (1991): 571-597 (p.593); and Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentleman: "Gurkhas" in the Western Imagination* (New York: Berghahn, 1995), pp.10-12.

deemed more suited to military service within British colonial discourse.<sup>301</sup> According to historian Richard Reid, for example, by the onset of British rule Acholi people had garnered a reputation for ‘clannish and incessantly bloodthirsty feuding’.<sup>302</sup> Thus, Reid continues:

[The] same circumstances that required a military presence across unsettled northern territories, their propensity for violence and aptitude as warriors, made the inhabitants of those lands ideal recruits. In part, at least, this was linked to “martial race” theory: the essentialist idea that certain groups [...] made better soldiers.<sup>303</sup>

Social scientist Sverker Finnström echoes this perception in his book *Living with Bad Surroundings*. He claims the Acholi were regarded as suitable for military recruitment because with ‘an outlook coloured by the race paradigm and its focus on primordial and immutable qualities of human types, early colonial observers claimed that the Acholi and other peoples of northern Uganda were martial’. Thus, as ‘the irony of history had it’, Finnström continues, it was the colonised subjects who were labelled as warlike rather than the oppressive colonialists.<sup>304</sup>

This perspective regarding the nature of military recruitment strategies during the early years of British colonial rule is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, although there has been a serious effort to question the authenticity of this colonial stereotype — according to Mahmood Mamdani for example the ‘colonial view that northerners were “martial” peoples was simply racist hogwash’ — scholars have not

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<sup>301</sup> For example, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.188-189; Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.79; Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, pp.8-9.

<sup>302</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.158.

<sup>303</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.282.

<sup>304</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.61, p.79.

interrogated the nuances embedded within such imagery.<sup>305</sup> Importantly, there has been a lack of appreciation for the complex and often conflicting imagery produced by early western observers concerning Acholi-speaking peoples, with historiography instead reinforcing the notion that within colonial discourse Acholiland was systematically interpreted as a land of barbarity inhabited by bellicose natives.

Early accounts describing the Acholi as ‘wild and warlike’ certainly exist. Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Rev. Arthur Fisher, for example, labelled the Acholi in 1913 as still ‘in their very primitive state [...] They have lived a life of continuous internecine warfare, & have only just been brought under control by the Uganda Government’.<sup>306</sup> Nonetheless, some of the first written descriptions of northern Uganda we have access to identify Acholiland as an idyllic region inhabited by uncivilised but welcoming and peaceful peoples. Writing in the 1860s and 1870s explorer Samuel Baker, for example, described Acholiland as ‘my little paradise’ and ‘a picture of true harmony’ where no policing was required. ‘During my sojourn of seven months’, Baker further claimed, ‘I never heard a woman scream, neither was there any domestic or civil disturbance’.<sup>307</sup> The governor of Equatoria, Emin Pasha, similarly wrote in his diary during 1887, ‘When I came here 11 years ago, Acholi land [sic] was well populated, rich in corn, honey, etc., and its inhabitants friendly and peaceful’.<sup>308</sup> As noted in Chapter One, although both Baker and Emin reportedly witnessed devastating levels of violence while based in Acholiland, their accounts generally attribute these conflicts to the brutality and pillaging of the Arabic-speaking

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<sup>305</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1984), p.10.

<sup>306</sup> CMSA, CMS/ACC84 F4, Arthur Fisher, Unofficial Papers, Letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1913.

<sup>307</sup> Baker, *Ismailia*, pp.458-9, p.473.

<sup>308</sup> ‘The Diaries of Emin Pasha-Extracts VII’, ed. by Gray, p.80.

slave-hunters, and later the Sudanese soldiers of the Egyptian garrisons.<sup>309</sup> Descriptions of Acholi speakers that do not conform to the more defamatory and sensationalised portrayals remained common throughout the consolidation of British rule. CMS missionary Arthur Kitching, for example, marked the character of the Acholi as ‘independent, manly, and self-reliant’, but added that this was ‘not to say [they were] aggressive’.<sup>310</sup> Another CMS missionary Albert Lloyd noted, ‘On the whole one would call them a fine race physically, but not warlike’.<sup>311</sup> British intelligence reports from this era likewise contain remarks such as ‘As far as I can ascertain, they are not a fighting race’.<sup>312</sup> This evidence is not employed to suggest the Acholi were never described as militarised, but more to underscore how the imagery surrounding Acholiland during the early stages of British rule in Uganda was flexible, inconsistent, and encompassed a variety of often contradictory opinions.

Secondly, being labelled warlike by nineteenth-century explorers, early Christian missionaries, or British officials, was neither unique nor distinct to the Acholi people. Various regions of Uganda were identified as plagued by ceaseless, predatory, low-calibre struggles, fought by barbarous peoples. And yet, many of the communities initially identified as warlike during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not end up representing a key source for colonial military recruitment.<sup>313</sup> In 1902, for example, it was the Karamojong who were labelled as the

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<sup>309</sup> Baker, *The Albert N’yanza*, pp.263-4; Baker, *Ismailia*, pp.94-5, p.112, p.125; ‘The Diaries of Emin Pasha-Extracts VII’, ed. by Gray, p.80.

<sup>310</sup> Rev. Arthur L. Kitching, *On The Backwaters Of The Nile: Studies Of Some Child Races Of Central Africa* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), p.23, p.49; CMSA, Extracts From Annual Letters, 1904, Kitching, pp.538-539; CMSA, Extracts From Annual Letters, 1907, Kitching, pp.270-271.

<sup>311</sup> ‘Extracts from “Mengo Notes” — V’, *The Uganda Journal*, 12:1 (1984), 82-99, p.84; Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, p.176.

<sup>312</sup> BNA, FO/2/804, Intelligence Report, October-November 1901, Captain G. M. N. Harman, p.111; BNA, FO/2/804, Intelligence Report, May 1902, Mr. F. A. Knowles, p.295.

<sup>313</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.41.

‘fighting race’ best suited to succeed the Sudanese troops who had hitherto represented the backbone of Britain’s colonial military force in Uganda.<sup>314</sup> And yet, as will be demonstrated below, the Karamojong were never recruited in large numbers into Britain’s colonial army. In one military report written in 1909, few areas of Uganda avoided the label warlike. According to Captain A. H. C. MacGregor and Lieutenant S. W. H. Rawlins, the Karamojong, Baganda, Bavuma, Bagisu, Nandi, Acholi, Alur, and the Madi could all be classified as of a martial disposition.<sup>315</sup> Thus, the fact the Acholi were branded warlike by some early European commentators tells us relatively little about how they were understood in contrast to other Ugandan people. It therefore fails to clarify why by the latter half of the colonial period it was Acholiland, rather than the numerous other regions initially associated with violence, which became the focus of colonial recruitment safaris. Perceptions regarding fertile recruitment grounds were thus based on more than early descriptions pertaining to warlike reputations. In fact, as the second section of this chapter will demonstrate, whether or not a community was initially identified as warlike within early European accounts was largely irrelevant to a colonial military administration preoccupied with ensuring the soldiers recruited were from African communities deemed politically reliable.

Thirdly, but most importantly, Acholi-speaking peoples did not become the focus of colonial recruitment safaris until around the First World War. Writing in 1985, Africanist scholar Hugh Dinwiddy proposed that, ‘The Acholis, from the north of Uganda, were the people who, with their hunting and warrior traditions, were chosen by the British at the end of the last century [so at the end of the nineteenth century] as

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<sup>314</sup> BNA, FO 881/7749, Inspection Report, 1902.

<sup>315</sup> IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909.

the most likely recruits for the newly forming Uganda Army'.<sup>316</sup> This statement is simply not supported by archival evidence. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, even by 1908 not one Acholi speaker had been enlisted into the KAR.<sup>317</sup> Thus, this notion that the Acholi, or even people from the North more generally, were singled out as the embodiment of martial superiority from the outset of imperial intervention in Uganda ignores changes over time and consequently conceals a far more complex reality.

Once heralded as people of both sophisticated political discourse and military pre-eminence, it was the Baganda, not the Acholi, who were initially recruited into the British colonial army in substantial numbers. In 1902, for example, the Baganda made up a significant 17 per cent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, meaning out of a total of 1,019 soldiers, 177 were Baganda troops. This made them the second-best represented ethnic group behind the Sudanese, who in 1902 made up 70 per cent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>318</sup> The Baganda were spoken about 'in the highest terms' by military officials and applauded for their commendable levels of courage and endurance.<sup>319</sup> There is a simple explanation for this recruitment strategy and the admiration which was poured upon the Baganda during the era of conquest. As opposed to the more heterarchical communities of northern Uganda, throughout the nineteenth century Buganda had enjoyed a centralised, hierarchical political and military structure. From the British perspective, then, the Baganda represented ideal levies because thousands of troops could be quickly organised and deployed in focused campaigns aimed at "pacifying" whole regions. In 1893, for example, the acting commissioner Colonel Colvile enlisted

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<sup>316</sup> CUA, MMLP/DINW, photocopy entitled 'The Uganda Coup: Some Insights', written by Hugh Dinwiddy, 12.08.85.

<sup>317</sup> BNA, CO 534/9, Military Report, 1908.

<sup>318</sup> There were 714 Sudanese soldiers. BNA, FO881/7749, Inspection Report, 1902.

<sup>319</sup> BNA, FO2/804, Uganda Protectorate Intelligence Report, 1901.

16,135 Baganda soldiers for an expedition against Kabarega and his people, the Banyoro.<sup>320</sup> Having relied on their military support throughout the 1890s, it was only natural that a number of these Baganda soldiers were absorbed into Uganda's newly formed standing colonial army during the early twentieth century.

In contrast, during the initial years of British colonial rule the Acholi were commonly categorised as inadequate recruitment material. Some military reports may have indicated Nilotic communities were likely to be of value at some point in the future, but others described the Acholi as 'not a fighting race', and even as 'cowardly', 'liable to panic on the slightest occasion' and thus 'a source of danger to any force with whom they may be employed'.<sup>321</sup> KAR officer Major Baldwin commented in 1912, for example, that the Acholi were not proven, battle-hardened warriors, instead the 'reputation of the Acholi as a fighting race is only of recent years, and entirely due to the great number of firearms in their possession'.<sup>322</sup> In fact, when J. R. P. Postlethwaite, who worked as a colonial administrator in Gulu, offered to raise recruits for the KAR from amongst the Acholi during the First World War, his proposal was initially swiftly rejected on the grounds the Acholi would not prove 'reliable fighting men'.<sup>323</sup>

Even so, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a key issue with assuming colonial decision-making in relation to martial value was wholly based

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<sup>320</sup> BNA, FO2/71, Letter from Colonel Colville to the Consul-General, 2 Jan 1894; Omara-Otunnu, p.17.

<sup>321</sup> BNA, FO2/804, Intelligence Report, 1902, Mr. F. A. Knowles; BNA, CO536/50, Statement of Native Levies Employed in Punitive Expeditions Undertaken by the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1912, Major Baldwin's report on the situation in the Northern Province, Part 2, p.164.

<sup>322</sup> BNA, CO536/50, Extracts of Operations Against the Rouna by Mr. Tanner, D. S. Police, Report on actions in Nimule District from 13/4/11- 9/5/11, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1912.

<sup>323</sup> John R. P. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back* (London: T. V. Boardman and Company Limited, 1947), pp.70-71.

around Britain's imperial mission, is the resultant scant attention paid to how African people themselves impacted salient colonial stereotypes, and thus in turn, military recruitment strategies. This is not to refute the importance of colonial imaginings, and how they could be both manipulated and exploited to serve the interests of British imperialism. But what also needs to be woven into any historical analysis of colonial recruitment practices is a discussion of how martial identities were produced through a process of dialogue and negotiation.<sup>324</sup> Thus, to better understand why the Acholi were not positioned at the top of this constructed martial hierarchy during the early twentieth century, it is important to consider the way in which Acholi people authored and popularised their own image in relation to violence.

During the preliminary years of colonial rule men from Nilotic communities, such as the Acholi, proved wholly reluctant to join the KAR or any other martial discipline such as policing. In 1902, for example, an intelligence report suggested that 'The tribes in the Nile Province [which included the Acholi at the time] cannot, at present, be induced to enlist'.<sup>325</sup> Similarly, when reporting upon the likelihood of enlisting local people into the colonial police force in 1908, the 'raw Nilotic native tribes' were still being described as 'very averse to departing from their homesteads', prompting one colonial commentator to conclude 'it will be a long time before they can be profitably engaged in direct Government employment'.<sup>326</sup> To some extent this prediction proved accurate: eight years later, for example, colonial officials were deliberating the idea of building a Central Nilotic recruiting depot at Gulu which would expose new military recruits from northern Uganda to regimental life before

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<sup>324</sup> For more detail on African agency in relation to imagery, see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, p.28.

<sup>325</sup> BNA, FO2/804, Intelligence Reports, 1902.

<sup>326</sup> UNA, A45/144, Annual Report for 1908-09.



they were drafted down south. This measure, it was hoped, would ‘go far to remove the dislike to immediate expatriation and the difficulties formerly met with in recruiting’.<sup>327</sup> The First World War in particular saw a number of recruitment measures introduced aimed at persuading groups such as the Acholi to enlist for military service, further demonstrating the unpopularity of soldiering amongst the Acholi at this time. By 1916, for example, *rwodi* (meaning Acholi chiefs, sing. *rwot*) were being granted a commission if they helped to inspire men from their communities to become colonial soldiers. For every man they encouraged to join the ranks of the KAR, a *rwot* received three rupees as a ‘recruiting award’. This, it was hoped, would help ‘popularise further recruiting’.<sup>328</sup> Even as late as 1919, however, the commanding officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion complained that ‘the present battalion is well under strength and men are not re-engaging and there is a difficulty in obtaining recruits’.<sup>329</sup>

As briefly indicated above, Acholi men’s initial unwillingness to join the colonial army predominantly stemmed from the fact military service required long periods of absence from home, which left their families and livestock unprotected. British officials often blamed initial recruitment difficulties on the lack of security in the region, which made Acholi men reluctant to travel far from their homestead — there supposedly always being the chance a man’s village would be raided and his wife subsequently abducted by a neighbour during his absence.<sup>330</sup> In 1909, for example, a British military report suggested ‘if there was any question of a considerable journey or long absence from their own countries then very little support

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<sup>327</sup> UNA, A46/786-798, Northern Province Monthly Reports 1911-1927, May 1916.

<sup>328</sup> UNA, A46/806-817, Northern Province Annual Reports, 1910-1927.

<sup>329</sup> UNA, A46/2678, KAR Rations to African Troops, 1908, Letter from Commander 4<sup>th</sup> KAR, Bombo 1919.

<sup>330</sup> UNA, A46/683, Northern Province Monthly Report 1912.

[for the British from Nilotic communities, including the Acholi] could be expected'.<sup>331</sup> Even as the First World War was beginning to draw to a close, Acholi soldiers would desert in large numbers if they believed their homesteads had come under threat whilst they were away on active duty. In 1917, for example, the colonial administration reported that '70 desertions occurred amongst those recruited from the Chua District', the former name for the area surrounding Kitgum in northern Acholiland. This, it was argued, was likely 'due to local unrest in the District. By which men became afraid that their families and stock might be in danger'.<sup>332</sup> During the period immediately following the establishment of British rule in Uganda, then, neither the idea of military service nor policing resonated amongst Acholi men because of the historical importance placed upon protecting and defending the homestead.<sup>333</sup>

## SECTION II: LOYALTY IN THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM ON A SHOESTRING:

### C.1905-1962

During the final years of the nineteenth and the initial years of the twentieth centuries, colonial military recruitment reflected Britain's aim to hurriedly subjugate the area we now refer to as Uganda by forcing the people living there to surrender their sovereignty.

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<sup>331</sup> BNA, WO 287/13, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate 1909, p.169.

<sup>332</sup> UNA, A46/806-817, Northern Province Annual Reports, 1910-1927 (1916-17).

<sup>333</sup> It is plausible similar concerns did not impact the decisions of Baganda men because they were less fixated on the personal protection of their homestead. Service beyond Buganda's borders had, after all, been normalised in previous decades. Moreover, the state had largely monopolised the use of violence for much of Buganda's recent past, although such norms broke down in the late nineteenth century. See Henri Médard, 'Le Royaume du Buganda au XIXe siècle: Mutations Politiques et Religieuses d'un Ancien État d'Afrique de l'Est' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Paris, IFRA Karthala, 2007).

Throughout the subsequent era of consolidating and safeguarding British rule in Uganda, however, a more permanent, professional army was required, containing troops considered both obedient and loyal to the colonial government. As mentioned within the introduction to this chapter, by 1912 all the KAR's Indian contingents had been withdrawn.<sup>334</sup> This effectively forced colonial officials and military officers to re-evaluate the reliability of different local ethnic groups. At first, securing a more reliable fighting force predominantly involved the military administration trying to enlist soldiers from outside the area in which they were most likely to be called upon to operate. Thus, northern communities such as the Acholi became the focus of colonial recruitment practices, initially at least, because they were considered ethnically distinct and politically peripheral to the Baganda, who had come to be envisioned as the most problematic in terms of internal security and the stability of British colonial rule. The structure of political organisation amongst the Acholi was also significant, however, as according to colonial thinking it rendered a unified uprising against British rule exceptionally difficult. Towards the end of the colonial period it was the relatively low level of politicisation and anti-British sentiment throughout Acholiland, especially in comparison to other areas such as Buganda, which proved particularly important. Thus, in sum, justifications for enlisting Acholi speakers shifted throughout British colonial rule.

'Martial race' theory clearly underscored colonial recruitment strategies in Africa. But despite being framed by and indebted to the language of social Darwinism and scientific racism, 'martial race' theory was also constructed and employed to promote the goals of colonialism more broadly.<sup>335</sup> As Heather Streets has argued in a

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<sup>334</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp.14-17.

<sup>335</sup> Streets, pp.1-18.

recent monograph relating to British rule in India, ‘martial race’ discourses were applied both pragmatically and strategically to justify the exclusion of some ethnic groups from colonial military service, whilst simultaneously legitimising the inclusion of others. ‘Martial race’ theory, therefore, could be adapted and manipulated over time to meet British imperial interests.<sup>336</sup> Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the Ugandan context. Within just a few years of British rule in Uganda being firmly established, the Baganda were being denounced as ‘deficient of any innate sense of discipline’, ‘difficult to control’, ‘more courageous with their mouths than their deeds’, and ‘reckless creatures of impulse and lacking in stamina’.<sup>337</sup> In contrast, the Acholi began to be lavished with unprecedented praise for their martial superiority. As one former British officer described:

We favoured the Acholi enormously, because they were the best soldiers, they were smarter, they shot their rifles straighter, they ran faster, they were brilliant on parade, we spoilt them [...] they were brave, they were strong [...] I mean they were very good.<sup>338</sup>

By 1907 there were just 9 Baganda soldiers left serving in the Ugandan colonial army, a radically reduced number in comparison to the 177 Baganda men who had been working as colonial soldiers in 1902.<sup>339</sup> Military officials continually framed their decision-making within ‘martial race’ discourse, claiming the ‘bicycle riding’,

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate 1909; UNA, A46/2678, Letter from F. J. Jackson 1915; UNA, A42/30, Constabulary Report, 1905-6; BNA, WO 287/13, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909.

<sup>338</sup> Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

<sup>339</sup> IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909, Classification of Races of 4<sup>th</sup> Ugandan Bn. 31<sup>st</sup> December 1907, p.102.

‘banana eating’ Baganda were naturally unsuited to military service.<sup>340</sup> However, this phenomenon was evidently driven in part by the changing nature of colonial rule in Uganda — and thus the purpose of the KAR — during this extended period of preserving British power and authority.

Despite the role colonial armies played during both the First and Second World Wars, from 1905 to 1962 the KAR in Uganda was primarily used to suppress internal disorder and uphold colonial stability. As the following extract provided by a British officer who served during the 1950s highlights, the KAR spent a significant amount of time conducting military expeditions in the form of flag marches aimed at subduing the civilian population.

I mentioned this business of flag marches, we used to go out in sort of companies and march around, on foot [...] It was a normal thing [...] to put on a demonstration of a sort of military operation with live weapons, live firing [...] it also acted [as] a sort of cautionary tale I think, “this is what will happen if you try anything on, you’ll be the other end of this, so don’t”.<sup>341</sup>

The KAR, and the African soldiers who comprised it, thus represented a crucial support system for the maintenance of colonial law and order and provided the coercive force which sustained British rule in Uganda for so long.<sup>342</sup> Despite this, due to a lack of finances the ratio of British officers to the African rank-and-file was proverbially slim, to the point of representing a ‘thin white line’.<sup>343</sup> As military

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<sup>340</sup> IWMA, report entitled ‘Notes on the History and Organisation of the King’s African Rifles and East Africa Command’, November 1951.

<sup>341</sup> Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960.

<sup>342</sup> For more information, see Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.2-3.

<sup>343</sup> A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, ‘The Thin White Line: The Size of the British Colonial Service in Africa’, *African Affairs*, 79 (1980), 25–44.

historian Timothy Parsons has noted, ‘British officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) rarely constituted more than six percent of a 600-man KAR battalion’.<sup>344</sup> Thus, although Africanist scholar Crawford Young argued back in 1994 that colonialism in Africa was exceptionally powerful and dominating, more recent literature has effectively demonstrated how many colonial states were inherently weak, mainly due to the limited resources they had at their disposal.<sup>345</sup> For the colonial military administration this inadequate funding, and subsequent small number of British KAR officers, made it of paramount importance that the local troops enlisted should prove both reliable and loyal.<sup>346</sup> Reliability and loyalty are, as Myles Osborne reminds us, inherently ambiguous and hoary terms in regard to colonial military service.<sup>347</sup> And yet it remains possible to unpack such language and provide a more nuanced analysis of when and why such terminology was used, especially in relation to the Acholi from around the First World War.

Read in isolation, colonial military documents suggest the qualities that military officials sought above anything else during this period were iron discipline, acceptance of subordination and obedience: qualities often reduced to and clad as ‘doggedly loyal to the British’ within colonial-apologist and military-history narratives.<sup>348</sup> It seems it was these attributes, over marksmanship or propensity for aggression, which military officials deemed most valuable, and it was these traits which Acholi men reportedly demonstrated to a greater extent than men belonging to

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<sup>344</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.3.

<sup>345</sup> Young, *The African Colonial State*. For a counter argument see, Bruce J. Berman, ‘The perils of Bula Matari: Constraint and power in the colonial state’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 31:3 (1997) 555-570.

<sup>346</sup> See Kirk-Greene, ‘The Thin White Line’.

<sup>347</sup> Osborne, pp.10-11.

<sup>348</sup> For a scholar who argues that martial reputations were primarily built on the willingness of African peoples to follow orders, see Kirk-Greene, ‘*Damnosa Hereditas*’, p.406.

other Ugandan communities.<sup>349</sup> As Col. St. L. Morris who served in the 1930s proclaimed, ‘for complete reliability I would choose the Acholi Askari both as a soldier and as a man’.<sup>350</sup> Military officers generally justified the increasingly large numbers of Acholi enlisted into the KAR by claiming them to be ‘easy to command’, of a ‘cheerful, pleasant disposition’ and receptive to discipline.<sup>351</sup> Acholi veterans themselves likewise assert it was their ability to follow the rules and regulations which gained them admiration and esteem amongst the British.<sup>352</sup> As one former soldier who served between 1958 and 1962 suggested, ‘if you did not follow the rules then they [the British] did not like you. [But] The good thing about the whites was that if you followed the rules they trusted you and you could get promoted’.<sup>353</sup>

Such descriptions, which emphasise the importance of obedience over heroic demonstrations of bravery or martial skill, neatly coincide with statements made by officers in regard to other so-called ‘martial races’. Major A. B. Thruston, for example, wrote of the Sudanese in 1900, ‘Possibly they are not heroes — heroes are not required; but in endurance, subordination, patience and cheerfulness, they are a model to be admired and imitated by every army in the world’.<sup>354</sup> In addition, groups such as the Karamojong were heralded poor quality soldiers because they allegedly proved

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<sup>349</sup> For a similar suggestion in regard to German officers and Sudanese soldiers, see Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p.44.

<sup>350</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 11, Col. St. L. Morris, Served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1937-1939.

<sup>351</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 3, George Henry Hugh Coles, Served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1949-55; OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 1, Kenneth Donald Bright, Served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1954-55; and BNA, WO 287/138, Military Report, date N/A.

<sup>352</sup> Interview with 30, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1954-57; Interview with 20, Male, Gulu, 25 May 2016, Served in the KAR 1952/3-[?]; Interview with 25, Male, Lamogi, 30 May 2016, served in the KAR 1944-1953; and Interview with 8, Male, Gulu, 28 April 2016, served in the KAR 1958-62.

<sup>353</sup> Interview with 8, Male, Gulu, 28 April 2016, served in the KAR 1958-62.

<sup>354</sup> Brevet-Major Arthur Blyford Thruston, *African Incidents: Personal Experiences in Egypt and Unyoro* (London: John Murray, 1900), p.235.

unresponsive to discipline. As former KAR officer George Henry Hugh Coles who served during the 1950s wrote, ‘Across on the Eastern border was Karamoja District — a wild nomadic and very primitive group, they looked a bit like the Turkana of Kenya. They were poor material, did not understand discipline’.<sup>355</sup> The same supposedly held true for the Maasai of Kenya, who were marked as disobedient and thus ‘useless as soldiers’.<sup>356</sup> Acholi veterans similarly claim communities such as the Karamojong were marginalised within the recruitment process because they did not respond well to discipline. ‘The Karamojong’, one interviewee declared, ‘they had the ability [to fight], but their major problem was they did not like following rules and regulations’.<sup>357</sup> Accurate archival data documenting the ethnic composition of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion for each consecutive year is lacking, but in 1927 for example, there were no Karamojong people serving in the Ugandan Battalion.<sup>358</sup> In 1938, on the eve of the Second World War, there were still only eleven soldiers out of a total of 571 who identified as Karamojong.<sup>359</sup>

In reality, of course, it is very difficult to substantiate the claims made by some former British officers concerning the Acholi proving easier to control and more obedient than other Ugandan soldiers when on active service. In fact, one less dogmatic British officer who served with Ugandan troops during the Second World War wrote in regard to the different ‘fighting tribesmen’: ‘I would not wish to pass

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<sup>355</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, George Henry Hugh Coles.

<sup>356</sup> IWMA, 3934, Interview with Hugh Alastair Borradaile, British Officer served with 4th Bn. KAR 1931-1936, production date 18 September 1978. Also, see IWMA, 19630, Interview with Eric Basil Burini, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1951-52, production date 17 August 1999.

<sup>357</sup> Interview with 21, Male, Laroo, 26 May 2016, served in the KAR 1947-56.

<sup>358</sup> BNA, CO 820/1/20, Military Report, 1927.

<sup>359</sup> BNA, CO 820/34/10, Military Report, 1938.



judgment on individual tribes — they all behaved well, none better than others’.<sup>360</sup> Archival records even contain a number of references to acts of insubordination on behalf of Acholi soldiers. During the juvenescence of British colonial rule, for example, Acholi soldiers were described by their commanding officer as ‘perfectly useless’ and ‘a menace owing to their [...] extreme cowardice combined with laziness’.<sup>361</sup> Equally, during the 1930s British officer John Francis Macnab supposedly witnessed an entire company made up of Acholi soldiers refuse to continue working whilst stationed at Lokitaung in Kenya: ‘virtually it was a mutiny’, Macnab stated, although ‘of course they did not know it was a mutiny, they just refused to “soldier on”’.<sup>362</sup> Yet despite these discrepancies, as the colonial period wore on most commentators came to agree that ‘the Acholis made a far, far better soldier than any other of the tribes recruited’.<sup>363</sup> How then can we explain this gap between rhetoric and experience? Why after British colonial rule had been properly established were the Acholi deemed more obedient and loyal than other Ugandan recruits, and subsequently enlisted in significant numbers, when it is clear that Acholi soldiers hardly enjoyed an unblemished record over the course of the colonial period? As will be demonstrated, what proved hugely important was how the Acholi as an ethnic group were conceptualised and understood by the British colonial government in regard to political reliability.

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<sup>360</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 17, Carl August Hendrik Swift, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1939-45.

<sup>361</sup> BNA, CO536/50, Extract from the report of Captain W. I. Webb-Brown. Also see BNA, CO536/50, Extracts of Operations Against the Rouna by Mr. Tanner, D. S. Police; and BNA, CO536/50, Major Baldwin’s Report on the situation in the Northern Province, part 2.

<sup>362</sup> IWMA, 4427, Interview with John Francis Macnab, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR in Kenya 1929-1939, Ethiopia and Somaliland 1940-1941, Madagascar 1942 and Burma 1944, production date 7 June 1979.

<sup>363</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Kenneth Donald Bright.

Scholarly research concerning colonial judgments on loyalty generally concludes that verdicts were framed within imperialist discourses regarding levels of civilisation, education and sophistication. David Killingray, for example, has argued:

Europeans required recruits with a “simplicity of character” who in a short time would transfer their loyalty from a chief to a white officer [...] The best source [for colonial military service, then,] was men from societies untouched by modern ideas of government or commerce, nonliterate who would provide a clean slate upon which could be written new military codes of discipline.<sup>364</sup>

Similarly, Alicia C. Decker has suggested army recruiters preferred ‘soldiers with little to no education because they were more likely to follow orders without question’.<sup>365</sup>

Finally, Kenyan historian Ali Mazrui echoed this notion when he wrote, ‘There was a belief among most colonial administrators that illiterate or semi-literate Africans made better soldiers than the better educated. The better educated was sometimes distrusted as “cheeky” and not adequately obedient’.<sup>366</sup> There is undoubtedly evidence to support this perspective: references to the problems with recruiting Africans who were ‘paradoxically, *too* educated’, and to a preference for ‘the thick ones [who] [...] have plenty of esprit de corps’, are bountiful within the source material.<sup>367</sup> As the following extract provided by a British officer who served with the KAR during the 1950s highlights, this wariness and anxiety in regard to the so-called better educated subject

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<sup>364</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.42.

<sup>365</sup> Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin’s Shadow: Women, Gender and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014), p.29.

<sup>366</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, ‘The Warrior Tradition and the Masculinity of War’, in *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa*, ed. by Ali A. Mazrui (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp.69-82 (p.80).

<sup>367</sup> Iain Grahame, *Amin and Uganda: A Personal Memoir* (London: Granada Publishing, 1980), p.37; Iain Grahame, *Jambo Effendi: Seven Years with the King’s African Rifles* (London: J. A. Allen & Co., 1966), pp.13-14.

peoples was framed in part by the 1857 Rebellion in India and the infamous massacre of women and children at Kanpur by the Bengal army. This event saw the high-caste sepoys who had hitherto comprised much of the Bengal army recast as treacherous and faithless, language which later legitimised their exclusion from colonial military service.<sup>368</sup>

The Uganda Government laid down the tribal structure of the battalion — in simple terms we concentrated on the Northern Tribes and left out the so-called “non-warriors” of the South [...] I think this rigid tribal structure as laid down by the Administration was wrong [...] I feel there was always a hangover in Colonial administration of the Indian Mutiny of the Bengal Army which caused a universal distrust of the educated or intelligent native — “the Mission Boy”.<sup>369</sup>

However, had judgments regarding loyalty and martial worth been based on perceived levels of intelligence or civilisation alone, then in all likelihood communities such as the so-called ‘wild nomadic and very primitive’ Karamojong would have dominated the African rank-and-file.<sup>370</sup> Yet very few Karamojong — who as illustrated above were often described as ‘poor material’ because they ‘did not understand discipline’ — were recruited into the KAR. Contrasting opinions regarding the relationship between perceived intelligence, level of education and military value can also be located within the sources.<sup>371</sup> In the midst of the Second World War, for example, a survey was circulated around District Commissioners in an attempt to

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<sup>368</sup> For more information on this, see Streets, p.11.

<sup>369</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 18, Major R. D. West, British Officer, served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1958-[?].

<sup>370</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, George Henry Hugh Coles.

<sup>371</sup> See Grahame, *Jambo Effendi*, pp.13-14.

‘obtain a full appreciation of the soldierly qualities of the various African tribes’. Revealingly, the traits which were sought after included adaptability, reaction to discipline, stamina, staying power, capacity for hard living, but also, intelligence.<sup>372</sup> Additionally, in another colonial military report the Kakwa were described as ‘good soldiers’ but also acclaimed as ‘the most intelligent tribe of this part of Africa’. In the same report the military value of the Baamba was described as ‘untried’ but ‘probably small due to their lack of intelligence’.<sup>373</sup> The Acholi themselves were even described by one British officer during a recent interview as ‘certainly not stupid’ and yet ‘completely loyal’.<sup>374</sup>

What proved more instrumental than access to education or perceived level of civilisation, then, was whether or not an ethnic group was branded as being a politically safe group to work with.<sup>375</sup> Whether a community was identified as loyal or disloyal largely depended on whether or not they posed a potential threat to Britain’s imperial agenda in East Africa. To take the example of the Baganda, Mazrui has argued attempts to enlist the Baganda into military service met with little success. Thus, through their abhorrence for the profession of bearing arms it was the Baganda themselves who ‘influenced the imperial power [...] in its choice of tribal areas of recruitment’.<sup>376</sup> Yet this assertion is not supported by the source material. Firstly,

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<sup>372</sup> UNA, B.006/08, Secretariat Topical, Series B, Box 5, folder entitled ‘Soldierly Qualities of Tribes in East Africa Force’, survey entitled ‘African Troops: Survey of Qualities for Military Service’, 1941.

<sup>373</sup> BNA, WO 287/138, Uganda Military Report, date N/A.

<sup>374</sup> Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960.

<sup>375</sup> See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); and R. Subhasish, ‘The Nonmartial Origins of the “Martial Races” Ethnicity and Military Service in Ex-British Colonies’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 39:3 (2013), 560-575.

<sup>376</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, ‘The Baganda and the Japanese’, in *Afrasia: A Tale of Two Continents*, ed. by Ali A. Mazrui and Seifudein Adem (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013), pp.18-39 (p.23).

archival reports suggest when recruitment drives were executed amongst the Baganda they were not always met with scorn and contempt. When raising a military unit to bring operations amongst the Nandi population to a satisfactory conclusion in 1901, for example, 5,000 Baganda men reportedly answered the recruitment call and ‘a considerable amount of persuasion was necessary in order to induce the superfluous to return to their homes’.<sup>377</sup> Similarly in 1939, during a recruitment campaign in Kampala for a territorial defence unit, it was estimated around 800 applicants, most of whom were Baganda, had presented themselves when only 100 were needed.<sup>378</sup> Moreover, a number of former British officers insinuate that for large portions of the colonial period the Buganda region was intentionally excluded from recruitment campaigns. Officer George Henry Hugh Coles wrote of his experiences in the 1950s, for example, ‘We did not recruit Baganda, or Basoga [...] We seemed to have a policy not to recruit the pure Bantu’.<sup>379</sup> Similarly Major Iain Grahame stated in relation to the same period, ‘recruiting safaris were sent off to various parts of Uganda, we never bothered about the Buganda [...] we didn’t want them’.<sup>380</sup> Revealingly, officer Percy William Powlett Green also admitted that, ‘At one time I believe there were quite a lot [of Baganda] in 4<sup>th</sup> KAR but they were phased out’.<sup>381</sup>

Secondly, and most importantly, both archival and recently collected oral histories conjoin in suggesting the Baganda were increasingly conceptualised as ‘trouble makers’ and ‘potential agitators’, making them politically dangerous to

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<sup>377</sup> IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909, p.106.

<sup>378</sup> UNA, F.078/14/02, Secretariat Topical, Defence 7th (Ugandan Territorial) Battalion of KAR, Series F, Box 7, Progress Report June 20th 1939.

<sup>379</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, George Henry Hugh Coles. Bantu is a collective term for ethnic groups which speak Bantu languages, such as the Baganda or the Banyoro.

<sup>380</sup> Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

<sup>381</sup> IWMA, 10155, Interview with Percy William Powlett Green, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR in Kenya 1954-1956, production date 24 March 1988.

British colonial interests.<sup>382</sup> It was believed the 1900 Agreement, which established British colonial rule in Uganda and accorded special privileges to the Baganda, had sown a sense of superiority and an air of arrogance which could deteriorate into discontent and resentment towards the colonial order.<sup>383</sup> In the eyes of the British, therefore, the Baganda may have represented ‘excellent irregulars’ during the era of conquest, when maintaining discipline and control during punitive campaigns was less important, but they were ‘unsuitable as regular soldiers’ because their loyalty could not be guaranteed.<sup>384</sup> As Major Iain Grahame who served during the 1950s wrote in his memoirs, ‘it is only fair to stress that [...] we ourselves were prejudiced against the Bantu southerners [such as the Baganda] [...] we had an understandable dread of “barrack-room lawyers” and other potential agitators’.<sup>385</sup> Similarly, when discussing why there were very few Baganda serving in the KAR during the early 1940s, British officer Frank Richard Stedman revealed:

I do recall one [Baganda soldier] being a little bit bolshie [...] he asked me a question “why should the English colonise their country, why shouldn’t Baganda rule their own country?” I couldn’t honestly give him an answer [...] if that tendency [of questioning British rule] had existed I would think it would have been more prominent amongst the Baganda.<sup>386</sup>

Regardless of how popular soldiering might have proven on a local level, therefore, it seems unlikely the Baganda would ever have been accepted into the colonial army in

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<sup>382</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 15, Lt.-Col. John C. T. Peddie, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1956-9; Grahame, *Amin and Uganda*, p.37.

<sup>383</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1823, Leslie Holcom, *The Crested Crane – Uganda Recalled*, p.100.

<sup>384</sup> IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909, pp.149-150.

<sup>385</sup> Grahame, *Amin and Uganda*, p.37.

<sup>386</sup> IWMA, 7394, Interview with Frank Richard Stedman, British Officer served with 4/4th Bn. KAR in Kenya, Uganda, British Somaliland and Ethiopia 1940-1941, production date 13 March 1984.

large numbers after the era of conquest because they were viewed with growing suspicion and contempt by colonial authorities.

Thus, a key reason why Nilotic groups based in northern Uganda, such as the Acholi, became the focal point of recruitment safaris during this era of safeguarding British colonial rule was because they were considered politically peripheral and ethnically distinct from the Baganda. Archival reports suggest British recruitment practices in East Africa were based to a considerable extent on the colonial principle of stationing troops amongst ‘alien tribes’ where local sympathies would not jeopardise military operations.<sup>387</sup> In other words, the colonial military administration sought to recruit soldiers from outside the area in which they were most likely to be called upon to operate. This, it was thought, would ensure that the African KAR troops would remain loyal and continue to impose the colonial order in the event of any internal unrest or ‘insubordination among the [civilian] natives’.<sup>388</sup> As colonial official Lord Frederick Lugard, who emphasised his ‘experience of the African as a fighting man’ contended in 1922, ‘battalions or wings of battalions, composed of races which have no affinities with the population of the region in which they are serving, and even the introduction of an alien battalion may be a wise precaution’.<sup>389</sup> As the extract below provided by a British officer who served during the 1960s indicates then, communities such as the Acholi became the focus of military recruitment efforts partly

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<sup>387</sup> For more information, see Omara-Otunnu, pp.24-25, pp.32-33; BNA, CO 820/9/2, 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR Report, 1930; BNA, FO2/797, letter dated December 1903; BNA, CAB 45/24, letter dated July 1916.

<sup>388</sup> BNA, CO 820/9/2, 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR Report, 1930; BNA, FO2/797, letter dated December 1903; BNA, CAB 45/24, letter dated July 1916.

<sup>389</sup> Fredrick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), p.577.

because it was believed KAR troops would thence remain reliable and controllable during any violent disturbances in Buganda.

The Acholi and the West Nile tribes were considered the best soldiers on average [...] We had very few Baganda, although this was the largest Uganda tribe [...] [but] also the most troublesome from the I.S. [meaning internal security] point of view. There was no love lost between them and the Acholi, so there was no difficulty in retaining the loyalty of our troops when it came to putting down any insurrection in Buganda.<sup>390</sup>

Thus, as Mamdani perceptively wrote back in 1984, at least to some extent ‘northern peoples were put in uniform to crush the resistance of the southern peasantry’.<sup>391</sup>

In addition to this, it was the heterarchical and segmentary system of social and political organisation amongst the Acholi which rendered them a politically safe group to arm and provide with military training from around the time of the First World War.<sup>392</sup> The colonial administration thought the Acholi incapable of raising a military force sufficient in size and scope to challenge British rule due to their non-centralised political organisation.<sup>393</sup> In the language of the colonial authorities, therefore, the Acholi were likely to prove decidedly less troublesome and subsequently more loyal. The British were definitely not ignorant nor wholly dismissive of the Acholi people’s capacity to launch a combined military effort. As was noted in a military report from 1909, ‘These [Acholi] people have a certain power

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<sup>390</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 3, Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> KAR 1960-2.

<sup>391</sup> Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism*, p.10.

<sup>392</sup> Charles Amone, ‘The Creation of Acholi Military Ethnocracy in Uganda, 1862-1962’, *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*, 2:3 (2014), 141-150 (p.147).

<sup>393</sup> Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, p.35; Omara-Otunnu, p.33; Mazrui, ‘Is Africa decaying?’, p.348.



of acting in concert'.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, whilst the so-called Lamogi rebellion of 1911-12 was predominantly framed within colonial reports as an isolated disturbance triggered by 'bad characters', there can be little doubt the insurgency made the colonial administration more wary and attentive to the possibility of individual Acholi chiefdoms combining against the British government.<sup>395</sup> Nonetheless, during the first half of the twentieth century the Acholi were clearly judged less capable of mounting resistance to colonial rule than those ethnic groups organised under the banner of a single political authority, such as the Baganda.

During the latter half of the colonial period, level of politicisation proved particularly important.<sup>396</sup> This was especially the case following the Second World War, when British rule in East Africa was marked by increasing instability and fragility. This era saw a rapid rise in new forms of political consciousness and anti-colonial sentiment which signalled the arrival of nascent nationalism. The case of Idi Amin Dada exemplifies this point. Amin was a KAR soldier from the West Nile province who, despite being associated with acts of brutality against local African communities during the Mau Mau campaign in Kenya, was much admired by his British officers which led to quick promotions.<sup>397</sup> Many former British officers when questioned about Amin's reputation as a soldier echo the following statement made by officer Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse, 'Idi Amin, who came from one of the

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<sup>394</sup> BNA, WO 287/13, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909, p.174.

<sup>395</sup> For more information on the Lamogi rebellion see A. B. Adimola, 'The Lamogi Rebellion 1911-1912', *The Uganda Journal*, 18:2 (1954), 166-178; and BNA, CO 536/50, British Reports on the Lamogi Rebellion, 1911-1912.

<sup>396</sup> For a comparable example see, Timothy H. Parsons, "'Wakamba Warriors are Soldiers of the Queen": The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race, 1890-1970', *Warfare and Violence in Ethnohistorical Perspective*, 46:4 (1999), 671-701 (p.689).

<sup>397</sup> Manzoor Moghal, *Idi Amin: Lion of Africa* (Milton Keynes: Author House, 2010), p.9; and Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

West Nile tribes, was an outstanding individual [...] although he showed a touch of ruthlessness at times'.<sup>398</sup> The reason why the atrocities Idi Amin performed against fellow African people were either excused or ignored is because his military officers still imagined him to be stoically loyal towards the British.<sup>399</sup> Loyalty in this circumstance seemingly connoted a readiness to aid British imperialism through helping quash any localised political dissent. Perceived level of education or intelligence and level of politicisation were, of course, in some ways inextricably linked. But as demonstrated by the extract taken from Major Iain Grahame's personal memoirs, Idi Amin was promoted despite his lack of education, not because of that. What worked in Amin's favour was his apparent lack of political aspirations and the way he presented himself as unwaveringly pro-British.<sup>400</sup>

He [Idi Amin] certainly had no political ambition himself, and he had always been a staunch anglophile. His outlook was perfectly simple: "You, the British, must remain and help us." [...] Although it still appeared to us that his limited intelligence should debar him from progressing much further, there were many good points in his favour [...] Above all, Idi remained intensely loyal to his British superiors. While a few young and educated *askari* were beginning to vociferate somewhat militant criticisms on their "slow" rate of progress, he invariably exerted, by his own example, a sobering and unifying influence within the battalion [...] To the end he was

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<sup>398</sup> OAU, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 3, Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse; and IWMA, 10155, Percy William Powlett Green.

<sup>399</sup> Mazrui, *The Politics of War and the Culture of Violence*, p.50.

<sup>400</sup> Grahame, *Amin and Uganda*, p.44.

a loyal subordinate and, despite his many shortcomings, remained outstandingly popular with all ranks.<sup>401</sup>

Both throughout and following the Second World War, Acholiland was viewed as more sympathetic towards British colonial rule and thus less politically problematic than other areas. This is certainly not to say the Acholi were wholly uncritical of colonialism. Throughout the 1950s the politics in Acholiland was increasingly dominated by nationalist parties whose agendas included hostility towards a chiefly class associated with the British administration.<sup>402</sup> Nonetheless, in comparison to other regions, especially Buganda which bristled with political activism underpinned by royalist, neo-traditionalist ideology and a form of ethno-nationalism, the Acholi were viewed as less politically demanding and thus less of a threat to colonial stability.<sup>403</sup> During the 1940s for example, the Acholi were allegedly highly critical of the violent disturbances (often dubbed the Buganda riots) which erupted during 1945 and 1949. In one security intelligence report it was noted:

The attitude of the Acholi towards the Baganda and Basoga in respect of the recent strikes throughout the country is one of contempt, and they wish to disassociate themselves with the whole affair. They consider these two tribes

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.301. Also, see Cherry J. Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda, 1945-1963* (London: The Athlone Press, 1974), pp.13-15, p.22; Colin Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda, 1962-65* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967); and Elizabeth Laruni, 'From the Village to Entebbe: The Acholi of Northern Uganda and the Politics of Identity, 1950-1985' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2014).

<sup>403</sup> For more on political activity in Baganda, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.305-8.

have much to thank the British Government for and that the strikes showed these people up in their true colours.<sup>404</sup>

In effect, then, because the Acholi distanced themselves from the more militant political action which was unravelling across parts of southern Uganda during this period, they were increasingly conceptualised as loyal intermediaries in the eyes of their British colonisers. Not coincidentally, then, it was during this period that Acholi men came to truly dominate colonial recruitment efforts. British officers who served between the 1940s and the 1960s, for example, claim they ‘recruited 60 per cent from the Acholi district’.<sup>405</sup> Prior to that, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s for example, archival records show the Acholi only made up between 18-30 per cent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ugandan Battalion.<sup>406</sup>

To briefly summarise this section, statements regarding reaction to discipline, acceptance of subordination, loyalty and reliability, came to largely indicate a community’s broader relationship with the British, and how much of a threat a particular community was thought to pose towards colonial rule more generally. The same largely holds true for ‘martial race’ ideology, which must also be understood, in part, as a consciously manipulated linguistic tool used to both promote the military value of ethnic groups considered loyal to the British government, and ostracise those deemed politically problematic.<sup>407</sup> And yet, the evidence noted above cannot fully

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<sup>404</sup> BNA, CO 536/215/12, Uganda Affairs Fortnightly Review, Security Reviews sent to the Governor by the Director.

<sup>405</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, George Henry Hugh Coles; Also, see Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960.

<sup>406</sup> For example, see BNA, CO 820/1/20, Military Report, 1927; BNA, CO 820/9/2, Military Report, 1930; BNA, CO 820/34/10, Military Report, 1938; BNA, CO 820/11/1, Military Report, 1931; BNA, CO 820/7/1, Military Report, 1929; BNA, CO 820/3/17, Military Report, 1928.

<sup>407</sup> Streets, p.7.

explain why it was the Acholi in particular who came to be relied upon so heavily to fill the ranks of the KAR. There were a number of other areas in Uganda which were inhabited by seemingly politically unproblematic, non-centralised communities who were ethnically distinct from the Baganda. To understand why the Acholi came to be identified as particularly effective soldiers, then, we must again turn to how African actions and initiatives impacted military recruitment strategies and colonial discourse.

### SECTION III: THE IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES OVER COLONIAL IMAGINATIONS, C.1905-1962

Existing literature normally asserts that colonial recruitment policies helped produce and preserve ethnic identities linked to military service.<sup>408</sup> ‘Martial race’ theories are understood as having initiated self-fulfilling cycles whereby certain ethnic groups came to identify and elevate an image of themselves as martial at the expense of pre-existing identities.<sup>409</sup> Streets, for example, has argued ‘martial race’ language influenced local cultures in enduring ways. Colonial imaginings in regard to ‘martial race’ could, according to Streets, overshadow local expressions of cultural identity meaning colonial recruits often found themselves forced to adapt to British ideas about their behaviours and traditions.<sup>410</sup> This narrative has been widely cited in relation to the Acholi, with a number of social scientists in particular arguing that the use of Acholiland as a fertile recruitment ground for the colonial armed forces initiated a

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<sup>408</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.55; Parsons, ‘Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen’, pp.671-2; and Streets, *Martial Races*.

<sup>409</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p.10.

<sup>410</sup> Streets, pp.6-7.

process of militarisation.<sup>411</sup> Frank Van Acker, for example, has argued the historical use of the Acholi population for military means created a ‘lumpen militariat class’, who came to perceive violence as the only legitimate instrument for interacting within society.<sup>412</sup> Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot have similarly suggested that the Acholi were not born natural warriors, but were transformed by colonialism into a martial community who saw the bearing of arms as their natural profession.<sup>413</sup> Africanist historians have also contributed towards this much recycled and repeated narrative. Mazrui, for example, has stipulated that a militarised ethnic identity, or ‘military ethnocracy’, was superimposed over the Acholi as a consequence of their recruitment into the colonial armed forces.<sup>414</sup>

But the nature and development of militarism amongst the Acholi was a far more complex and uneven process than the above assessments provide for. Clearly, the ways in which Acholi identity intersected with the ideology and practice of militarism cannot be interpreted as having developed in a neat linear fashion — starting under British imperial rule and then steadily gaining momentum throughout the twentieth century. Primarily, this interpretation ignores Acholi-speaking people’s historical use of warfare as a platform for cultivating individual prestige, as was discussed in Chapter One. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in more detail below, it might be more accurate to suggest the emergence of a modern army under British colonial rule conversely instigated a period of demilitarisation amongst the Acholi as bearing arms become the prerogative of relatively few. Furthermore, it is vital to conceptualise Acholi identity in relation to militarism and military service as a

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<sup>411</sup> Amone, ‘The Creation of Acholi Military Ethnocracy’, pp.141-150.

<sup>412</sup> Acker, pp.338-342.

<sup>413</sup> Doom and Vlassenroot, pp.8-9.

<sup>414</sup> Mazrui, ‘Soldiers as Traditionalizers’, pp.258-261; and Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, p.49.

contested space which encompassed local debates. To suggest the Acholi increasingly came to identify themselves as martial as a result of colonial recruitment policies is to mistake a complex, heterogeneous social reality as homogenous. The Acholi population comprised a whole range of actors — including women, children and elders — each with their own understanding of what it meant to be an Acholi man, or what constituted the basis of Acholi identity more broadly.<sup>415</sup> As will be demonstrated in the final section of this chapter, many Acholi women rejected the notion that soldiering was systematically compatible with honourable manhood, instead placing emphasis on men's duties around the home.

It is important to note that although both archival and recently collected oral histories conjoin in suggesting military service proved, at times, very popular throughout Acholiland, the majority of Acholi men never served in the colonial armed forces — either through choice or as a result of being rejected by the military administration. Thus, only a relatively small number of Acholi men were directly exposed to the KAR's use of 'martial race' language with its attendant celebration and propagation of inherent martial qualities and traditions.<sup>416</sup> For example, most of the Ugandan troops who served in the KAR were recruited into the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. According to the archival reports we have access to, and as demonstrated by the graphs below, by the latter half of the colonial period Acholi soldiers made up a significant percentage of the total number of soldiers employed.<sup>417</sup> Yet despite representing a noteworthy percentage, the actual number of Acholi soldiers who served at any one time was relatively small, especially in comparison to the total number of Acholi males

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<sup>415</sup> For a similar argument concerning the Kamba of Kenya, see Osborne, p.3.

<sup>416</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.55.

<sup>417</sup> For example, see BNA, CO 820/1/20; BNA, CO 820/9/2; BNA, CO 820/34/10; BNA, CO 820/11/1; BNA, CO 820/7/1; and BNA, CO 820/3/17.

employed more generally. Between 1927 and 1938, for example, the number of Acholi men serving in the KAR ranged from just 104 to 245. In contrast, in 1931 there were reportedly 32,603 men over the age of 18 currently working in any form of paid employment.<sup>418</sup> Even during the most intensive period of enlistment, 1939-1945, 80 per cent of the tax paying Acholi male population were never recruited.<sup>419</sup> Moreover, according to anthropologist Frank Girling, who collected extensive quantitative data on occupational distribution, the vast majority of the Acholi population during the 1950s remained engaged in agricultural pursuits.<sup>420</sup> Such evidence clearly provides scope to question how much of an impact such a small number of Acholi soldiers — allegedly indoctrinated through their exposure to ‘martial race’ discourses during colonial military service — could have had upon Acholi expressions of cultural identity, and importantly, local understandings concerning the relationship between masculinity and militarism. The remainder of this section, then, will analyse the extent to which changes in military recruitment patterns from around the First World War, as well as shifts in the ideology of ‘martial race’, were also a product of changes in the way Acholi people interpreted colonial military service, especially in relation to honourable manhood.

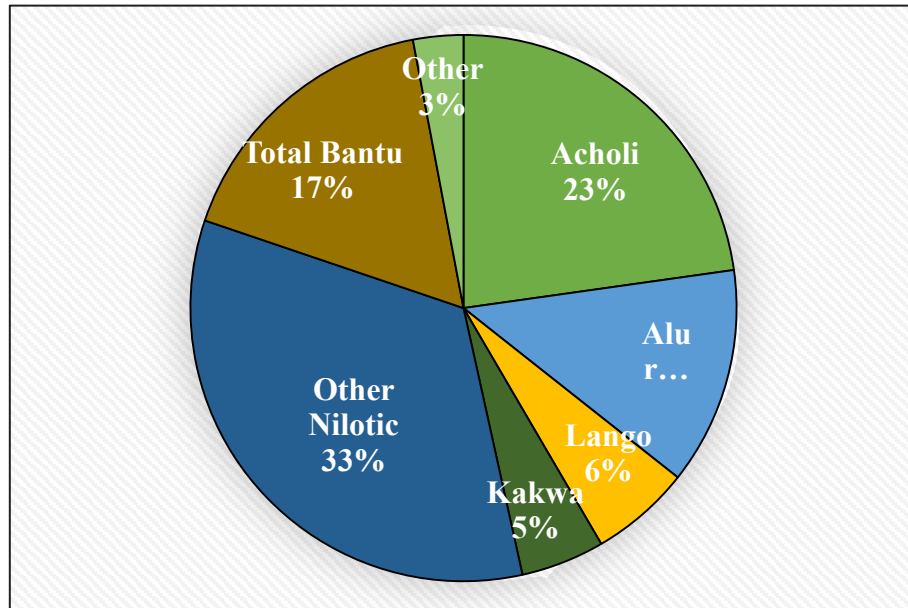
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<sup>418</sup> BNA, WO 287/138, Uganda Military Report, date N/A.

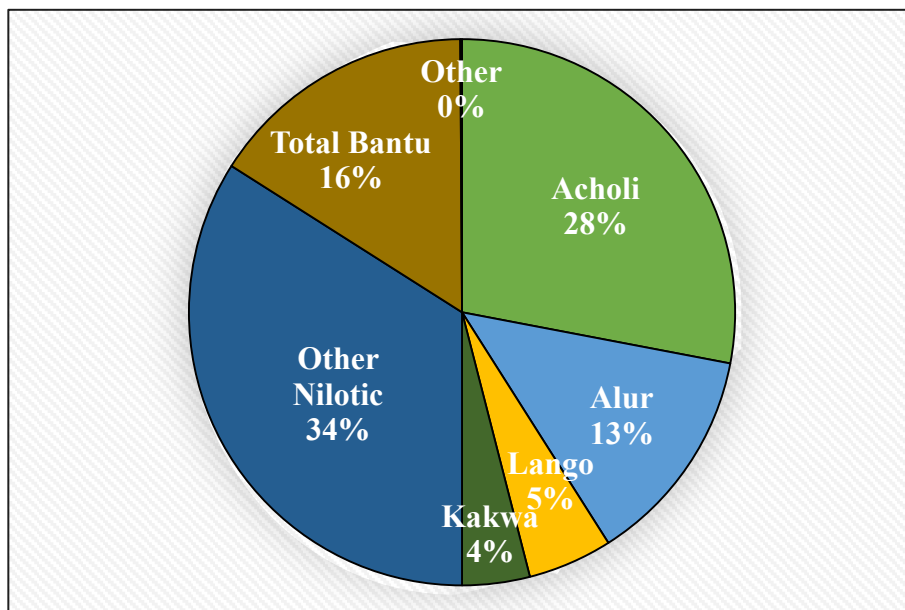
<sup>419</sup> Nairobi, Kenya National Archive (KNA), MAA/2/3/25/I/47, Service During WWII.

<sup>420</sup> Girling, pp.182-183; Also, see F. K. Girling Family Archives, Acholi Surveys.





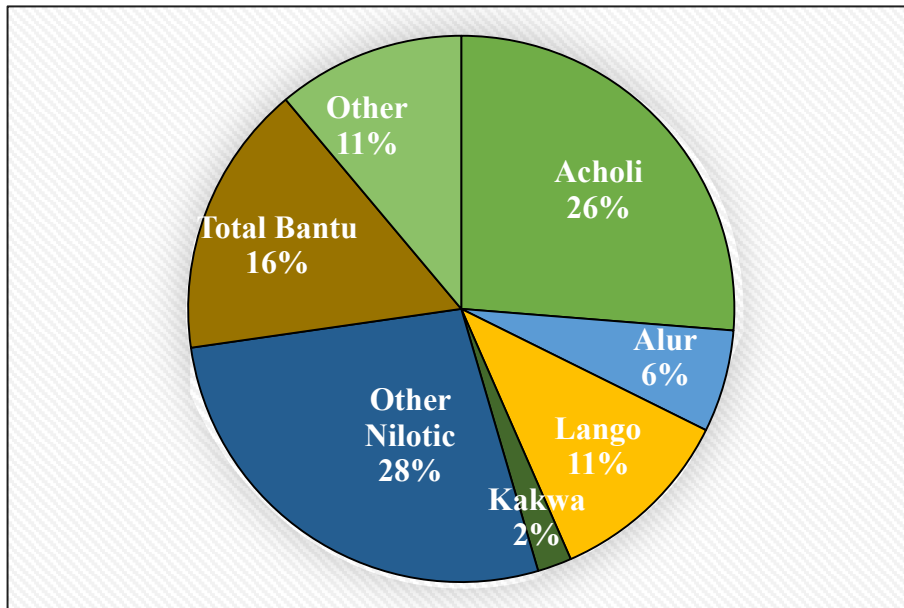
Graph 3:1, Ethnic composition of KAR 4<sup>th</sup> (Ugandan) Battalion, 1927<sup>421</sup>



Graph 3:2, Ethnic composition of KAR 4<sup>th</sup> (Ugandan) Battalion, 1930<sup>422</sup>

<sup>421</sup> BNA, CO 820/1/20. ‘Other Nilotic’ is used here to refer to the total number of Nilotic soldiers serving excluding the Acholi, Alur, Lango, and Kakwa. The term ‘Other’ includes groups such as the Karamojong.

<sup>422</sup> BNA, CO 820/9/2.



Graph 3:3, Ethnic composition of KAR 4<sup>th</sup> (Ugandan) Battalion, 1938<sup>423</sup>

This alteration in colonial perceptions regarding the military value of the Acholi coincided with a shift in the popularity of enlistment. As has been argued above, by solely focusing on how imagery and stereotypes were manipulated and exploited by western actors, African identities are consequently depicted as the implanted product of colonial imaginations, and African actors are reduced to passive objects of imposed change.<sup>424</sup> In reality, European understandings were also shaped and determined by the form and content of local African discourses.<sup>425</sup> As Parsons has rightly indicated, ‘martial stereotypes had little meaning unless they were accepted by the ethnic group in question’.<sup>426</sup> The Acholi people’s reputation for sterling military service and unwavering loyalty following the First World War, then, was also a product of the way Acholi speakers presented themselves to western observers. During the second half of the colonial period military service proved hugely popular amongst

<sup>423</sup> BNA, CO 820/34/10.

<sup>424</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.80.

<sup>425</sup> For other work which discusses this, see Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.6-7; and Osborne, p.9.

<sup>426</sup> Parsons, ‘Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen’, p.674.

the Acholi and it was through their willingness to enlist into the colonial armed forces that Acholi men informed colonial recruitment policies and helped create and disseminate this enduring image of themselves as a loyal ‘martial race’.<sup>427</sup>

Of course, as mentioned above, only a relatively small number of Acholi men actually served in the KAR at one time. This was not, however, due to a lack of enthusiasm for military service on behalf of the Acholi, but predominantly the consequence of a stringent selection criteria, as well as the small size of the Ugandan Battalion. As one British officer who served during the 1950s explained:

First of all let’s say, it was hugely popular, it was always immensely oversubscribed [...] One went out with the number of troops they hoped to recruit, and there was always ten times as many [...] 60 per cent of the recruits were Acholi [...] I would think that if they wanted fifty, three or four hundred would turn up, something like that.<sup>428</sup>

Another military officer who likewise served during the 1950s described a similar scene, ‘We went up to Gulu [a town in Acholiland] [...] it was absolutely amazing [...] every able bodied man formed up on the football ground and they all wanted to be soldiers [...] at a guess probably well over a thousand [Acholi would turn up]’.<sup>429</sup> It is certainly plausible that former British KAR officers interviewed more recently — having been acutely aware of current criticism regarding the colonial enterprise — exaggerated the popularity of recruitment campaigns within their testimonies in an

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<sup>427</sup> For a similar argument in relation to East Africa more broadly, see, Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.5, p.53.

<sup>428</sup> Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960.

<sup>429</sup> Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63. For an additional example, see OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, George Henry Hugh Coles.

attempt to justify the enlistment of African soldiers into colonial armies used to preserve British imperial interests. This would not explain, however, the insinuation within some British officers' accounts that recruitment proved *especially* popular amongst the Acholi. As officer William Cockcraft who began serving with the Ugandan Battalion in the 1930s stated:

It didn't matter so much the balance of tribe, we happened to have more Acholis at that time than anything else, but we could have had other tribes like West Nile, but it happened we got more recruits from the Acholi part I think, and they did in fact make good soldiers.<sup>430</sup>

Moreover, interviews conducted with Acholi KAR veterans mostly reinforce the testimonies provided by British officers. As one interviewee who enlisted in 1939 declared, 'There were very many [Acholi] youths that wanted to join in that army'.<sup>431</sup> Another veteran who likewise served during the Second World War guessed 'around 1000 [Acholi] people' had turned up to the recruitment drive he attended, when only forty-eight were eventually selected.<sup>432</sup>

Drawing comparisons between the Acholi context and that of other ethnic groups provides further evidence that relative enthusiasm for military service impacted British perceptions regarding martial status and thus recruitment patterns for the KAR. The Sudanese for example, who were deployed by the British during the

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<sup>430</sup> IWMA, 3935, Interview with William Gordon Latrobe Cockcraft, British Officer served with Royal Berkshire Regt and 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR in Uganda, Kenya and East Africa 1938-1942, production date 25 September 1978.

<sup>431</sup> Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45; For additional examples of this narrative, see Interview with 24, Male, Lamogi, 30 May 2016, served in the KAR 1944-1953; Interview with 29, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1941-46; Interview with 16, Male, Alero, 20 May 2016, served in the KAR 1952-55; and Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959.

<sup>432</sup> Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959.

founding of the Ugandan protectorate during the 1890s and acclaimed as ‘the best material in the [4<sup>th</sup>] battalion’ during the early years of colonial rule, had initially enlisted into the KAR in large numbers.<sup>433</sup> Yet, despite the best efforts of many British officers who insisted the Sudanese represented the best fighting material on offer, retaining their services became increasingly difficult as the colonial period wore on. This was mainly due to the more lucrative wages offered by trading and within the service sector.<sup>434</sup> By 1927 just two recruits identified as Nilotic Nubi (another term used to describe the Sudanese population residing in Uganda), a staggeringly low number compared with the 590 soldiers who were recognised as Sudanese in 1907.<sup>435</sup> Consequently, not only did colonial recruitment safaris redirect their attention towards other areas of Uganda, most notably Acholiland, but more importantly, the Sudanese were increasingly excluded from descriptions regarding ‘martial races’.<sup>436</sup> In effect, it was through their relative lack of interest for colonial military service which enabled the Sudanese to gradually renegotiate their image in regards to militarism and martial values.

It would clearly be unwise to suggest Acholi people’s increasing enthusiasm for military service throughout British colonial rule was wholly responsible for the departure from previously established recruitment policies. In reality, the Acholi were only able to inform colonial thinking following the First World War because the British were already seeking to recruit soldiers from communities which resembled the Acholi. In other words, by representing a politically unproblematic, non-

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<sup>433</sup> BNA, FO2/804, Intelligence Report, November 1902.

<sup>434</sup> BNA, FO2/804, Intelligence Report, November 1902; UNA, A46/2678, KAR Rations to African Troops, 1908.

<sup>435</sup> See BNA, CO 820/1/20, Military Report, 1927; and IWMA, 77217, Classification of Races of 4<sup>th</sup> Ugandan Bn., December 1907, p.102. It should be noted, however, that numbers did fluctuate over the colonial period.

<sup>436</sup> For example, see OAU, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 3, Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse.

centralised community, who were in addition ethnically distinct to the so-called troublesome Baganda, the Acholi already fulfilled a criterion laid out by the British government. For other ethnic groups such as the Baganda, however, their ability to define and determine the form and content of 'martial race' imagery and colonial policy was more limited. And yet, the increasing popularity of soldiering amongst Acholi communities performed a hugely significant and decisive function: namely, it established Acholiland as the primary focus of colonial recruitment safaris, and thus ensured future discussions regarding martial value and so-called loyalty centred around the Acholi as opposed to other Nilotic communities. In effect, the colonial military establishment may have stipulated Nilotic peoples were to fill the ranks of the KAR from around the First World War, but it was the Acholi themselves who negotiated their own distinction and martial superiority over other communities similarly inhabiting the lands north of Lake Kyoga. This may not have been a deliberate and consciously pursued strategy, but through their increasing enthusiasm for military service the Acholi influenced the actions and perceptions of colonial authorities nonetheless. Thus, although for an African community's demands concerning their suitability for soldiering to be successful they had to coincide with British imperial interests at the time, for the colonial government to secure the assistance of a particular African community for military service, recruitment policies also had to align with indigenous aspirations.

It is at this point we must pose the question, why did soldiering become increasingly popular amongst the Acholi over the course of the colonial period? Over the past two decades Africanist scholars have made a serious attempt to decipher what motivated colonised peoples to enlist for military service. This has represented a valuable corrective to the *loyal-askari* myth which claimed African recruits

volunteered as a consequence of implanted loyalties to European establishments and in extension, imperial objectives.<sup>437</sup> This myth, disseminated by colonial-apologists and institutionalised military history accounts, does little to expand our understanding of colonial military service or importantly, our knowledge of African soldiers.<sup>438</sup> Economic considerations have dominated counter narratives, with relative poverty during the colonial period being seen as a critical factor.<sup>439</sup> For Timothy Parsons, whose research was mainly carried out in Kenya and Malawi (formerly Nyasaland), African KAR soldiers should be considered a class of unskilled labour migrants, who viewed their enlistment in the KAR as a long-term labour contract. Parsons argues that most unskilled African males joined the colonial army out of necessity, attracted by lucrative military wages and the financial security of government service.<sup>440</sup> Willingness to enlist into colonial armies and martial status were therefore mostly based upon the extent of a particular region's economic development and its integration into the East African economy.<sup>441</sup> It was, according to Parsons, because the economic status of a region could change over time, that enthusiasm for enlistment and thus martial stereotypes were similarly fluid.<sup>442</sup>

Military archival records reveal that a number of British officers likewise viewed African recruits as economically-motivated target workers, whose readiness, or indeed unwillingness, to enlist into the colonial armed forces derived primarily from

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<sup>437</sup> For a rich analysis on the 'loyal-askari myth', see Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, pp.7-9; and Michelle Moyd, "'We don't want to die for nothing": Askari at war in German East Africa, 1914-1918, in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. by S. Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.90-107 (pp.91-93).

<sup>438</sup> For an example of this 'loyal-askari' narrative, see IWMA, 7394, Interview with Frank Richard Stedman.

<sup>439</sup> For example, see Streets, p.192, p.195; and Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.59.

<sup>440</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.53.

<sup>441</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.53; Parsons, 'Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen', pp.677-681.

<sup>442</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.5-6, p.53.

economic aspirations. Reducing the wages paid to indigenous soldiers before the outbreak of the First World War, for example, was believed to have had a significant impact on recruitment efforts. As Lieut. Col. B. R. Graham reported in 1914:

The tendency has been in recent years to reduce the pay [local soldiers are entitled to]. It is now 16/- and men pay for their rations [...] men can earn better wages with big game safaris than as soldiers and have no discipline or night duties to worry about. They earn more in six months with a safari than in a year as soldiers.<sup>443</sup>

It was this, according to Lieut. Col. B. R. Graham, which was hindering recruitment and explained the current unpopularity of the KAR.<sup>444</sup> Similarly, in a letter dated June 1923 concerning further reductions in pay it was argued that, 'The Nilotic tribes [...] [who] provide the best fighting material are mercenary to a degree, and any reduction in pay would create considerable dissatisfaction and cause many to take their discharge'.<sup>445</sup>

This economic explanation could certainly apply to Acholiland and Acholi recruits.<sup>446</sup> The transition to a wage-based economy and the division of labour along regional lines meant northern Uganda suffered from severe economic disruption under colonial rule. As Reid has argued, 'the trajectory of the colonial economy reinforced a north-south economic dichotomy'.<sup>447</sup> Investment in the North was mostly absent, development initiatives were infrequent, and most of the lucrative cash crops such as

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<sup>443</sup> UNA, A46/2678, KAR Rations to African Troops, 1908, letter from Lieut. Col. B. R. Graham to the Inspector General of the KAR.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> UNA, A46/604, letter dated June 1923.

<sup>446</sup> As has been argued in Amone, 'The Creation of Acholi Military Ethnocracy'.

<sup>447</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.242.



cotton and coffee were grown in Buganda and the Eastern Province.<sup>448</sup> This preferential treatment accorded to communities geographically situated in southern Uganda, especially in terms of access to formal education and civil service employment, left areas such as Acholiland to function solely as a reservoir for cheap unskilled labour.<sup>449</sup>

Soldiering did not, of course, represent the only option available for Acholi men seeking to participate in the wage-based economy. Many travelled to other parts of Uganda to fill the demand for migrant labour on rubber, sugar, coffee and cotton plantations, or to work on industrial enterprises such as the hydroelectric schemes in Jinja or the Uganda Railways.<sup>450</sup> In 1923, for example, the colonial government reported that:

A very large number of Acholi have gone to Soroti and elsewhere in the Eastern Province where good wages are obtainable. Recently at Paranga [an Acholi town] seventy were counted passing through on the one day and fifty odd the next day.<sup>451</sup>

Nonetheless, colonial reports indicate that Acholi men serving in the KAR typically earned more money than their civilian counterparts working as unskilled labourers, although how much more depended on the time period in question as well as the soldier's rank.<sup>452</sup> During the First World War, for example, a Private in the KAR would earn between 15-19 rupees per month, while a NCO would earn between 28-

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Acker, p.341.

<sup>450</sup> Girling, pp.178-9.

<sup>451</sup> UNA, Call Number N/A, Northern Province Quarterly Reports, Kitgum District-Chua, October 1923.

<sup>452</sup> Before the First World War, for example, military recruits had to source their own food, see BNA, CO 534/9, Military Report, 1908.

50 rupees. In comparison an unskilled worker would earn just 4-6 rupees.<sup>453</sup> From 1940 to 1941 the pay rates for the KAR were as follows: a recruit was paid 20 shillings per month, a Private 28 shillings, and a NCO between 48-90 shillings.<sup>454</sup> In contrast, unskilled labourers working in Kampala during the same period would earn on average 23.3 shillings.<sup>455</sup> Considering KAR recruits were also provided with food and clothing when on active service (or at least they were after the First World War), as well as exempted from paying poll tax, soldiering clearly provided some men with more disposable income. Predictably, then, a number of Acholi veterans interviewed for this project claimed they were initially encouraged to join the KAR by the wealth and economic privileges they assumed derived from military service.<sup>456</sup> As one interviewee who served between 1939 and 1945 explained, ‘What made me join the army was the issue of poverty’.<sup>457</sup> Similarly, another veteran who likewise served during the Second World War responded that it was ‘the problem of money’ which initially encouraged him to enlist into the KAR.<sup>458</sup>

Even so, despite the importance of economic factors, the lucrative military wages were just one amongst a range of factors which influenced Acholi men’s willingness to enlist into the KAR, and thus in turn, their role in creating and projecting a ‘martial race’ identity. Reductionist frameworks which pursue a single, overarching explanation for the nature of enlistment fail to expose the full range of motivations

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<sup>453</sup> UNA, A46/2678, KAR Rations to African Troops, 1908, KAR Pay Rates.

<sup>454</sup> See Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.89; KNA, DEF 1/39/53 & 64, GROs on Pay 1941.

<sup>455</sup> See Michiel de Haas, ‘Measuring Rural Welfare in Colonial Uganda: Why farmers would not work for wages’, *African Economic History Working Paper*, 18 (2014), <<http://edepot.wur.nl/325832>> [accessed 12 June 2019].

<sup>456</sup> As the following chapter will highlight, however, Acholi men’s expectations regarding the economic benefits of soldiering did not always match their actual experiences.

<sup>457</sup> Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45.

<sup>458</sup> Interview with 25, Male, Cwero, 6 June 2016, served in the KAR, period of service N/A.

which guided recruitment patterns. Importantly, economic incentives cannot be studied in isolation from social prestige and gendered hierarchies. More recent historiography, therefore, has emphasised how martial service and military wages helped some soldiers marry and extend their households, which subsequently enhanced their claims to a respected masculinity and social status. Michelle Moyd, for example, has argued *askari* in German East Africa sought to pursue respectability and authority through amassing dependents, accumulating herds of livestock, and thus fashioning themselves as ‘big men’ and wealthy patrons.<sup>459</sup> A number of the veterans’ narratives collected for this project further support this perspective. Some Acholi ex-servicemen, for example, specifically claimed they joined the KAR because the wages enabled them to afford the ever-increasing sums requested for bridewealth.<sup>460</sup> As one former soldier who served during the Second World War expressed, ‘I joined the army, so I could get money and marry a woman [...] If I was not to join the army, I was going to get defeated to get the money [...] I was going to remain poor’.<sup>461</sup> Another KAR veteran similarly stated, ‘the salary was there, so women would love you because you had money’.<sup>462</sup> The following extract from an Acholi song further demonstrates how joining the colonial army was envisioned by some as a route to marriage. The song explains that if a man was unable to marry through using the bridewealth brought into the homestead through the marriage of a sister or another female relative, he should join the KAR.

Money these days,

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<sup>459</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, pp.4-5.

<sup>460</sup> For additional examples, see Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45; Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71.

<sup>461</sup> Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 28 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45.

If you do not have a sister,

Join the KAR,

Money these days,

If your sister is not there,

Then the money is in the KAR<sup>463</sup>

In addition, military wages enabled some Acholi soldiers to marry younger than they had originally anticipated, while affording others the opportunity to marry multiple wives or the ability to negotiate a more advantageous marriage to a more desirable woman.<sup>464</sup>

Despite this, it is important to keep in mind that joining the KAR was not the only way an Acholi man could afford marriage and thus lay claim to respected manhood during the colonial encounter. The actual amount requested from the girl's family was flexible and thus a compromise could be made. Young men could also request to pay in instalments or pay through labour to the father-in-law. Moreover, young men could make a promise to pay at a later date, or even find a wife from another area where the price required was not as high.<sup>465</sup> In addition to this, Acholi colonial recruits did not represent a homogeneous group. Although most of the men were poor and unmarried, others were comparatively wealthier and from more

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<sup>463</sup> Interview with 86, Male, Lamogi, 30 September 2016.

<sup>464</sup> For example, see Interview with 90, Male, Koc, 4 October 2016, served in the KAR, period of service N/A; Interview with 23, Male, Layibi, 28 May 2016, served in the KAR 1938-[-?]; Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 28 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; Interview with 35, Male, Pabo, 4 July 2016, served in the KAR 1948-58; and Interview with 24, Male, Lamogi, 30 May 2016, served in the KAR 1944-53.

<sup>465</sup> Girling, pp.30-40, p.62,

prosperous homesteads. Some soldiers had thus already secured a wife or had access to alternative wealth which they intended to use for marriage before participating in the wage-based economy through soldiering.<sup>466</sup> On the whole, therefore, the importance of marriage in relation to locally constructed understandings of masculinity can only partly explain the popularity of military service amongst the Acholi.

In order to truly understand the diversity of motives which encouraged Acholi men to join the KAR, then, we need to push past purely economic, or even socio-economic explanations. To date, precolonial identities, attitudes and values have been rendered of only marginal importance to military service and constructed understandings of ‘martial race’.<sup>467</sup> Parsons, for example, has argued ‘the designation *martial race* had little to [do] with specific cultural characteristics or precolonial military traditions’.<sup>468</sup> Yet, as will be discussed below, localised dynamics and drivers which had historically framed Acholi men’s relationship with violence continued to guide their interest in military service throughout much of the colonial period. It remains important, then, not to undermine the influence of precolonial identities in respect to willingness to enlist, and thus in extension, the likelihood of communities becoming defined as martial within imperial imaginations. For reasons which have already been dwelt upon at length in Chapter One, from the eighteenth century war in Acholiland had become indelibly intertwined with the acquisition of social prestige and individual distinction. It was this historical relationship between honour and

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<sup>466</sup> For example, see Interview with 16, Male, Alero, 20 May 2016, served in the KAR 1952-55; and Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71.

<sup>467</sup> Valuable exceptions include Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*; and David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1994).

<sup>468</sup> Parsons, ‘Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen’, p.671.

warriorhood that encouraged many Acholi men to enlist into the KAR, which performed a central role in the process of them becoming a ‘martial race’ within colonial narratives. Mazrui once claimed the warrior tradition in Uganda was damaged by white hegemony and the terrors of ‘gunfire and hellfire’ during the colonial encounter.<sup>469</sup> This, however, does not take account of how colonial military service came to be imagined by some Acholi men as a platform for gaining honour through the expression of embedded martial virtues such as courage and physical strength. From around the First World War, military service began to be interpreted, in part, as akin to the warrior tradition of the past in terms of the social benefits it could create for the individual.

Many KAR veterans speak with great pride when discussing militarism in relation to Acholi culture. This is not to say former soldiers suggest the Acholi were renowned for being aggressive or celebrated the use of ruthless behaviour, but many elderly KAR veterans certainly claim the Acholi demonstrated sought after martial characteristics within the context of war. As one interviewee commented:

[The Acholi] were strong, they were not fearful [...] If a person was shot down here, you just jumped over the person shot and you just moved on [...] The Baganda [...] when the bullets started, they would just run and hide in their banana plantation. They could not manage.<sup>470</sup>

During the Second World War *askari* would even boast of their bravery in battle within the letters they sent home to family and loved ones.<sup>471</sup> Expressions of strength

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<sup>469</sup> Mazrui, ‘The Warrior Tradition’, p.65; and Mazrui, ‘The Resurrection of the Warrior Tradition’, pp. 71-78.

<sup>470</sup> Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-49.

<sup>471</sup> BNA, WO 203/2045, Morale Reports Feb-Oct 1945.

and fearlessness thus continued to be respected and deemed honourable throughout the colonial period, while signs of physical or mental weakness were verbally ridiculed.<sup>472</sup> In fact, behaviour deemed cowardly or feeble was held in such contempt that even some Acholi soldiers who were discharged whilst still young were subjected to humiliation upon their return home. One Acholi veteran revealed, for example:

When I returned I was still a little young so some of the soldiers who had returned earlier were abusing me, asking “why couldn’t you stay in the army? You are still young, continue serving in the army! Why did you return home? Did you have sex with a goat or cow there?”<sup>473</sup>

Other former KAR veterans specifically recalled mocking soldiers who had attempted to desert. As one ex-serviceman stated, ‘Those who just sneaked away [...] were just arrested and brought back [...] We belittled them so much, saying “why had you accepted [to join the army] earlier?”’<sup>474</sup>

It is plausible that this emphasis on martial virtues within the veterans’ accounts is a consequence of feedback in the oral records, the British having initially expressed what qualities a good soldier should demonstrate to the Acholi recruits. This seems unlikely, however, given the evidence detailed in Chapter One which indicates that even before the colonial encounter, martial prowess, demonstrations of bravery and physical strength were celebrated and actively encouraged, whilst displays of

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<sup>472</sup> See Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71; Interview with 16, Male, Alero, 20 May 2016, served in the KAR 1952-55; Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-9. This is not to say that Acholi soldiers were immune to fear. As the next chapter will demonstrate, there is a contradiction between how Acholi soldiers view themselves and the emotions they experienced when on the battlefield.

<sup>473</sup> Interview with 6, Male, Laliya Dwol, 28 April 2016, served in the KAR 1946-[?]. Asking if the soldier had had sex with a goat or cow was a way of insulting him.

<sup>474</sup> Interview with 28, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in KAR 1954-1960.

cowardliness were strongly associated with femininity and rendered shameful. Moreover, that the subjective desire for honour plays an integral part in motivating and framing individual behaviour within Acholi society is clearly demonstrated by the fact that fear of being labelled a ‘coward’ — and thus being publicly denied honour — has continued to encourage Acholi men to conform to conventional gendered behavioural patterns concerning violence to this day. As the extract below provided by an Acholi elder demonstrates, even during the most recent cycle of violence involving the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), some Acholi men perceived as fearful were taunted to such an extent that they subsequently joined the government army. This was no doubt in the hope of proving themselves to be ‘real men’ who were capable of protecting their communities through demonstrations of bravery and heroic self-sacrifice.

So, we the elders provoked them [the young men] by saying, “you let other men come and scare you, what kind of *men* are you?” For example, it happened to my two sons, unfortunately they have all been killed whilst with the army. They joined because of the way people were provoking them those days, when the rebels were harassing people. People were making fun of them, suggesting, “you let fellow men chase you away from home, so why do you not go and chase those men also?” So they joined and were lost within the army.<sup>475</sup>

Relating colonial military service to the acquisition of honour and respect was not unique to the Acholi. Myles Osborne, for example, has demonstrated that for many young Kamba speakers in Kenya, soldiering during British rule likewise represented

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<sup>475</sup> Interview with 120, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016. Emphasis added.



a recognisable and long-established way to earn prestige, especially after the firm imposition of colonial rule had caused raiding to cease. Through permitting demonstrations of bravery and specialised knowledge, martial occupations gave Kamba youth the chance to gain status in their communities.<sup>476</sup> What seemingly makes the Acholi context distinct to that of the Kamba in Kenya, however, is how military service additionally became likened to the provision of peace and security. Rarely are African soldiers who fought in colonial armed forces credited with harbouring broader philosophical or ideological motivations other than pro-empire loyalism. As Moyd has noted, ‘the notion that soldiers volunteer for military service, thereby risking injury or death, for patriotic, nationalistic, or civic reasons is commonplace in the United States and Great Britain’.<sup>477</sup> This language of shared sacrifice for the common good is largely missing, however, from research concerned with why African soldiers chose to serve in colonial armies. As has been demonstrated, African recruits’ reasoning for enlistment is almost invariably considered to have revolved around their personal economic or socio-economic aspirations. Parsons is right to point out that few African soldiers fought during the Second World War because they believed they were defending East Africa when, for example, inching their way down the Kabaw valley fighting the Japanese. Indeed, most soldiers likely obeyed their officers’ commands during an offensive due to a mixture of loyalty to their comrades and a fear of military discipline.<sup>478</sup> It remains important, though, to differentiate between what motivated colonial soldiers to ‘pull the trigger’ when on the battlefield, and what encouraged African men to initially enlist into the KAR.

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<sup>476</sup> Osborne, p.62, p.77, p.101.

<sup>477</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, pp.2-3.

<sup>478</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.34.

The idea of soldiering resonated amongst a number of Acholi men, especially during the early years of the Second World War, because of the importance placed upon protecting and defending the homestead in relation to manhood within Acholi culture. Widely accepted precolonial notions of masculinity revolved around *gwòkò*. The term literally meant ‘to care for’ and was used to refer to all actions and behaviours regarded as fundamental for protecting and providing for one’s homestead and community more widely. Caring for the home was thus synonymous with warriorhood because socially sanctioned violence was considered necessary for pursuing adequate security, stability and wellbeing within the community. Ideas of protecting the home and maintaining collective harmony remained central to male honour during the colonial period. Prior to the First World War, this notion had discouraged many Acholi men from serving in the colonial armed forces or acting as levies during early military campaigns because they were reluctant to leave their homes unprotected for extended periods of time. And yet, it was this same element of hegemonic masculinity which inspired many Acholi-speakers during the latter half of the colonial period to enlist into the KAR. Many Acholi veterans interviewed for this project clearly demonstrated a heroic understanding of selfhood revolving around the importance of providing protection and restoring peace, stability and social harmony.<sup>479</sup> As one soldier who served during the 1950s suggested: ‘If you were a soldier [...] They [the civilians] respected you and thought that, “this is our protector”’.<sup>480</sup> It seems to have made little difference that outside of the inherent violence which colonialism itself represented, there was no external threat to Acholiland, or even Uganda, under British rule. Performing the role of protector

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<sup>479</sup> For example, see Interview with 18, Male, Gulu, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-62; and Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959.

<sup>480</sup> Interview with 28, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in KAR 1954-1960.

simply came to be understood in a more abstract sense than in the past. The verb *gwàkò* was thus used repeatedly by KAR veterans to describe their motivations for enlistment, and their experiences of military life. One veteran who served during the Second World War, for example, responded to a question regarding the advantages of being a soldier with ‘*Gwàkò dano aye ber*’, meaning ‘Protecting people was the only good thing’.<sup>481</sup> Even some elderly non-combatants discussed this notion of protecting when asked about their opinions regarding the colonial enlistment process. One interviewee, for example, explained ‘those people who joined the [KAR] army [...] they went with the rationale of helping their home [...] they were protecting their home’.<sup>482</sup>

As the posters below indicate, political propaganda depicted colonial soldiers, especially those who served during the First and Second World Wars, as stoic defenders of the British Empire. As did the annual ceremonies held around Remembrance Day to commemorate those who died in battle.<sup>483</sup> Clearly, therefore, it could be suggested KAR veterans described their motivations in these terms because they were exposed to powerful imagery both before enlistment and after being discharged.

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<sup>481</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>482</sup> Interview with 142, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016.

<sup>483</sup> For more details see the annual newspaper articles printed by *The Uganda Herald* and *The Uganda Argus*.



Figure 3:1, Colonial Military Recruitment Posters<sup>484</sup>

Yet it is crucial not to mistake Acholi veterans' insurances that they joined the KAR to act as defenders and protectors, as loyalty to the British or imperial objectives. Acholi testimonies are not evidence that colonial soldiers framed their experiences of military service as 'fighting for Britain'. One British officer's suggestion that 'fighting an enemy of the establishment as they knew it must have appealed to them', was not supported by the veterans interviewed for this project, who often explicitly disagreed with this rhetoric.<sup>485</sup> Moreover, with their origins being overwhelmingly rural, and having received little in the way of formal education, Acholi recruits likely had little sense of the colonial empire when first enlisting, or the significance of their service in

<sup>484</sup> IWMA, Art.IWM PST 8263, poster entitled 'The British Colonial Empire: Our Allies The Colonies- The King's African Rifles; IWMA, Art.IWM PST 3158, poster entitled 'Together'.

<sup>485</sup> IWMA, 7394, Interview with Frank Richard Stedman; Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959; and Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016, served in the KAR, period of service N/A.

terms of British imperial interests. Even Lord Frederick Lugard admitted that, ‘It would, I think, be untrue to say that they [meaning African soldiers] gave their lives to uphold the British Empire’.<sup>486</sup> Instead, Acholi soldiers, and indeed some Acholi civilians, contextualised military service as fighting for Acholiland, or Africa more broadly. As one colonial intelligence report from 1942 detailed:

The [Acholi] Chiefs are quite emphatic that if the situation demands it their people should go abroad to deal with any possible menace to Africa [...] The elders evidently treat this as a glorified tribal war and want to bless their young men and send them off.<sup>487</sup>

The following extract taken from a colonial intelligence bulletin dated 1940 further illustrates Acholi people understood serving in the KAR as akin to protecting Africa, as opposed to supporting British imperial interests.

During a recruiting campaign by the K.A.R. in the northern districts in the first half of November, crowds of Acholi and Langi were noticed on the roads wearing a form of home-made uniform which had a map of Africa in white on the front of the jersey and a black letter “A” in the middle of the map. Others were wearing a different type of uniform and carried a flag, also home-made, with a large map of Africa in the centre. Not content with joining up in the usual way, these enthusiasts had also regimented themselves before

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<sup>486</sup> Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p.575.

<sup>487</sup> BNA, FCO 141/18105, The Uganda Protectorate Security Intelligence Summary, No.5, May 1942.

coming to the recruiting Officers. The emblems, they said, indicated that they were going to fight for Africa.<sup>488</sup>

In sum, Acholi men did not volunteer to join the KAR solely based on the lucrative wages or the social benefits such wages might generate for them. Firstly, whether it was through individual choice or the result of societal pressure, Acholi men were also inspired to enlist into the colonial army because soldiering was imagined as a way to earn individual distinction through the demonstration of normative martial virtues. Secondly, Acholi men's increasing enthusiasm for military service following the First World War revolved around an explicitly Acholi cultural ideal: namely, the philosophical understanding that soldiering was intimately intertwined with the provision of protection and stability. Thus, military recruitment patterns and the process of becoming a 'martial race' during the latter half of the colonial period continued to represent a product of *both* Britain's imperial agenda and pre-existing Acholi values. Reid is right to argue 'British recruitment policy in northern Uganda in some ways built on the militarisation of the region through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'. For Reid, however, this was largely because this context of violent upheaval meant the British were co-opted into a particular vision of the North that cast its inhabitants as perennially backward and inherently warlike — a stereotype which soon after influenced British recruitment policies.<sup>489</sup> In comparison, the argument here is that although the Acholi people's reputation as a martial community was framed, in part, by the region's precolonial experience, it was because this period

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<sup>488</sup> BNA, FCO 141/18105, The Uganda Police Periodical Intelligence Bulletin, 15th December 1940.

<sup>489</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.188-189, p.282. Elsewhere, however, Reid has briefly acknowledged the importance of emergent mercenary cultures during the nineteenth century and the impact this had upon African men's willingness to serve in colonial armies, see Reid, *Warfare in African History*, p.140.

of militarisation and violent contest laid the groundwork for local enthusiasm regarding colonial military service. This image of the Acholi as the ultimate ‘martial race’ within the Ugandan context was not the product of precolonial European narratives relating to barbarity and savagery, but it was to a considerable extent influenced by violent expressions of manhood and local manifestations of militarism forged throughout a long nineteenth century characterised by war and conflict nonetheless.

#### SECTION IV: MILITARY RECRUITMENT AND ‘MARTIAL RACE’ IMAGERY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Although military enlistment patterns and the concept of ‘martial race’ were fairly consistent from the 1920s onwards, fluctuations still occurred; the most prominent example of this being throughout the Second World War. Having suffered from years of mismanagement and a lack of funding the KAR was poorly prepared for full-scale operations when the Second World War broke out. As the war progressed, however, the KAR grew remarkably — going from just seven battalions in 1939, to an astonishing forty-three by 1945.<sup>490</sup> As will be demonstrated below, the need to expand the size of the KAR for full-scale operations coincided with a reduction in enthusiasm on behalf of some Acholi men to enlist for military service, which forced the colonial government to reorganise recruitment patterns on a significant scale. Acholi women proved central to this wavering interest in military service, mainly because they were

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<sup>490</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.25.

capable of manipulating whether or not soldiering was deemed manly and honourable within local discourses. When the relationship between gender and colonial military service has been the focus of scholarly attention the emphasis has primarily been on how and why colonial authorities attempted to control and regulate African soldiers' relationships with women, or the extent to which soldiering enhanced African men's access to women and, by extension, to respected masculinity.<sup>491</sup> And yet, African women were not simply a motivation for enlistment, but instead central to the whole, complex decision-making process regarding whether or not serving in the KAR coincided with established gendered norms and values.

The unprecedented demand for African soldiers of frontline status during the Second World War meant the possibility of conscription was discussed in earnest.<sup>492</sup>

As the Governor of Uganda proclaimed in 1942:

I have issued instructions to the Heads of Provinces [...] that such [tax] defaulters may be drafted for military service in lieu of prosecution and imprisonment [...] At a time when man-power is the prime need, I hold it unreasonable to keep in prison 9,000 men [...] of whom many could serve [in the army].<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> For example, see Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*; Ogot, p.285; Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.145-175; Timothy Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men: Sex Domesticity and Discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1906-1964' in *Guardians Of Empire: The Armed Forces Of The Colonial Powers C. 1700-1964*, ed. by David Killingray and E. Omissi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.157-178; and Sarah Zimmerman, 'Mesdames Tirailleurs and Indirect Clients: West African Women and the French Colonial Army, 1908—1918', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44:2 (2011), 299-322.

<sup>492</sup> UNA, F.78/05/06, Secretariat Topical, Series F, Box 5, 'African Man Power Committee: Agenda and Minutes of Meetings'.

<sup>493</sup> UNA, D.728/41/1, Secretariat Topical, Series D, Box 2, 'Defence Regulations: Drafting of African Poll Tax Defaulters into the Army'.



After much deliberation this particular policy was not implemented, and Britain attempted to distinguish itself from France by claiming all colonial recruits were volunteers as opposed to conscripts. In practice, however, many African men who served in the KAR during the Second World War had been placed under varying degrees of pressure during the enlistment process. As Parsons has argued and as the following statement made by an Acholi veteran who served between c.1939-1946 confirms, there were a number of African KAR troops who were ‘de facto conscripts’.<sup>494</sup>

We were in the classroom, the commanders of the army came [...] They came with an army vehicle [...] some people jumped through the window and ran. I said “I am not going to run” [...] So they captured us, they brought us to the office here.<sup>495</sup>

A number of the men interviewed for this project also claimed to have been coerced into reenlistment: a claim substantiated by the fact the colonial government reported in 1941 that ‘a great many letters from Africans [...] to relatives in Uganda [...] indicate discontent [...] [towards] alleged compulsion in re-enlistments from the Labour and Medical Corps to the combatant forces’.<sup>496</sup>

More importantly, however, the increase in demand for African soldiers by the latter half of the Second World War compelled the military establishment to move

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<sup>494</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.64. For more information, see Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.35, p.58, p.61.

<sup>495</sup> Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A.

<sup>496</sup> See Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A.; and Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71; BNA, FCO 141/18105, Uganda: Intelligence Bulletins and Security Intelligence Summaries, 1939-1944, September 1941.

beyond its traditional recruiting grounds into areas such as Toro, Teso, Busoga and Bugwere.<sup>497</sup> Even a significant number of Baganda were recruited into the newly created territorial unit termed the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which initially represented something akin to the British Home Guard, but shifted throughout the course of the war into a regular frontline infantry battalion.<sup>498</sup> This change in colonial recruitment policy prompted a change in the way British officers spoke about such communities who came to represent substitute ‘martial race’ soldiers. Captain Carl August Hendrik Swift, who served with the Ugandan 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion between 1939 and 1945, for example, claimed ‘the fighting tribesmen from Uganda’ included both the Baganda and the Iteso.<sup>499</sup> Similarly, officer Charles Frederick Broomfield who began serving with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion in 1941 asserted that, although ‘not all up to the standards of the Acholi’ ethnic groups such as the Iteso represented good military material.<sup>500</sup>

This shift in military recruitment patterns was not, however, solely the product of a deliberate alteration in official colonial policy. Once again, indigenous communities played a significant role here. In recent years, scholars have focused on why some colonised people chose to serve a foreign power. In comparison, the remainder of this section concentrates on an equally important but little-appreciated question: why did a significant proportion of Acholi men during the Second World War opt to effectively reject the ‘martial race’ label they had both fashioned and been assigned through choosing to remain (or later return) home?

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<sup>497</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.283; Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.63.

<sup>498</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.24-5.

<sup>499</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 17, Carl August Hendrik Swift.

<sup>500</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1941-1958.

Firstly, as the Second World War wore on rumours of malignant British intentions and the horrors of modern warfare meant some Acholi men's enthusiasm for military service began to dwindle. As one Acholi veteran recalled, 'Some would decide to join but some never wanted to, they believed they [meaning the British] were taking us to be killed. Yes they thought they wanted to take people to be killed'.<sup>501</sup> The colonial government clearly anticipated the impact such rumours could have upon colonial recruitment as intelligence reports from this era had an entire section designated to reporting on rumours and their impact over local morale. In 1941, for example, it was reported 'There was a rumour current last month in the district to the effect that some of the 2/4 K.A.R. had been ambushed, killed and badly mutilated'.<sup>502</sup>

Secondly, and more importantly, such rumours were coupled with Acholi women's appeals that honourable manhood was not compatible with prolonged absences. Albeit occasionally observed and noted, female influence in regard to African male behaviour and decision-making was often trivialised by European observers. The CMS missionary Arthur Kitching wrote in 1912, for example, 'Each [Acholi] man as a rule takes his own line, and is little influenced by his fellows [...] His own women [however] have more weight with him, and hen-pecked husbands are not unknown even among the chiefs'.<sup>503</sup> In reality, 'hen-pecking' represented nuanced, sophisticated and strategic interventions by women, who were acting according to their own interests. As will be demonstrated below, in contrast to both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where a woman's physical safety, economic wealth and

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<sup>501</sup> Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45.

<sup>502</sup> BNA, FCO 141/18105, Uganda: Intelligence Bulletins and Security Intelligence Summaries, 1939-1944, April 1941.

<sup>503</sup> Kitching, *On The Backwaters Of The Nile*, p.23. For further evidence of female authority, see CMSA, CMS Precis Books and Original Documents, G3/A7/0, OL 135, p.91, Extract from Uganda Notes, June 1905, Vol.VI, n.6; and 'The Diaries of Emin Pasha- Extracts IV', ed. by Sir John Gray, *Uganda Journal*, 26:2 (1964), 121-139 (p.131).

social worth was, at least in part, intricately connected to her husband's achievements on the battlefield, there were points during the colonial period where women who entered into conjugal relationships with soldiers were left vulnerable to new forms of marginality and patterns of exclusion from local social hierarchies. It is thus unsurprising that many women began to encourage their male kin to forgo the opportunity to initially enlist, or to continue serving, in the KAR during this period.

Parsons is correct to point out that the wives of soldiers could, at times, achieve tangible benefits through their association with the KAR, and Osborne has rightly drawn attention to how some soldiers' wives established new ways to fend for themselves economically during their husbands' absences.<sup>504</sup> Even so, many KAR soldiers' wives faced a variety of challenges. During peacetime it was possible for the military administration to accommodate the wives and families of African troops in KAR barracks.<sup>505</sup> This was not the case, however, during wartime when the *askari* were serving in foreign territory. Thus, during the Second World War in particular, the wives of African recruits left behind were burdened with an ever-increasing number of domestic and agricultural responsibilities while their husbands were fighting abroad. Furthermore, for some homesteads the remittance payments sent home by soldiers were never received, or proved wholly insufficient.<sup>506</sup> In other families, the payments were appropriated by male relatives leaving soldiers' wives struggling to maintain the home.<sup>507</sup> The Acholi region also suffered from drought, famine and locusts during this period which further accentuated the problems that

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<sup>504</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.175. Also see Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men', pp.171-2.

<sup>505</sup> Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men', p.166.

<sup>506</sup> BNA, CO 536/215/12, Uganda Affairs Fortnightly Review, Security review sent to the Governor by the Director of Security Intelligence and forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

<sup>507</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.172-3.

soldiers' wives faced in terms of providing for themselves and their children.<sup>508</sup> In fact, Acholi recruits' wives and families complained about their desperate economic situation during the Second World War to such an extent that the military establishment eventually had to urge District Commissioners to discourage soldiers' next of kin from any 'loose talk of extreme drought and famine' during their correspondence.<sup>509</sup> Of course the wives of all labour migrants might have suffered from similar privations, but the length of soldiers' absences during the Second World War made this period especially problematic for the wives of *askari*.

It is equally important to reiterate that war during both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was often employed for defending the homestead, especially in terms of thwarting any attempts to abduct women and cattle. It thus served women's interests to promote and encourage a more militarised form of Acholi masculinity. In contrast, KAR battalions were rarely concerned with defending local African communities. In fact, because during both the Second World War and the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya (1952-60) their husbands were fighting abroad, soldiers' wives were actually left more exposed to abuse and harassment. As one Acholi veteran revealed, 'My first woman said I should first return home, she told me that my brothers were disturbing her'.<sup>510</sup> The Acholi verb for 'to disturb', *yèlo*, can also be translated to mean 'to torment' or 'to trouble' and is associated with the noun *àyela*, meaning 'molestation'.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> KNA, MAA/2/3/25/I/47, Annual Reports for 1939-46.

<sup>509</sup> UNA, F.023/069/25, Secretariat Topical, Series F, Box 6, African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps (E.A.), Serving in the Middle East, Report by Lt. Col. J. C. Keane dated 21.7.44.

<sup>510</sup> Interview with 32, Male, Lugore Market, 23 June 2016, served in the KAR 1952-58.

<sup>511</sup> Crazzolara, *A study of the Acooli language*, p.421.

Most significantly, though, during the Second World War many women who had married KAR soldiers found their ability to bear children inhibited because their husbands were serving abroad. This was a serious impediment to their social belonging and authority within the community, as well as their access to honourable womanhood. The etymology behind the Acholi term used to talk about infertile people clearly demonstrates the intolerable position such people often found themselves in. Regular sound change patterns tell us the Acholi term *làbvòc*, used to describe impotence or infertility in both males and females, originated from the proto-Nilo-Saharan verb *\*pó:ɣ* meaning ‘to spoil’.<sup>512</sup> This semantic innovation was a clear attempt to dehumanise and ostracise such people through the suggestion that they were ruined, inadequate and useless. Cultural forms, such as the song copied out below, similarly indicate sterility was regarded as one of the greatest afflictions an Acholi person could suffer.

You keep on laughing and laughing,

Yet you have no wife

Ee, this brother who dances so vigorously,

Is a nobody, he has no wife;

He had brought home a woman

Whose womb has been sucked by a leopard,

She cannot bear a child;

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<sup>512</sup> Ehret, *A Historical-Comparative Reconstruction*.

This man has brought home a woman

Whose womb was hardened long ago.<sup>513</sup>

As the extract above implies, an Acholi woman who was unable to bear children was left socially vulnerable. A key reason for this being that infertility or barrenness in a woman impacted her husband's claims to honour by denying him fatherhood. Given, therefore, that motherhood was widely accepted as an essential aspect of women's lives, it remains unsurprising Acholi soldiers' wives felt humiliated at having their capacity to reproduce hindered. As the following Acholi song indicates, because they were unable to conceive whilst their husbands were serving abroad during the Second World War, soldiers' wives were left exposed to the sting of social marginalisation and scorn associated with infertility.

Writing, writing, writing so many letters

Those letters can they be changed into a child?

Soldiers' wives are barren

Soldiers' wives are truly barren.<sup>514</sup>

Rennie Bere, who worked as a district commissioner in Uganda, recounted in his memoirs the following story concerning a group of Acholi soldiers' wives which underscores their agitation at being unable to reproduce while their husbands were serving abroad.

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<sup>513</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *The Horn of my Love* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p.77.

<sup>514</sup> p'Bitek, 'Oral literature', p.312.

The office gradually filled up. It was not a large room but forty or fifty soldiers' wives managed to pack themselves in. Then they all started talking at the top of their voices [...] "There isn't much fighting yet," said one, "so why shouldn't we be allowed to live with our husbands in the base camps in Kenya?" "Most of us now have children, two or three years old," said another, "and we want more babies. How can we have more babies if we cannot have our husbands?" "The young men in the villages worry us a great deal," a young woman with a roving eye added to this, "but we don't want them. We want our husbands. Our husbands are very good to us and send us money, but do you imagine that money will buy us babies?"<sup>515</sup>

As a creative response to the challenges they faced during their husbands' absences, many Acholi women exploited established gendered expectations relating to honourable manhood to address their grievances and promote their own interests. As has been mentioned, during both the precolonial and colonial periods widely accepted notions of masculinity revolved around *gwɔ̄kɔ*, meaning both 'to protect from' and 'to provide for'.<sup>516</sup> This dual meaning of the verb *gwɔ̄kɔ* gives us some insight into the range of responsibilities Acholi men were required to perform in order to access respectable manhood. Looking after one's wife, family and household did not just encompass providing protection, it also involved a variety of duties associated with providing for, and looking after, the home on a daily basis. These included farming, rearing domestic animals, siring children, as well as building and maintaining the hut and the granary. In a direct demonstration of female agency, many Acholi women began to place more emphasis on this latter aspect of masculinity, which

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<sup>515</sup> OAU, MSS.Afr.s.1744, Rennie Bere, *A Spear for the Rhinoceros*, pp.197-8.

<sup>516</sup> Crazzolaro, *A Study of the Acoli Language*, p.235.



revolved around providing and caring for the home, in an attempt to challenge and renegotiate the vulnerability they had been (or would be) exposed to through their husbands' absences. Rather than celebrating a version of Acholi masculinity which predominantly revolved around demonstrations of physical strength and courage, therefore, many women challenged their male kin to act like 'men' in other locally prescribed ways.

Notably, as the following extract from an oral poem indicates, women denounced their husbands for abdicating their responsibilities around the home and for failing to adequately provide for them and their children.

The skin of my hands is hardened,

Grinding the millet,

[...]

The burden is killing me, I get nothing for it;

My hands are burnt,

Cooking for you,

And the prostitutes are drinking all your money,

[...]

Husband, I kill myself,

Feeding our children,

And the prostitutes are finishing you<sup>517</sup>

Moreover, soldiers' wives implored their husbands or other male relatives to remain or return home and take care of their families in a more practical way. The extract below comes from a song composed by a woman whose husband had joined the KAR. The woman was praising her husband, referring to him as a 'lion', but she was simultaneously pleading for him to come back home.

When is he [the soldier] coming back?

[...]

He reached up to Nairobi,

Lion when are you coming?<sup>518</sup>

By urging men to remain or return home so that they could perform certain duties commonly associated with taking care of, and providing for, one's homestead, Acholi women were not completely disrupting conventional assumptions regarding masculinity: they were simply taking advantage of and nurturing certain gendered norms and behavioural patterns over others which had hitherto been prioritised in order to promote alternative patterns of conduct. They essentially began to foster elements of Acholi manhood previously deemed marginal or subordinate, underlining how hegemonic models of masculinity are continually contested and in the process of being reconstructed.<sup>519</sup> By defining Acholi masculinity in this way women were simultaneously promoting a version of femininity which was characterised by a

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<sup>517</sup> p'Bitek, *Horn of my Love*, p.61.

<sup>518</sup> Interview with 129, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016.

<sup>519</sup> Miescher and Lindsay, pp. 4-5.

dependency upon male support. In effect, Acholi women advocated the notion they had been, or would be, left vulnerable and helpless as a consequence of their male relatives working away from home.<sup>520</sup> The effect this had upon KAR soldiers' attitudes is clearly demonstrated by the way in which ex-servicemen discuss the women they left behind. One veteran who initially enlisted in 1942 claimed, for example, 'my mother was just digging alone and could be crying, so I wanted to come back [from the army] and rectify that situation'.<sup>521</sup> Similarly another former combatant who served in Kenya during the 1950s emphasised, 'The reason I left the army was because [...] my woman was left here alone, with no one to take care of her'.<sup>522</sup>

Discussions regarding female power and authority normally revolve around more easily observable and recognisable ways women strove to exercise their influence and autonomy within public spaces.<sup>523</sup> With that in mind, the manner in which Acholi women objected to their husbands' long absences is particularly important because it reveals how female agency could manifest itself in more prosaic, subtle and covert forms. Such demonstrations of women's authority and power over male behaviour and masculine cultures are certainly harder to detect and identify, meaning they have often been overlooked and thus discounted within contemporary historiography. And yet, through framing themselves as powerless and vulnerable,

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<sup>520</sup> For a comparable argument in relation to widowed Kenyan women, see Kenda Mutongi, "'Worries Of The Heart": Widowed Mothers, Daughters And Masculinities In Maragoli, Western Kenya, 1940–60', *The Journal of African History*, 40 (1999), 67–86.

<sup>521</sup> Interview with 12, Male, Koro, 4 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942–46.

<sup>522</sup> Interview with 28, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in KAR 1954–1960.

<sup>523</sup> A key example for the African context being the more visible, and subsequently the more quantifiable, power of queen mothers, see Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood*, p.125; Edna G. Bay, 'Belief, Legitimacy and the *Kpojito*: An Institutional History of the 'Queen Mother' in Precolonial Dahomey', *Journal of African History*, 36:1 (1995), 1–27; Suzanne Preston Blier, 'The Path of the Leopard: Motherhood and Majesty in Early Danhomè', *Journal of African History*, 36:3 (1995), 391–417; and *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, ed. by Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan (New York: New York Academy of Science, 1997).

Acholi women were, somewhat paradoxically, utilising traditional gendered roles to exert influence over their male counterparts and promote their own interests.

As a consequence of this rhetoric, the welfare of the wives and extended families they would have to leave (or had already left) behind remained a constant source of anxiety for Acholi men.<sup>524</sup> Recruits on active service during the Second World War began to challenge their British officers in regard to how their families would be financially provided for if they were killed. They also wrote anxious letters home expressing concern for their wives, children and property.<sup>525</sup> Most importantly, though, this discourse concerning masculine responsibilities around the homestead impacted local Acholi attitudes towards long-term military service. Many Acholi elders today who did not enlist into the KAR thus echo the following statement made by one informant: ‘the reason why I did not join the army was because [...] I was to look after the home, if not I would have joined the army.’<sup>526</sup> In addition, many Acholi soldiers were persuaded to opt for discharge as soon as an opportunity presented itself. Archival records suggest nearly all of the Acholi recruits returning home after the Second World War were in favour of release, having reasoned that they wished to return home and resume life with their families.<sup>527</sup> This evidence is clearly supported by more recent interviews. As one KAR veteran claimed ‘I left [the army] because

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<sup>524</sup> Parsons has also argued ‘When askaris were without their families on active service, they remained concerned for the welfare of their wives and children’. See Parsons, ‘All Askari are Family Men’, p.159.

<sup>525</sup> See BNA, WO 169/7028, East Africa Command: Infantry: 3/4 Battalion King's African Rifles, Censor Reports 24 June 1942 and 2 July 1942; and BNA, FCO 141/18105, The Uganda Protectorate Intelligence and Security Summaries, especially the sections entitled ‘Propaganda, Rumours and Morale’. For more on letters written home by African troops, see Killingley, *Fighting for Britain*, p.99.

<sup>526</sup> Interview with 87, Male, Lamogi, 30 September 2016.

<sup>527</sup> BNA, CO 536/215/12, Uganda Affairs Fortnightly Review, Security Reviews sent to the Governor by the Director of Security Intelligence and forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

[...] I thought, indeed, I should be home taking care of my wives'.<sup>528</sup> Overall, then, the reluctance of some Acholi communities to meet the ever-increasing demand for KAR recruits during the Second World War further demonstrates the impact local interest (or indeed lack of interest) in military service could have upon colonial recruitment strategies and 'martial race' discourses.

## CONCLUSION

In contrast to the majority of scholarship on colonial military recruitment strategies in Uganda, this chapter has argued that the Acholi were not enlisted into the KAR in large numbers simply because they were viewed as inherently warlike and thus more "naturally" suited to military service. Instead, colonial military recruitment practices in Uganda must be understood as having been influenced by both British imperial aspirations and indigenous attitudes towards soldiering, which shifted over time. By initially recruiting large numbers of Baganda levies during the era of conquest, Britain was able to quickly stamp out any pockets of resistance and pave the way for colonial rule while keeping administrative costs down. The decision to later enlist men from non-centralised Nilotic communities was another deliberate calculation again underpinned by the tenuous nature of British rule in East Africa. 'Martial race' language and references to the so-called unwavering loyalty a particular ethnic group demonstrated, then, were predominantly used as a tool to justify and validate

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<sup>528</sup> Interview with 90, Male, Koc, 4 October 2016, served in the KAR, period of service U/A.

recruitment policies which ultimately aimed to safeguard and preserve the colonial order.

African actors and existing African identities also played a highly significant role, however. As has been demonstrated, only because the Acholi began to conceptualise soldiering and military service as a socially profitable exercise were British officers able to recruit them into the KAR and brand them a 'martial race' from around the First World War. Prior to that, regardless of colonial assertions that 'excellent material' *might* 'exist amongst Nilotic tribes', the Acholi could not be induced to enlist and thus the military administration was forced to rely upon other African communities, such as the Sudanese and the Swahili, to fill the ranks of the Ugandan Battalion.<sup>529</sup> The Acholi, therefore, were not simply appointed or allocated the label 'martial race'. Through their unrivalled enthusiasm for military service from around the First World War, Acholi people manipulated and renegotiated how they were stereotyped within colonial imaginations. For the British to secure the cooperation and assistance of local African communities, then, colonial recruitment strategies had to in some way align with, and accommodate, indigenous attitudes and ambitions. The nature of military recruitment in Uganda was thus characterised by interdependence, involving both the British colonial government and local African peoples.

This chapter additionally sought to understand why soldiering became increasingly popular amongst the Acholi over time. Chiefly, it has challenged the

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<sup>529</sup> BNA, WO 287/13, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate, 1909, pp.149-50; UNA, A46/786-798, Northern Province Monthly Reports, 1911-1927, May 1916; IWMA, 77217, Military Report on the Uganda Protectorate 1909, Classification of Races of 4<sup>th</sup> Ugandan Bn. 31<sup>st</sup> December 1907, p.102.

assumption that African soldiers' understanding of military service wholly revolved around pragmatic economic considerations. Instead, localised dynamics and drivers that had historically framed Acholi men's relationship with violence underscored their increasing enthusiasm for military service from around the First World War. Soldiering began to be envisioned by many as a gateway to reputation building and as an opportunity to assert their position within local hierarchies. More importantly, though, Acholi men held a romanticised and nostalgic interpretation of warfare which enabled them to conceptualise serving in the KAR as akin to performing the role of heroic provider of peace, stability and collective wellbeing.

Young Acholi men's expectations regarding the social value of soldiering were sometimes in sharp contrast to how many Acholi women conceptualised military service, and this was particularly evident during the Second World War. This chapter has additionally illustrated, therefore, how soldiering throughout British colonial rule represented a series of contradictions for Acholi men. It may have provided them with a platform for attracting and securing a wife, but enlisting into the KAR also engendered long periods spent away from their family, particularly their wives. This left Acholi men physically unable to perform certain duties traditionally associated with caring and providing for their homestead. It was this, albeit mostly unintentional, evading of locally established responsibilities which caused many Acholi women to reject the notion that soldiering was systematically compatible with honourable manhood. As such, Acholi women were at the heart of Acholi men's reasoning in regard to remaining at, or returning, home from military service. Contrary to current interpretations, therefore, it seems that despite being labelled a 'martial race' throughout British colonial rule, as the Second World War wore on it became

increasingly difficult for Acholi men to cultivate individual prestige and social status through military service alone.

The following chapter will explore how Acholi KAR soldiers made meaning of the violence they engaged in whilst serving in the British colonial army, and how soldiering impacted the social position Acholi veterans occupied after being discharged. In particular the next chapter explores how Acholi men's expectations regarding the social value of soldiering was often at odds with the position they actually inhabited upon their return home.



## CHAPTER THREE

### BEING A 'MARTIAL RACE' SOLDIER

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A comprehensive understanding of colonial military service can only be obtained through an appreciation of the complex and contradictory nature of African experiences. Despite considerable scholarly attention being dedicated to colonial recruits in recent years, rarely have the ways in which African soldiers made meaning of the violence they engaged in been at the centre of in-depth analysis.<sup>530</sup> The first section of this chapter is thus concerned with African soldiers' individual experiences of frontline combat. Importantly, it contends that Acholi soldiers who witnessed and participated in the horrors of modern warfare faced the ongoing challenge of trying to cope with emotions such as fear and guilt, whilst simultaneously attempting to conform to an idealised representation of themselves as brave, heroic fighters, fostered and popularised by both local understandings of masculinity and colonial stereotypes regarding 'martial races'. As such, this section compares the normative public narrative which surrounded colonial military service with individual perspectives, placing emphasis on contrasting the idealised interpretations of soldiering discussed in Chapter Two, with the murkier realities of serving in the King's African Rifles (KAR) during periods of conflict. In addition, this section explores how Acholi soldiers contextualised and coped with the new forms of violence they were exposed to. It argues that traditional healing practices continued to play an important role in

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<sup>530</sup> Notable exceptions include, Moyd, 'We don't want to die for nothing', pp.90-107; Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, pp.141-179.

terms of coping with the unique psychological demands of modern warfare, although Acholi recruits also developed innovative ways to justify and rationalise the violence they were involved in. By focusing on coping mechanisms which transcended the boundary between the precolonial period and the imposition of British rule, this section further demonstrates how the colonial moment, as powerful as it was, neither destroyed nor suppressed all that went before.<sup>531</sup>

The second section challenges the assumption that colonial recruits were imbued with a sense of social superiority over their civilian counterparts and were systematically able to enhance their position within colonial society through military service.<sup>532</sup> Seldom did African soldiers' initial expectations regarding what military service would engender for them as individuals coincide with the position they inhabited during active service or upon their return home. Thus, this section argues that serving in the KAR did not guarantee a rise in honour or prestige. A soldier's capacity to access respectable manhood whilst serving in the KAR was hindered by the unyielding racial boundaries of the colonial military establishment. Moreover, even after being discharged and returning home, a veteran's social status remained ambiguous as it largely depended upon whether his physical and mental health allowed him to resume work and undertake responsibilities traditionally associated with honourable manhood. In addition to this, soldiering did not secure substantial economic advantages for men over the long term. As noted in Chapter Two, participating in the wage-based economy no doubt supplied soldiers with more disposable income at first. But even so, their relatively wealthy status soon diminished

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<sup>531</sup> See Atkinson, *The Roots*, p.17.

<sup>532</sup> For historiography which makes this assumption, see Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*; and Eugene P. A. Schleh, 'The Post-War Careers of Ex-Servicemen in Ghana and Uganda', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6:2 (1968), 203–220.

once they had been discharged. This was especially true from the 1930s onwards after veterans' exemption from taxation was abolished and the promised gratuity payments set up to replace this benefit often failed to materialise.<sup>533</sup> Overall, then, how young Acholi men understood soldiering before enlistment was often vastly different to the more contradictory realities they experienced both during and after their service in the KAR.

For the most part, this chapter is concerned with Acholi soldiers whose period of service was limited to either the Second World War (1939-1945) or the Mau Mau insurgency (1952-1960). This was partly intentional given the fact this chapter is largely concerned with how Acholi recruits coped with and made meaning out of frontline combat. There can be little doubt that those *askari* who enlisted during the Second World War or the Mau Mau uprising were both exposed to, and required to commit, more acts of violence than African soldiers recruited during more peaceful times. Throughout the Second World War, Ugandan KAR troops fought in the East African Campaign (also known as the Abyssinian Campaign) against the Italians (1940-41), and the Burma Campaign against the Japanese (1942-45), for example.<sup>534</sup> During the Mau Mau uprising, the 4<sup>th</sup> (Ugandan) Battalion was deployed to fight for Britain's imperial interests in Kenya through suppressing an internal revolt predominantly headed by Kikuyu fighters.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> For more information on this, see Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp.128-13; and BNA, WO 169/7028, East Africa Command: Infantry: 3/4 Bn. KAR.

<sup>534</sup> There were a number of other campaigns which the KAR fought in during the Second World War, including the invasion of Madagascar in 1942, but these are not the focus of this discussion.

<sup>535</sup> For more information on the Mau Mau uprising, see Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (Oxford: James Currey, 1989); Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters & The Roots of Mau Mau* (Oxford: James Currey, 1987); *Mau Mau & Nationhood*, ed. by E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2003); and Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

Focusing on KAR recruits who served during the 1940s and 1950s was also, however, unavoidable given the limited source material available. The vast collection of files stored in the British National Archive or the Imperial War Museum in London, for example, provide very little information regarding African soldiers themselves.<sup>536</sup> Semi-official military histories written by British officers provide more detail regarding indigenous troops, but rarely are African voices actually heard.<sup>537</sup> Thus, given the unlikelihood of discovering significant numbers of African soldiers' diaries or letters, only through the collection of oral histories could further insights into how Acholi KAR recruits contextualised military life, as well as their post-service experiences, be uncovered. Yet for obvious reasons it was not possible to collect oral histories relating to the early colonial period including, frustratingly, the First World War. Moreover, many soldiers who continued to serve in the army following 1960 were subsequently slaughtered during Idi Amin's regime in the 1970s.<sup>538</sup> As such, the oral histories utilised throughout this chapter were typically provided by temporary recruits as opposed to career soldiers. This imposes certain limitations: temporary recruits, many of whom eagerly elected for discharge after their minimum length of service had concluded, are far more likely to have regarded military service with apathy or even negativity in comparison to career soldiers, who opted to remain in the army indefinitely. It is also, however, an important advantage. Military histories largely focus on career soldiers, who tend to leave behind more extensive written accounts and records.<sup>539</sup> Yet during the 1940s and 1950s temporary recruits

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<sup>536</sup> For more detail on this, see Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, pp.143-4.

<sup>537</sup> For example, see Grahame, *Jambo Effendi*; Grahame, *Amin and Uganda*; and John Nunneley, *Tales From The King's African Rifles* (London: Cassell & Co., 2000).

<sup>538</sup> For more information on this, see Chapter Four.

<sup>539</sup> For example, see Michelle Moyd, 'From a hurt sense of honour': Violence work and the limits of soldierly obedience on a scientific expedition in German East Africa, 1896-1897', *Slavery & Abolition*, 39:3 (2018), 579-601.

represented the numerical majority in the KAR. By focusing on these soldiers, then, this chapter provides a less conventional insight into military service and documents contrasting perspectives on army life which are equally, if not more, important to expose.

## SECTION I: CONTEXTUALISING AND COPING WITH VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS

In contrast to what is often suggested within early European narratives, African men were not born ‘natural fighters’ who relished the opportunity to engage in bloody, brutal battles.<sup>540</sup> Acholi veterans’ accounts of their military service are littered with references to the fear and hardship they experienced. Some men invented innovative ways to justify and legitimise the new forms of violence they both witnessed and participated in, while others recycled traditional coping methods in order to combat the psychological impact of modern warfare.

As indicated in Chapter Two, for the majority of the colonial period African soldiers were mostly occupied with internal security. They acted as a tool for intimidation and a coercive force which helped facilitate British colonial rule. *Aide-mémoires* written by former British officers who worked in Uganda indicate life in the

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<sup>540</sup> For example, a British Officer named William Cockcraft who served during the Second World War argued African troops ‘tended to get a bit of a blood lust you know and it was difficult to stop them [...] [they] tended to get very excited if everything was going well, you had to hold them a bit’. See, IWMA, 3935, Interview with William Gordon Latrobe Cockcraft. Another British Officer named John Macnab who served in the Burma campaign similarly described African soldiers as ‘cruel people, but awfully good soldiers’. See IWMA, 4427, Interview with John Francis Macnab.

barracks revolved around training, parading and ‘spit and polish’. Internal expeditions consisted of patrolling and ‘showing the flag’, as well as the occasional engagement to suppress any cattle raiding or ‘inter-tribal’ warfare.<sup>541</sup> Of course, British records may have understated the amount of violence engaged in by the KAR during internal security operations, most likely in order to quell suggestions of there being anti-colonial sentiment during this period, and to limit metropolitan humanitarian criticism. Even so, life within the KAR was drastically different for African soldiers who served during either the Second World War, or the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. For these soldiers, their daily routine was marred by an extraordinary amount of violence and bloody destruction.

Although there was some concern for how the *askari* would cope with modern warfare, racialised discourses which characterised African people as inherently bloodthirsty and naturally endowed with martial skills dominated colonial accounts. One British officer, for example, proclaimed each African soldier ‘had a cruel streak in him and would think nothing of inflicting injury on his fellow kind’.<sup>542</sup> Similarly, another British officer commenting on the Ugandan Battalion suggested, ‘they didn’t want to go to school, they wanted to fight! And beat up the neighbouring tribes [...] they weren’t frightened of [the] enemy [...] they loved being soldiers’.<sup>543</sup> As well as reflecting tendencies towards racial categorisation, comments such as these are probably best explained as an attempt to justify and defend the use of African subjects

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<sup>541</sup> IWMA, 3934, Interview with Hugh Alastair Borradaile; OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 16, Francis Michael Shaw, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1948-50; OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 4, Patrick Walter Forbes of Corse, served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1946-1947; and OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 3, Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse.

<sup>542</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield.

<sup>543</sup> Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

for promoting imperial interests and protecting British colonial rule. Conversely, as will be demonstrated below, oral histories offer a far more nuanced account of African experiences during frontline combat and violent engagements more broadly.

For certain, some Acholi soldiers interviewed for this project had effectively internalised any feelings of fear or regret and thus echoed idealised representations of themselves as courageous soldiers who found participating in violence both exciting and exhilarating. As one KAR veteran who had served during the Mau Mau insurgency expressed:

When we were fighting, it was very enjoyable. Because it was like when you went hunting and you saw an edible rat [*Thryonomys* sp.] running away, you must make sure that rat does not disappear. You have to kill it. There was no fear.<sup>544</sup>

Some Acholi KAR recruits even returned home with pieces of the men they had killed in battle for use during local celebrations. As one Acholi elder described:

I remember there was a time when an old man fought in the Second World War and killed a white man who had had a beard. He cut off that part, the jaws, he skinned it properly and dried it out and then came back home with it to celebrate, and they put it in the shrine.<sup>545</sup>

A. C. A. Wright similarly claimed in an article for the *Uganda Journal* in 1936, ‘there are many stories in the countryside of the Acholi soldiers in the East African campaign

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<sup>544</sup> Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959.

<sup>545</sup> Interview with 38, Female, Pece, 22 July 2016.

bringing back mementoes of the men they killed'.<sup>546</sup> Among the oral histories collected for this project, however, expressions of enthusiasm for violence and warfare were relatively rare. In general, the most positive descriptions of soldiering were provided by KAR veterans who never actually engaged in frontline combat. As one Acholi veteran who served in the army up until and after independence, for example, explained, 'those days when there was no serious war, you could just eat the salary freely. There were no battles, so that was not a burden at all, there was just enjoyment'.<sup>547</sup>

In comparison, those veterans who had served during particularly violent moments in colonial history commonly described feeling a combination of fear, disgust and guilt. Many found the level of bloodshed they witnessed and the number of casualties they observed particularly distressing. As one interviewee who fought during the Second World War in Burma stressed, 'You got frightened. There was death of course [...] It bothered me. I should not have joined [...] Life in the army was not simple; it was just death. I should not have joined'.<sup>548</sup> Another KAR veteran explained how some soldiers would even 'defecate on themselves [...] Because [of] the fear'.<sup>549</sup> The fact that a number of Acholi KAR recruits committed suicide during the Second World War further illustrates the psychological challenges *askari* faced whilst on active service. One Acholi soldier named Zakayo Olwedo, for example, was

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<sup>546</sup> A. C. A. Wright, 'Some Note on Acholi Religious Ceremonies', *The Uganda Journal*, 3 (1936), 175-203.

<sup>547</sup> Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; Similar statements were made by Acholi soldiers who served after independence, see Interview with 155, Male, Pece, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA 1981-89; Interview with 106, Male, Palenga, 13 October 2016, served with UA and UNLA 1964-1986; Interview with 108, Male, Gulu, 14 October 2016, served with UA 1968-1986; Interview with 98, Male, Gulu, 8 October 2016, served with UNLA 1980-1986.

<sup>548</sup> Interview with 29, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1941-46.

<sup>549</sup> Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71.



found dead in February 1944 having hung himself. Just six months later, another Acholi recruit named Ali Banyia died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.<sup>550</sup>

What the above evidence ultimately indicates is that military service and exposure to violent contexts did not systematically result in versions of masculinity characterised by exaggerated militarism, the celebration of war and the glorification of military values, as has often been proposed.<sup>551</sup> Instead, personal experiences of war often entrenched an abhorrence of violence and stimulated masculine identities which devalued militancy. The same held true for many postcolonial soldiers, who despite their initial expectations of military service, similarly loathed the violence they witnessed and subsequently wanted to return home. As one Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) veteran who served during the war against Idi Amin explained:

[The war] was rough, because when some people were cut off from Mbarara [...] The people there were eating rats [*Rattus* sp.] because there was no food [...] It was serious because lorries came full of dead bodies. The blood that flowed, you saw it. You came back [home] perceiving that war was not nice.<sup>552</sup>

On active service, then, Acholi KAR recruits were challenged with how to articulate and cope with their experiences of fear and guilt within a context which

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<sup>550</sup> UNA, F.078/65/04-16, Secretariat Topical, Series F, Box 7, Roll of Honour-Casualties, 1946.

<sup>551</sup> For an opposing argument, see Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow*, p.7. Decker argues, 'Out of militarism comes militarised versions of masculinity and femininity'.

<sup>552</sup> Interview with 155, Male, Pece, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA 1981-89. For additional examples, see Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA and UPDF 1986-96; and Interview with 92, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with the UNLA 1984-1989.

demanded daily demonstrations of both heroic self-sacrifice and the capacity to kill. Some Acholi soldiers managed their fear and subsequent dissatisfaction with military life through absconding. Desertion levels during the colonial period are no doubt difficult to evaluate. This is primarily due to inadequate record keeping, but colonial attempts to depict soldiering as a prestigious profession no African would forfeit and African soldiers as doggedly loyal to the British, have likely also contributed to this lack of reliable data.<sup>553</sup> Nevertheless, a number of Acholi veterans emphasised that the fear created through fighting meant absconding was common amongst the African rank-and-file. As one former combatant explained, ‘people were just escaping [...] They feared fighting and the hard work that is involved in soldiering’.<sup>554</sup>

Yet for *askari* fighting abroad during the Second World War, desertion was not always a viable option. Although these soldiers presumably experienced the most violence, navigating their way home would have proven practically impossible. As one veteran who served during the Burma Campaign suggested, then, ‘The Acholis were not happy, but during that period the Acholis did not desert, people were at a distant place, thus how shall you find your way back?’<sup>555</sup> In addition, as was noted in the preceding chapter, absconding from the army was associated with cowardliness and those captured during futile attempts to escape faced scorn and humiliation upon

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<sup>553</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King’s African Rifles Papers, Box 18, Charles St. John Wallis, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1949-55; OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 11, Col. St. L. Morris; OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 1, Kenneth Donald Bright; and Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

<sup>554</sup> Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947. For additional examples, see Interview with 2, Male, Kadedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A; Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; and Interview with 21, Male, Laroo, 26 May 2016, served in the KAR 1947-56.

<sup>555</sup> Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45. Having said this, desertion was not completely impossible during the Burma Campaign, see Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.33.

their return. Desertion, therefore, presented an internal conflict for those combatants who despite their subjective experiences of fear, imagined themselves to be — and wanted to be celebrated in their communities as — brave and courageous.<sup>556</sup> Consequently, as the following extract provided by a veteran who served during the Second World War indicates, many recruits could only orchestrate effective protest against the circumstances of military life by refusing to re-enlist after they had completed their initial period of service:

There was anger because our colleagues died, they were killed [...] I saw bad things there [whilst in the army], so my interest was not to work in the army again [...] The fear that came was because people were [killed] [...] Would you have truly gone to join the army again after what you witnessed? We just had to leave work and return home.<sup>557</sup>

Colonial military records from 1945 corroborate this. As was written in one such report, ‘with very few exceptions it appears that Askari treat the idea of signing for further service [...] with distrust and aversion’.<sup>558</sup>

With regards to coping with feelings of guilt, many soldiers were able to curb their moral anxieties through justifying and rationalising the acts they committed whilst on the battlefield. Distancing themselves from the decision-making process was a key way in which Acholi soldiers did this. In an attempt to free themselves of any private feelings of shame or regret colonial recruits constructed an internal narrative which held the British officers, or the nature of military service more widely,

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<sup>556</sup> For more information on why desertion was unfeasible for many African soldiers, see Moyd, ‘We don’t want to die for nothing’.

<sup>557</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>558</sup> BNA, CO 532/215/12, Notes on Morale.

accountable for the violence committed. Statements within Acholi veterans' testimonies which insinuate the violence performed by colonial armies was outside of the African rank-and-file's jurisdiction, then, were often employed to defend and justify the soldier's individual use of physical force. As the statement below provided by an Acholi recruit who served during the Mau Mau insurgency exemplifies:

When you joined the army, there were strict rules there, you put your thumb print, meaning that regardless of whether it was your father or your mother, you had to kill [...] You know, killing people, for us the soldiers we felt it was very painful. But even if you were fearful and you did not want to go to the frontline, you had to go and do it. Once the army commander had instructed you to do something, you had to go and do it [...] even though you rejected it [...] [and] you felt bitter inside you. But the laws and the rules forced you to do it [...] Some [Kenyan fighters during the Mau Mau uprising] even had no weapons, but regardless you just gunned that person down [...] it disturbed me, it made a few mad.<sup>559</sup>

Veterans today even describe themselves as having been akin to 'dogs', reluctantly yet unequivocally at the command of their British officers whilst on active duty. As one veteran who served during the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya stated:

Just like when you adopt a dog and you start raising it, and you start teaching your dog how to hunt [...] your dog must follow your command. So we were just like a dog that the British brought up and the British sent us on those

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<sup>559</sup> Interview with 35, Male, Pabo, 4 July 2016, served in the KAR 1948-58.

fellows [meaning the Kikuyu fighters]. There was no way we could not do what the British wanted.<sup>560</sup>

Thus, the context of coercion embedded within military life, revolving around a strict command hierarchy and harsh consequences incurred for indiscipline, helped colonial soldiers emotionally cope with committing violence in the moment, when on the battlefield. And yet, the testimonies produced by Acholi KAR veterans probably also reflect their ability to later modify and reshape their understanding of military service under British rule, especially in light of the growing anti-colonial sentiment which characterised the years preceding and following independence. Some veterans, for example, may have reframed their memories after being discharged, placing more emphasis upon force and intimidation in an attempt to discredit accusations that indigenous soldiers serving in the KAR acted as colonial collaborators. Thus, through portraying their commanding officers as ultimately responsible for the violence committed, Acholi KAR soldiers were able to construct and vocalise a more dignified and respectable narrative concerning their experiences of ‘fighting for Britain’ after their return home.

An alternative way of coping with guilt comprised of adapting local understandings regarding acceptable battle tactics, especially in response to those supposedly utilised by the enemy. A clear example of this, which was consistently referred to throughout the veterans’ accounts, relates to inhumane acts of physical force rumoured to have been used against Japanese soldiers during the long drawn out Burma Campaign. These included decapitation, mutilation, the public cremation of

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<sup>560</sup> Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959. For an additional example, see Interview with 67, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016, served in the KAR, period of service N/A.

corpses, and the threat of cannibalism. These forms of violence, which would normally have been perceived as wrongdoing amongst the Acholi, were actually defended by many veterans. For some, this was on the grounds that the Japanese soldiers used similarly brutal tactics in battle. When asked about stories of decapitation one veteran replied, for example:

It happened in a lot of fights, many Japanese people died [...] They [the Japanese] also fought you using their own tactics. They even used a knife to cut you [likely meaning ‘to castrate you’]. So it was not bad because you all wanted to defeat them [the Japanese].<sup>561</sup>

Thus, it was because the Japanese battle tactics were interpreted as also violating norms and accepted practices of warfare that some Acholi veterans described normally despised forms of violence as having been used legitimately in retaliation. As one Second World War veteran stressed, ‘How those fellows were acting towards you, is what caused you to change the tactics that you had to use against them. Do you see? So that you could defeat them’.<sup>562</sup>

Other Acholi veterans claimed tactics such as decapitation were justified because the Japanese soldiers refused to be taken captive and actually requested to be killed in this manner. As one veteran claimed:

When you arrested a Japanese person, he would not want to be put in jail so he just showed you that you should cut off his neck [...] It doesn’t take long

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<sup>561</sup> Interview with 29, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1941-46. In the Acholi language there is no specific term for castration, instead the verb *ɲɔ̃lɔ̃* is used which simply means ‘to cut’. See Crazzolara, *A study of the Acooli language*, p.327.

<sup>562</sup> Interview with 18, Male, Gulu, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-62.

even. Just get the knife, and very fast. As if you are slaughtering a hen [...] They did not want to be imprisoned.<sup>563</sup>

While not proclaiming Japanese soldiers specifically requested to be beheaded, British officers' accounts similarly claim the enemy would rather have died than surrendered. As one such report declared:

One major difference between fighting out here and fighting the Germans is the almost universal refusal of the Japs to surrender [...] there is no doubt that the Japanese soldier does obey the order to fight to the last round and the last man. There have been many cases in which the Japanese have been surrounded that they have committed suicide with grenades and other means rather than surrender.<sup>564</sup>

This notion regarding the Japanese soldiers' preference to die on the battlefield was additionally used by Acholi veterans to defend tactics reportedly employed to terrify them into surrendering, such as the threat of cannibalism and mutilation. As one former KAR recruit who served in Burma explained:

The British commented [to any Japanese captives] that, "you look, the Acholis eat human beings". For others whom they arrested, they started pricking [meaning piercing] their eyes, they just pricked their eyes one side, and said "go and show your other team mates". That is why the Japanese came to accept that now the war should end. They surrendered.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-49.

<sup>564</sup> BNA, WO 216/97, Situation Report on Burma: The Japanese Advance West of the River Chindwin.

<sup>565</sup> Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947.

It is not only Acholi accounts which provide a rationale and justification for the use of these forms of violence during the Second World War. Historian David Killingray documented similar statements within his seminal research concerning African soldiers serving in Burma. Musa Kihwelo, for example, is quoted as writing ‘When they started to pretend to eat the “meat” the other Japanese captives who surrendered would flee for their lives. This was intentional so that after they fled in terror they would spread the news that they were fighting against cannibals’.<sup>566</sup> Similarly, Kenyan Mutili Musoma recorded killing many Japanese soldiers using a *panga* because they refused to accept being arrested, ‘the Japanese was hard trained. He can’t accept to surrender’.<sup>567</sup>

Chapter One demonstrated that interpretations regarding what constituted wrongdoing as opposed to the legitimate use of physical force were susceptible to change throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The evidence noted above relating to the Second World War further illustrates that definitions of acceptable violence were flexible. Acholi soldiers did not arrive in Burma thinking tactics such as decapitation and mutilation were tolerable, but during the campaign the moral economy of violence which dictated normative behaviour in war had to be modified and revised according to the needs of the context Acholi soldiers were fighting in. Of course, reports of brutal and cruel behaviour during conflicts are common, and not always substantiated by complementary evidence. Thus, whether such forms of violence were actually employed by African soldiers during the Second World War is almost impossible to determine based on oral evidence alone. What we do know,

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<sup>566</sup> BBC Africa Service, Musa K. Kihwelo to Martin Plaut, dd. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 18 July 1989. As cited in Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.158.

<sup>567</sup> Christopher Somerville, *Our War: How the British Commonwealth Fought the Second World War* (London: Cassell and Co., 1998), p.257. As cited in Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.159.



however, is that many Acholi soldiers began to view these tactics as not only acceptable but necessary.

Despite attempts to combat feelings of fear, guilt and regret, many Acholi KAR soldiers still experienced mental health issues both whilst deployed and after having been discharged. The extent of mental trauma African soldiers had to contend with is impossible to compute through colonial records which were written at a time when mental illness was either contested or ignored. Even British officers interviewed more recently claim psychological dysfunction such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to be ‘an invention of modern society’, or inapplicable to ‘such a primitive society’ where performing violence ‘was second nature’.<sup>568</sup> More recent historiography concerning African servicemen has likewise dedicated little space to understanding the mental scars of war — preferring to focus on the more easily measurable debits of violence, death and physical injury.<sup>569</sup> That some Acholi recruits suffered from mental instability owing to their experiences of modern warfare is, however, evident from their accounts of visions, dreams, and a ‘madness’ which engulfed them.<sup>570</sup> As one veteran who served with the KAR during the late colonial period explained:

Dreams were the ones that disturbed me a lot; there were many dreams. You moved into dangerous places, like an ambush where land mines exploded vehicles [...] So those are the things that brought about a lot of dreams. Even up to now, I still dream that I am a soldier, it comes over me and it is as if I

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<sup>568</sup> Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960; and Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

<sup>569</sup> For example, see Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*; Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*; Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*; and Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*.

<sup>570</sup> For example, see Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71; and Interview with 90, Male, Koc, 4 October 2016, served in the KAR, period of service U/A.

am a soldier and I just go to fight [...] It became difficult for me [when back at home]. I was out of my senses.<sup>571</sup>

For many Acholi KAR recruits, coping with psychological dysfunction consisted of drawing on local healing practices already embedded within local culture. Acholi speakers generally conceptualised outward displays of psychological trauma or mental instability following violent encounters as resulting from *cen*, the polluting, malignant spirit of the slain, which if left to its own devices could cause the perpetrator to become unstable, susceptible to outbursts of destructive and violent behaviour, and thus a threat to himself and the wider community.<sup>572</sup> Killing, then, traditionally necessitated a lengthy cleansing ritual to free the slayer of *cen*, alongside any of the mental health issues associated with this evil spirit. Of course, a number of Acholi veterans who had recently converted to Christianity claimed such rituals to eradicate *cen* were meaningless, or even ‘an act of Satan’.<sup>573</sup> But even so, although the KAR was increasingly Christian in character, the ceremonies associated with eradicating *cen* continued to provide many Acholi soldiers with a widely accepted, tangible way to respond to the destructive psychological implications of violent engagements during colonial military service. As one veteran who fought in the Second World War described:

If you killed from there, you came back home and a ritual was performed [...] then you would not be disturbed. Very many people who killed came back

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<sup>571</sup> Interview with 34, Male, Awere, 28 June 2016, served in KAR, UA, and UNLA 1962-1986.

<sup>572</sup> ACR, B/186/6, file named ‘Cultura Acioli, Kitgum’, 1985; Interview with 95, Male, Atiak, 6 October 2016; and Interview with 119, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>573</sup> For example, see Interview with 2, Male, Katedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A.

and performed such rituals [...] They did not experience any problems after that.<sup>574</sup>

These traditional ways of coping and healing were thus highly effective against severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress, including aggression and flashbacks, which not only caused personal suffering, but also considerable social disruption.<sup>575</sup> They proved so useful, in fact, that although not formally directed, British officers generally made the decision to accommodate indigenous religious beliefs and accompanying practices, lest a circumstance arise capable of jeopardising the morale and physical health of their troops. One British officer, for example, commented that:

One must not overlook the power of the witch doctor and the native belief in their powers. An African could be ill or have a sickness which a doctor just could not heal. The only cure was to send an Askari on compassionate leave and he would return quite fit and well.<sup>576</sup>

Modern warfare did, however, require many Acholi KAR soldiers to partially renegotiate and modify local healing and cleansing practices relating to violence. The Second World War in particular introduced Acholi soldiers to unfamiliar combat situations, including the bloody and brutal nature of armed conflict fought using advanced military technology. Depending on his position within the battle formation, an Acholi soldier might kill a number of times during one encounter — though often

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<sup>574</sup> Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-49.

<sup>575</sup> For more information on traditional ways of coping, see Thomas Harlacher, Fancis Xavier Okot, Caroline Aloyo Obonyo, Mychelle Balthazard and Ronald Atkinson, 'Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi' (unpublished paper, sponsored by the Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Germany), pp.114-116; and Thomas Harlacher, 'Traditional ways of coping with consequences of traumatic stress in Acholiland' (unpublished thesis, University of Freiburg, 2009).

<sup>576</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield.

unknowingly. Because of this lack of certainty regarding whether or not he had killed, an Acholi soldier was consequently unable to discern whether a cleansing ritual to rid himself of *cen* was required. As a result of this conundrum, KAR soldiers adjusted and redefined which acts of physical force necessitated cleansing. During colonial military service, therefore, only when a soldier could distinguish and identify the specific individual he shot was it regarded as genuinely killing and thus an action demanding purification. As one soldier commented, ‘I cannot say that I killed people. The bullets that I fired from here “tititititi” killed a lot of people and so did anyone count the number of people? [...] That was not cleansed, who did you shoot?’<sup>577</sup> Mental instability as a result of *cen* was subsequently thought to only manifest in those who shot at close quarters, rather than those who fired long range weapons.<sup>578</sup> As the following extract highlights, elderly non-combatants suggest the *askari* orchestrated this redefinition whilst away on active duty, yet it was seemingly accepted by the local communities the soldiers returned to:

They the soldiers said that if it was a person that they had shot face to face [...] if they shot one directly and they knew they had, then they would come home and perform the ritual. Because he had shot directly and he was sure which one he had shot. But, for these ones where many bullets had been fired and nobody knew whose bullet it was, in that case he would not know whether he shot a person or not and therefore they would not perform the ritual.<sup>579</sup>

Other Acholi KAR soldiers, who were able to identify who they had killed in battle, invented unique but effective ways to combat the polluting impact of *cen*. They

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<sup>577</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>578</sup> Interview with 26, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1953-1959.

<sup>579</sup> Interview with 83, Male, Pabo, 23 September 2016.

did this because serving away from home meant they were separated from local spiritual leaders, who with their unique access to specialised knowledge, typically performed the cleansing rituals. The newly devised practices ranged from dripping water from the barrel of a gun into one's mouth, to licking and swallowing the blood of the enemy killed.<sup>580</sup> John Iliffe has claimed cleansing rituals amongst the Nuer of South Sudan were later adapted in a similar fashion: 'No longer did every homicide demand purification [...] it was enough to drink water from an empty cartridge case'.<sup>581</sup>

This process of adapting and revising customary practises in response to unfamiliar circumstances does not symbolise a reduction in the importance of indigenous spiritual belief systems. Instead, the lengths Acholi soldiers went to whilst on active service to minimise the impact of *cen* demonstrates the durability and resilience of local spiritual ideologies and imaginings amongst the KAR rank-and-file. There is a danger of exaggerating the impact military service had upon indigenous beliefs held by African recruits. Scattered throughout the historiographical record is this notion that colonial military service had a (for lack of a better term) 'modernising' impact upon African soldiers. Parsons, for example, has argued that by granting African recruits special benefits, and forbidding them from wearing examples of ethnic dress, the British inadvertently weakened 'tribal' loyalties and 'tribal traditions' through producing a distinct military class.<sup>582</sup> Similarly Myles Osborne maintains African soldiers — especially those who served abroad — were exposed to a whole host of new political ideas, practices and philosophies which empowered them and

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<sup>580</sup> Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-49; Interview with 144, Male, Pajule, 16 November 2016.

<sup>581</sup> Iliffe, *Honour*, p.352.

<sup>582</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, p.6, p.55.

removed them from the lives they had left behind.<sup>583</sup> Killingray has likewise echoed that, ‘Life in the army, and particularly overseas, served as a startling educative process for large numbers of soldiers drawn from rural areas [...] [it] offered them a view of an amazing world to which they rapidly adapted’.<sup>584</sup> The British military establishment certainly conceptualised colonial military service in these terms. As the following recruitment poster indicates, soldiering was advertised as having a homogenising effect upon African troops and as facilitating the disintegration of so-called ‘tribal’ traditions.

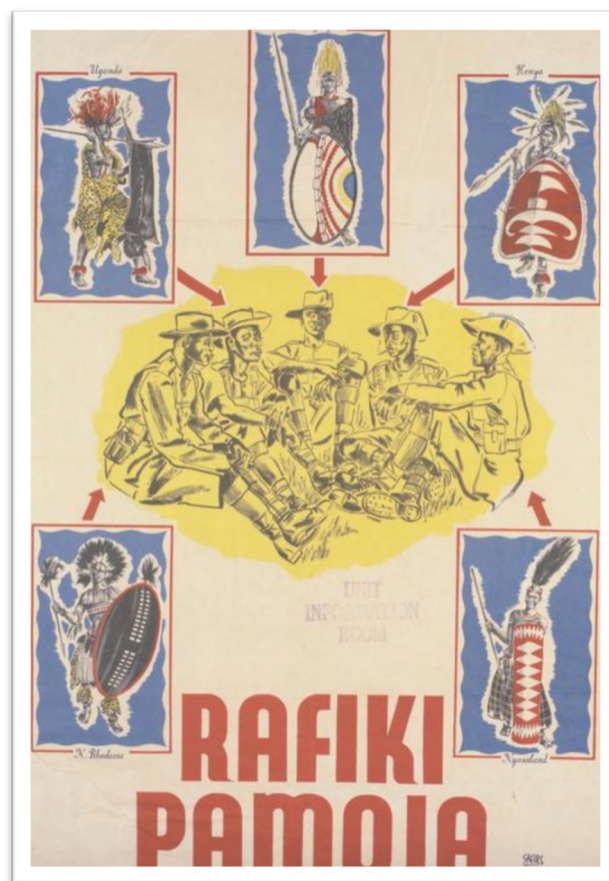


Figure 4:1, KAR Poster Depicting Impact of Military Service <sup>585</sup>

<sup>583</sup> Osborne, p.7, pp.133-5.

<sup>584</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.103.

<sup>585</sup> IWMA, Art.IWM PST 15301, poster entitled *Rafiki Pamoja* (Friends Together).

The ‘modernising’ potential of military service was also widely agreed upon amongst European missionaries, although some argued it would ultimately prove disruptive as opposed to advantageous to the colonial enterprise. As the Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Rev. Moore argued in 1942, for example:

The Acholi are a renowned fighting tribe and considerable numbers of them join the K.A.R. [...] One of our major causes for concern is what is going to happen to the askaris when the war is over and they return to their villages. Most of them had never seen a railway or a town before they went on active service and now that they receive good clothes, boots, etc., excellent rations and good pay and have “seen the world,” the question is how will they settle down to village life again — if they *will*?<sup>586</sup>

What the Acholi example illustrates, however, is that despite exposure to novel ideologies and the supposed homogenising impact of military service, *askari* did not systematically accept nor embrace all that they had witnessed. Military service may have provided African recruits the opportunity to observe and absorb, but the extent to which new ideas and experiences dominated their attitudes and actions whilst they were on active service, as well as upon their return home, is questionable.<sup>587</sup> For the Acholi, local spiritual beliefs, which we might tentatively term indigenous religions, held a pervasive power and influence over the recruits’ conceptual understanding of the world around them.

To briefly conclude, then, few would doubt the capacity for military service to expose recruits to new ideas and practices. But soldiering has historically, and

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<sup>586</sup> CMSA, CMS/AF/AL, Annual Letters 1940-1959, Letter from Re. Moore, Upper Nile 1942.

<sup>587</sup> See Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.115.

continues to, involve periods of terrible hardship and brutality, during which men seek out both physical and psychological security and stability, often through locally prescribed spiritual belief and observance.

## SECTION II: COLONIAL SOLDIERS AND EX-SERVICEMEN: SHIFTING NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY, HONOUR AND RESPECTABILITY

There is a general consensus amongst historians that African colonial servicemen represented a privileged class of labour aristocrats whose military service earned them unrivalled honour and authority.<sup>588</sup> Conversely, Acholi veterans' accounts illustrate a more complicated and complex reality. Colonial military service did not systematically grant African soldiers economic and social superiority. As will be discussed throughout this section, the social status colonial soldiers enjoyed remained both ambiguous and contested. In particular, Acholi recruits' experiences of colonial military service were inescapably shaped by their race. Moreover, although *some* Acholi recruits were afforded respect within their host communities upon their return, others were feared, or experienced scorn and harassment based on jealousy and resentment. Soldiers who suffered from physical or psychological disabilities as a consequence of their service found it particularly challenging to occupy an honourable position within local gendered hierarchies upon their return. Yet even for those

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<sup>588</sup> For example, see Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.4-5; Osborne, p.160; Marjomaa, pp.413-432, pp.421-22; and Timothy John Lovering, 'Authority and Identity: Malawian Soldiers in Britain's Colonial Army, 1891-1964' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Stirling, 2002).



soldiers who did initially acquire social recognition, their privileged status was often short lived once the initial jubilation at their return began to diminish.

Within the context of colonial military service African recruits were treated as racially inferior. Paternalistic attitudes, which cast Africans as eternal children, shaped how colonised recruits were treated by their British officers, and in turn, framed African soldiers' individual experiences of masculinity and adulthood on an everyday level.<sup>589</sup> One British officer who served during the 1940s, for example, proclaimed 'the Ugandan African soldier was in many ways somewhat child-like [...] [they] had to be treated to some extent like children'.<sup>590</sup> Racial discrimination impacted every aspect of military life, whether it was the food eaten, the uniform worn, the wages paid, the rank a soldier could aspire to achieve, or the amount of leave granted. As one Acholi veteran argued 'There was racism, for example, the British did not want us to eat together with them at the same table [...] it was bad because both those with white skin and those with black skin were created by God'.<sup>591</sup> The British were well aware of the enmity such racial discrimination incited amongst some African recruits. In a 1945 censorship review of African soldiers' letters home it was reported, for example, that, 'A few writers show discontent and resentment in regard to the Africans' status and alleged lack of rights compared with those of Europeans. An extract reads "We want equal pay for equal work; we want to see that the African receives minimum wages and regulated conditions"<sup>592</sup>.

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<sup>589</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, pp.12-20.

<sup>590</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 16, Francis Michael Shaw.

<sup>591</sup> Interview with 35, Male, Pabo, 4 July 2016, served in the KAR 1948-58.

<sup>592</sup> BNA, CO536/215, Extracts from African Affairs Fortnightly Review, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1945. For similar statements, see UNA, F.001/15, Secretariat Topical, Series F, Box 1, KAR African Ranks, Leave conditions, letter dated 1939.

These relentless reminders of the constructed racial hierarchy continuously challenged the African soldiers' access to respect and honour. There was, no doubt, a tendency for racial categories to break down during frontline combat.<sup>593</sup> A number of Acholi veterans, particularly those who served during the Second World War, thus recall their British officers with some warmth. As one former *askari* stressed, 'There was some segregation [...] But during war, we joined up together [...] if something [like a bomb] was dropped, it would fall on you all [...] There you were together'.<sup>594</sup> Even so, outside of battle situations the omnipresent derogatory and prejudiced views held by many British officers often culminated in African troops being subjected to both belligerence and humiliation. As one former KAR soldier explained:

They [the British officers] were aggressive towards us. Others insulted us saying, "You bloody idiot!" We did not know the language [...] It made me very angry. Other whites would call you, and ask "Do you know God?", so you told them "I know" [...] and so they told you, "You are lying, God is us, the whites, and even if I killed you, no one can strangle [reprimand] me". Those were the bad things we observed.<sup>595</sup>

Even British accounts recognise the callous behaviour some KAR officers demonstrated towards the African rank-and-file. One British officer, for example, suggested, 'Those with less patience [...] occasionally abused African NCOs [non-commissioned officers] in front of junior ranks, which led to resentment, and loss of face for the African NCO's'.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>593</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.158.

<sup>594</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>595</sup> Interview with 32, Male, Lugore Market, 23 June 2016, served in the KAR 1952-58.

<sup>596</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 3, Henry Kendal Percival Chavasse.

A long-standing suggestion within institutionalised military history narratives has been that African recruits had insufficient access to food, clothing, and adequate shelter before their enlistment into the KAR. Military service, therefore, supposedly transformed African soldiers into something of a *corps d'élite* through granting them access to a uniform, three square meals a day, and a barracks to sleep in. British officers' accounts are littered with statements such as 'prior to his enlistment into the KAR an African quite often had known the meaning of famine and hunger'.<sup>597</sup> In addition, the military attire is almost invariably described as having been treasured by the African recruits because '[for] many of the askaris their uniforms were probably the first proper [i.e. western] clothes that they had ever owned'.<sup>598</sup> One British officer writing for the *Uganda Herald* in March 1945 echoed this interpretation when he claimed the *askari* he had accompanied home on leave had revelled at the idea of impressing local African communities (whom they now reportedly referred to as 'savages') with their new scrubbed and spotless clothing.<sup>599</sup> KAR advertisements, such as the poster depicted below, likewise encapsulated this notion that military service provided African men with a means to escape the challenges of acute poverty through material improvement. The poster reads, 'Do YOU need a strong body, a good salary, delicious meals and smart clothes'?

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<sup>597</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield.

<sup>598</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, King's African Rifles Papers, Box 11, Richard Anthony Malyn, British Officer served with 4<sup>th</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Bns. KAR 1940-43.

<sup>599</sup> A Military Observer, 'East Africans Leave Route From Middle East', *The Uganda Herald*, 28 March 1945.

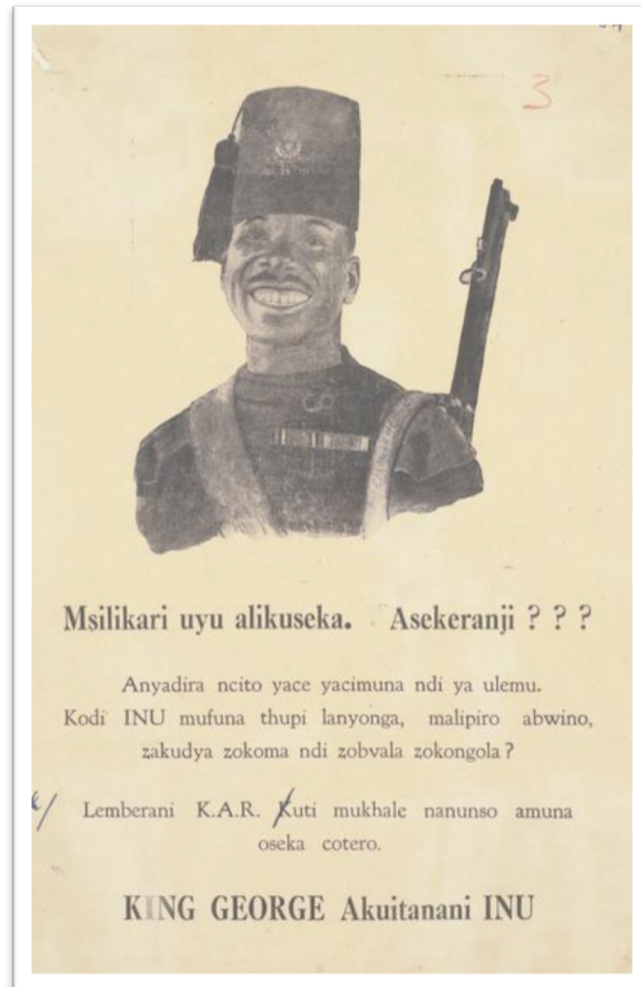


Figure 4:2, Advertisement for KAR<sup>600</sup>

Finally, similar ideas regarding colonial military service can additionally be found within contemporary Africanist scholarship. Myles Osborne, for example, has suggested the military boots 'were a mark of status in communities where many went barefoot, or wore roughly hewn shoes'.<sup>601</sup> Whether African soldiers themselves interpreted their quality of life before enlistment in this way is, however, debatable.

It is important to remember that people's expectations and aspirations are necessarily different having been constructed through diverse lived experiences. Is it

<sup>600</sup> IWMA, Art.IWM PST 15340, poster entitled 'Msilikari Uyu Alikuseka. Asekeranji?'.  
<sup>601</sup> Osborne, p.140.

logical to presume African communities held in high regard certain commodities simply because they had previously not had access to them? Clearly, military uniforms represented a form of prestige and status amongst some Acholi communities at certain points in history. When CMS missionary Albert Lloyd visited Acholiland in 1904, for example, chiefs and well-to-do individuals allegedly aspired to wear cast-off soldiers' coats: 'How ever torn and discoloured they may be', Lloyd asserted, 'they form the state dress of the "upper ten" in Acholiland'.<sup>602</sup> Lloyd supports his claims within his book entitled *Uganda to Khartoum* by including the following photograph of *Rwot Awic*, a famous Acholi chief, dressed in early colonial military attire.

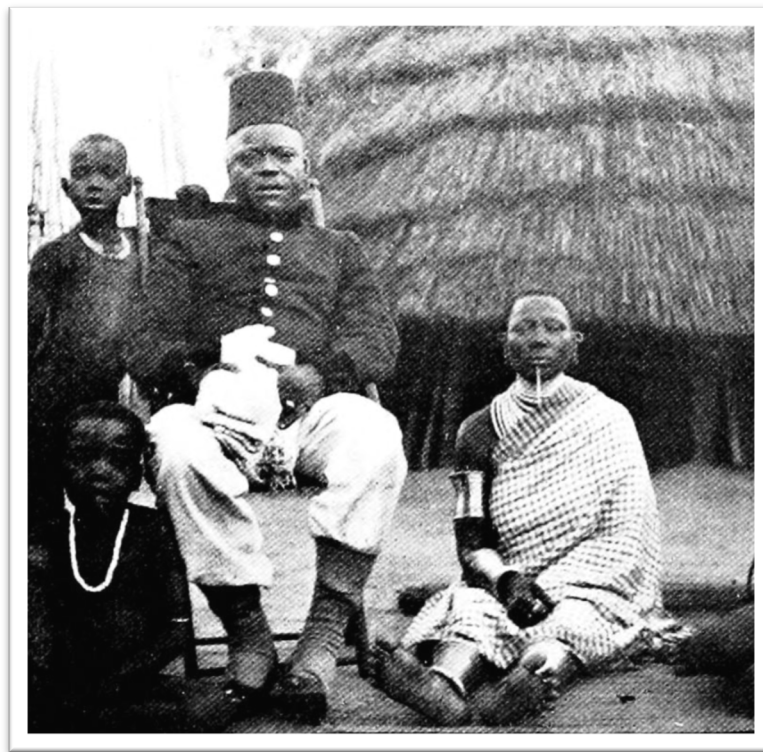


Figure 4:3, *Rwot Awic* of the Acholi Chiefdom Payira<sup>603</sup>

<sup>602</sup> 'Extracts from "Mengo Notes", pp.82-99.

<sup>603</sup> Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, pp.252-253.

Even so, we need to be cautious of assuming western demonstrations of wealth, such as certain types of clothing, were consistently associated with authority and affluence by African soldiers themselves, or by their communities when they returned home. One regimental medical officer's experiences in Uganda during the 1950s effectively illustrates this point.

An early safari was to the closed district of Karamoja peopled by tall, handsome and dignified Half-Hamites [...] They had elaborate hairstyles and wore only a thin cloth around the shoulders for sleeping out at night with the cattle. As a consequence we needed to have uniforms with us for any recruits. Later I asked one of the successfully recruited Karamajong [sic], who was about to go on leave, what he did about clothing. He said he would strip off at the District boundary as people at his home would laugh at him in clothes.<sup>604</sup>

Most of the Acholi veterans interviewed for this study demonstrated indifference and apathy whilst answering questions about their uniforms. When asked whether he liked the military attire, one such veteran argued, 'Since I was already there, I had to wear it. Can you refuse what you have been given? You just had to wear it [...] if you did not wear it, you would be charged and taken to jail'.<sup>605</sup> In addition to this, archival research indicates that the boots in particular were initially perceived as more of an inconvenience than a symbol of social prestige. As one British officer stressed 'all

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<sup>604</sup> Description sent in an email attachment to the author. British Medical Officer, RAMC RMO, served with 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-60.

<sup>605</sup> Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A. For an additional example, see Interview with 12, Male, Koro, 4 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-46.

they wanted to do was go barefooted, you know that is how they were accustomed to it'.<sup>606</sup> Similarly, another British officer emphasised:

Boots [...] the African soldier found very trying and fitting a man with a pair of boots was a nightmare [...] there were occasions when they marched with their boots slung around the neck because their feet were so sore in boots to which they were not accustomed.<sup>607</sup>

Such comments are further supported by an article written by J. C. Worker for the *Uganda Journal* concerning Ugandan troops preparing for war against Italy in 1940. Worker suggests the boots were identified as a hindrance and burden by the *askari* who were forced to wear them: 'The Battalion entrained at Nairobi for Nanyuki, and then began a three-day march to Isiolo. The troops, who had been issued with boots for the first time about a week previously, didn't enjoy this walk, and the boots were not popular'.<sup>608</sup>

In addition to this, it did not escape the African soldiers' notice that their uniforms were of poorer quality than those worn by the British. For some Acholi *askari* therefore, rather than a mark of status, their uniforms served as a daily reminder of their subordinate and inferior position within the context of the colonial armed forces. As one veteran explained:

The British used to wear very good clothes, [but] they used to give us collarless clothes [...] We did not feel good [...] Their shirts had collars and

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<sup>606</sup> Interview with 163, Male, UK, 2 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1953-63.

<sup>607</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 17, Carl August Hendrik Swift.

<sup>608</sup> J. C. Worker, 'The 4<sup>th</sup> (Uganda) K.A.R. in Abyssinia and Burma', *Uganda Journal*, 12:1 (1948), 52-57 (p.53).

they even used to put on good trousers, but ours here had no pockets. So that made us think that the British were looking down on us [...] that angered us. For we should have been equal.<sup>609</sup>

The picture below of a group of *askari* with Major C. F. Broomfield depicts the collarless shirts worn by African troops in comparison to the collared shirts worn by British officers.<sup>610</sup>



Figure 4:4, Variation in Uniform Style for European and African Soldiers

Military clothing was thus not always interpreted as a symbol of prestige or superiority. Instead, uniforms were perhaps deemed most valuable by African soldiers when the various components could be sold to supplement their wages. As one British officer noted ‘[T]hey went off [on leave] looking incredibly smart and came back looking

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<sup>609</sup> Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45.

<sup>610</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield.



incredibly scruffy, because what they had actually done was, [they had] sold their uniform in the village'.<sup>611</sup>

Finally, this interpretation that African KAR soldiers experienced a better standard of living in comparison to their civilian counterparts ignores the varying contexts within which they served. As opposed to conceptualising themselves as always occupying a privileged or honourable position, there were periods when Acholi soldiers perceived themselves to be living under worse conditions than the poorest back home. For those soldiers who served during the Second World War, for example, provisions were often in short supply and thus access to certain commodities was limited. Especially during the Burma Campaign, frontline soldiers had to scavenge for extra food and attempt to fix scruffy and tattered uniforms as best they could.<sup>612</sup> As one British officer recalled, 'With clothing and equipment, supplies were not always regular [...] quite often it [clothing] was in a bad state before it got changed'.<sup>613</sup> Military reports regarding soldiers' morale similarly indicate clothing shortages were widespread, especially amongst front line units.<sup>614</sup> Likewise in a piece for the *Uganda Herald* dated March 1945, the officer for the Ugandan Battalion in Burma reported that his troops were 'Tired, hungry and depleted' and that the military advance he had orchestrated involved 'moving fast and going hungry'.<sup>615</sup> Killingray's research has additionally indicated soldiers had to make do with sleeping in hammocks under frontline conditions and that even access to adequate water supplies was a major

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<sup>611</sup> Interview with 164, Male, UK, 15 August 2016, British Officer, served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. KAR 1957-1960.

<sup>612</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, pp.160-3.

<sup>613</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 2, Charles Frederick Broomfield.

<sup>614</sup> BNA, WO 203/2045, Morale Reports Feb-Oct 1945.

<sup>615</sup> 'More News of Uganda Battalion In Burma: Extracts from Letters', *The Uganda Herald*, 14 March 1945.

problem during many campaigns.<sup>616</sup> This is supported by an article written for the *Uganda Journal* whereby J. C. Worker, who led part of the Ugandan Battalion against the Italians in 1940, recalled how it was dangerous to drink the water where they were deployed. Worker claims they were consequently forced to rely on water brought to them, which was limited to one gallon (4.5 litres) per day per person, despite the arid conditions.<sup>617</sup>

Acholi veterans often vividly recalled the insufficient food provisions in particular, sometimes explicitly suggesting that they ate more before they enlisted into the army. One interviewee, for example, stated, ‘getting something to eat was also a problem. Some people were used to eating a lot, but they [the British] wanted you to eat just a small portion so that you got used to it’.<sup>618</sup> Similarly, another former *askari* stressed ‘at around noon, they just gave you only one small potato, and just a small portion of sauce, using spoons used for measuring rice’.<sup>619</sup> Colonial military records further indicate that food rations were tightly controlled and distributed unequally. One such report documented that European troops on active service were to receive more fresh meat (sixteen ounces), rice (six ounces), and fresh vegetables and fruit (six ounces) than their African counterparts, who were to receive just eight ounces of fresh meat, four ounces of rice, and no fresh vegetables or fruit. In addition, European troops were to receive more luxury items per day, such as sugar (five ounces), biscuits (twelve ounces) and cocoa (one third of an ounce). African soldiers on the other hand were to receive lower quality items such as meal, an individually packaged food ration

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<sup>616</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, pp.162-3.

<sup>617</sup> Worker, p.53.

<sup>618</sup> Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947.

<sup>619</sup> Interview with 30, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1954-57.

(sixteen ounces), and food which could be cheaply acquired locally such as jaggery (one ounce), dates (four ounces) and ghee (one ounce).<sup>620</sup>

Scholars generally contend that, despite African soldiers being denied honour whilst on active service, they were able to occupy a superior social status upon their return home. This notion likely originally derived from Carolyn Brown's research, which suggested men who worked for wages 'became less dependent on their fathers or village elders for resources they needed to become socially mature'. They were thus able to challenge their emasculating experiences at work by promoting an alternative image of themselves while at home which empowered them.<sup>621</sup> Historians such as Osborne have argued more recently, then, that African soldiers 'stood on a more equal footing with their chiefs' because they were able to use their military wages to purchase cattle and their brave service overseas meant they had become respected 'worldly men'.<sup>622</sup> Although the reality is far more complex, it is easy to see how such a conclusion has been reached based on the primary source material most readily available. For example, with very few exceptions British officers' accounts imply serving in the colonial armed forces was interpreted as a prestigious occupation amongst the general African population: a profession which granted soldiers unrivalled masculine superiority over their civilian counterparts.

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<sup>620</sup> BNA, WO 287/138, Uganda Military Report, date N/A.

<sup>621</sup> Carolyn Brown, 'A "Man" in the Village Is a "Boy" in the Workplace: Colonial Racism, Worker Militance, and Igbo Notions of Masculinity in the Nigerian Coal Industry, 1930-1945', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), pp.156-175. Also, see Carolyn Brown, 'African Labour in the Making of World War II', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. by Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.43-71; and Carolyn Brown, 'To be Treated as a Man: Wartime Struggles over Masculinity, Race, and Honour in the Nigerian Coal Industry', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. by Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.276-303.

<sup>622</sup> Osborne, p.77. Also see Schleh, pp.203-20.

On the whole the bush African enjoyed soldiering and belonging to the K.A.R. gave him tremendous kudos amongst his tribesmen [...] There were very few cases of desertion because this meant disgrace in his own tribe or village as the Askari was treated with great respect and admiration by his fellow civilian Africans.<sup>623</sup>

Without doubt most Acholi *askari* were, initially at least, warmly welcomed upon their return and were met with scenes of celebration and merriment. One former combatant recalled, ‘when you came back home, people just admired you and knew that you were someone of a different calibre [...] [they] viewed you as a person of different status’.<sup>624</sup> One elderly non-combatant additionally explained, ‘as soon as they [the returning soldiers] arrived [...] [the community] would slaughter a goat, people would gather and eat, they would organise a dance’.<sup>625</sup> Generally, however, the initial festivities following a soldier’s return were merely a product of their families rejoicing at the safe return of a loved one. As the same elderly interviewee mentioned above went on to further clarify:

People in the community [...] they would dance so much saying “so and so came back home and now we are settled, we were thinking that he [meaning the soldier] would not return” [...] They would celebrate just because there would be a feeling of joy or happiness for having seen him [meaning the soldier].<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> OUA, MSS.Afr.s.1715, Box 18, Charles St. John Wallis.

<sup>624</sup> Interview with 7, Male, Dog Opaka, 28 April 2016, served in the KAR 1958-1962.

<sup>625</sup> Interview with 87, Male, Lamogi, 30 September 2016.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

Rather than considering the human emotions which dictated African communities' initial reactions and responses to former combatants, there has been a tendency within existing literature to solely focus on the prospective economic and political benefits a returning soldier might have engendered for his homestead.<sup>627</sup> This is unsurprising given the limited scholarly attention devoted to understanding or deconstructing the concept of love and sentiments of attachment across the African continent; an omission in the historiographical record that initially stemmed, in part, from age-old representations of African 'barbarity' and 'primitiveness'.<sup>628</sup> Although racialised imagery portrayed African people as libidinous and hypersexual, they were simultaneously denied the capacity to demonstrate emotional depth which was viewed as the product of civilisation: love, empathy and remorse were thus reserved for those with white skin.<sup>629</sup> As Franz Fanon succinctly argued, some colonialists declared 'the [African] native [...] insensible to ethics', as representative of 'not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values'.<sup>630</sup>

For those soldiers who served abroad during the Second World War or the Mau Mau uprising, their families had had little contact with them since their departure and thus many were feared dead. As one former soldier explained '[my family] were very happy [when I returned] because while serving in the army you were at a terrible

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<sup>627</sup> Key examples include, Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*; and Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*.

<sup>628</sup> A key exception to this being *Love in Africa*, ed. by Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>629</sup> For a discussion of this, see Brett L. Shadle, 'Cruelty and Empathy, Animals and Race, in Colonial Kenya', *Journal of Social History*, 45:4 (2012), 1097-1116; and Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men', p.159. For examples of this discourse within the primary sources, see Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, p.253; Baker, *Ismailia*, p.187, p.201-2; Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p.73.

<sup>630</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p.40.

risk, very many people died there'.<sup>631</sup> These African men were not just soldiers, they were also husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. Their return was thus not necessarily celebrated because of the relative wealth they had enjoyed and shared with their immediate family whilst serving in the army: families rejoiced because they were relieved their loved ones had returned home alive. The consequence of this, however, was that not all ex-servicemen were treated as distinct or important forever. For many, as the initial excitement at their return began to diminish, so did their superior position within society. Just two years after the Second World War concluded, for example, the Remembrance Day commemoration held on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1947 in Kampala was barely even reported on. The *Uganda Herald* printed only a short piece describing the 'disappointingly small number of spectators'.<sup>632</sup>

For a number of less fortunate Acholi soldiers, if there ever was a honeymoon period, it was brief. These veterans were exposed to envy, resentment and even threats of violence almost immediately after being discharged. As one interviewee explained 'there was a lot of jealousy aimed at me [...] some [members of the community] would just spread lies about you'.<sup>633</sup> Moreover, rather than being perceived as valued 'worldly men' — as Osborne has indicated was the case for returning Kamba recruits — Acholi soldiers' experiences abroad often rendered them outsiders who no longer harboured the specialised knowledge required to partake in traditional leadership structures. As the following extract provided by an Acholi KAR veteran illustrates:

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<sup>631</sup> Interview with 30, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1954-57.

<sup>632</sup> 'Remembrance Day in Kampala', *The Uganda Herald*, 11 November 1947.

<sup>633</sup> Interview with 35, Male, Pabo, 4 July 2016, served in the KAR 1948-58. For an additional example, see Interview with 2, Male, Kapedopong, 21 April 2016 and 17 April 2017, served in the KAR during the Second World War, exact dates N/A.

Jealousy occurred [...] They said, “if I refused to be the chief, it was really understandable because [...] I lacked knowledge of the Acholi values and morals, because I had just been serving in a foreign land” [...] That was how some people were belittling me [...] I saw that there was a lot of jealousy, I knew they could have killed me.<sup>634</sup>

Many local Acholi communities additionally viewed returning soldiers as dangerous and frightening. As one elderly man explained, ‘people welcomed them [returning soldiers] well, but they were welcomed with some fear also, some [civilians] thinking that they could at times turn against them violently’.<sup>635</sup> Similarly, another elderly non-combatant stated, ‘there was also fear. Because all their [meaning the soldiers’] actions were like orders [...] So because they talked with authority, people became fearful’.<sup>636</sup> Generally, however, it seems this climate of apprehension and unease surrounding KAR veterans was unwarranted. Although colonial records concerning recently discharged troops document some individual incidences of violence and criminal activity, the veterans are largely described as ‘behaving well’.<sup>637</sup> This phenomenon was not unique to the colonial period. Former soldiers recruited during the postcolonial period likewise describe a challenging transitional period where an underlying fear on behalf of the civilian population prevented them from reintegrating back into their communities with ease after being discharged. One soldier who had served in the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF), for example, suggested, ‘Life was not easy [when I returned home], because you could tell from how the people conducted themselves that they still had that fear of soldiers [...] You

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<sup>634</sup> Interview with 28, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in KAR 1954-1960.

<sup>635</sup> Interview with 100, Male, Atiak, 10 October 2016.

<sup>636</sup> Interview with 120, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>637</sup> UNA, F.078/85/01, Secretariat Topical, Series F, Box 7, Ugandan African Soldiers on Active Service, Behaviour of African Soldiers Returning Home on Leave or Discharge.

lived with them but that fear was still present. It took time before you were close to them because that fear was still there'.<sup>638</sup> This is no doubt especially true of men — and sadly children — who have returned more recently from fighting with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an insurgency force which, as mentioned, have been associated with particularly brutal forms of violence, such as mutilation, rape and civilian massacres.<sup>639</sup>

This complex range of experiences former KAR combatants faced after being discharged raises questions about why serving in colonial armies did not guarantee Acholi men a rise in respectability and honour upon their return home. Heather Streets has proposed that the extent to which colonial recruits were afforded respect amongst their local communities depended upon whether the 'martial race' ideology resonated with locally constructed ideals concerning honourable manhood. For example, although both Sikhs and Gurkhas were endowed with the label 'martial race', the outcome of accepting this identity and taking on the role of colonial soldiers varied significantly between the two communities. While Sikh soldiers could expect attention and admiration upon their return, amongst Gurkha communities soldiering did not carry any substantial benefits. The 'ultra-masculine, warlike and violent "martial race" ideal', Streets argues, 'did not seem to resonate strongly among Nepal's hill communities from whence the British drew their "Gurkha" recruits'. Military service was therefore not regarded as a particularly honourable career and Gurkha soldiers who went away to fight for the British were not typically viewed as skilled 'ideal men'

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<sup>638</sup> Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA and UPDF 1986-96.

<sup>639</sup> See Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou, 'Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of Identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation, Peace and Conflict', *Journal of Peace Psychology*, 13:3 (2007), 273-292.



upon their return.<sup>640</sup> Amongst the Acholi, martial prowess, demonstrations of bravery and physical strength continued to be celebrated and admired throughout the colonial period. According to Streets' analysis, then, Acholi communities should have unequivocally embraced the colonial label 'martial race' and subsequently granted all colonial soldiers cultural and social rewards. And yet, as has been demonstrated above, this was not the case.

A better explanation for why military service did not inevitably bring about individual distinction for Acholi soldiers must revolve around the fact that after the imposition of British rule, war itself no longer produced the same advantages for local Acholi communities as it once had. As was demonstrated in Chapter One, before the colonial encounter violent engagements served to benefit not only individual warriors, but also their villages as a whole. Control over the means of production and reproduction, for example, was underpinned by the accumulation of key resources, such as livestock and people, which were often seized through conflict and raiding. A community's economic prosperity was thus to some extent dependent upon warriorhood and the 'spoils of war' which violent interactions generated. Conversely, remittance records suggest the only civilians who truly shared in the 'spoils of war' during colonialism were the soldiers' immediate family members. Out of a total of one hundred and four Acholi soldiers who were serving in the KAR Northern Brigade in 1939, for example, forty-six sent their wages back to their wife, thirty-nine to their brother, sixteen to their father, two to their son and one to their mother.<sup>641</sup> Even this fluctuation in relative wealth for the soldiers' next of kin, however, generally ceased upon the *askari* returning home. Especially after the Second World War, discharged

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<sup>640</sup> Streets, pp.214-216.

<sup>641</sup> KNA, MD 4/5/118/9a, Northern Brigade Remittance Records, October 1939.

soldiers returned with high expectations regarding their economic position and entitlements.<sup>642</sup> Colonial military reports indicate, for example, African soldiers awaiting discharge envisioned financially supporting the opening of hospitals, churches and schools when they returned.<sup>643</sup> Unfortunately, though, for most of these men military service had little impact upon their economic status over the long term. Having only served in the KAR for a few years at most, they were not entitled to service pensions and only a lucky few secured work with the police, the game department or in local prisons. Even soldiers who were entitled to some sort of service pension due to a disability attributable to their military service proved difficult for the colonial government to track down. Many of them, therefore, never received the payments they were entitled to.<sup>644</sup> The majority of KAR soldiers, then, simply resumed farming and tending to family responsibilities after being discharged.<sup>645</sup>

In addition to this, war was employed throughout the precolonial period for defending whole communities, especially in terms of thwarting any attempts to abduct women and children. KAR battalions, however, were rarely concerned with protecting local African villages unless raiding became so disruptive it was viewed as a threat to colonial stability. Consequently, as the extract from one veteran's account demonstrates, although Acholi soldiers themselves frequently associated military

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<sup>642</sup> For more information on African soldiers' post-service economic expectations and plans, see Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.231-2.

<sup>643</sup> BNA, WO 203/2045, Morale Reports Feb-Oct 1945.

<sup>644</sup> UNA, F.023/17, Series F, Box 1, Secretariat Topical, System of Identification of African Volunteers; UNA, F.0.23/05/II, Series F, Box 1, Secretariat Topical, Claims by Africans in Respect of War Services, 1914-18.

<sup>645</sup> Interview with 35, Male, Pabo, 4 July 2016, served in the KAR 1948-58; Interview with 30, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1954-57; Interview with 29, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in the KAR 1941-46; and Interview with 27, Male, Acholiboo, 7 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-49.

service with performing the role of ‘protector’, local non-combatants did not always conceptualise soldiering in the same way.

There were some people from the community who had their own funny comments, [they would say] “what kind of job did you go to do that we do not even understand?” I told them that “The kind of job that we went and performed is the same job that is enabling you to live a peaceful life” [...] Some accepted that that was a rightful mission, but others did not accept it.<sup>646</sup>

British security intelligence reports compiled during the Second World War likewise claimed, ‘There also seems to be a lack of appreciation [amongst local communities] that the war is being fought for the benefit of the Acholi’.<sup>647</sup> Acholi oral poems were even written to ridicule men who fought for the British during the Second World War. One such poem mocked soldiers for fighting in someone else’s conflict: ‘This battle, is it your fathers’ feud? It is the white man’s [battle]’.<sup>648</sup> Another poem argued the war was illogical and irrational: ‘They started a feud, but nobody knows the cause; Fighting, I said some time ago, there should be none’.<sup>649</sup>

Honour ultimately requires public recognition in order to be transformed into a public force.<sup>650</sup> For soldiering to have represented a stable platform for reputation building during the colonial period, then, military service would have had to have been consistently and unequivocally understood as a worthwhile, valuable, and thus honourable occupation by local civilian populations. The general mystique

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<sup>646</sup> Interview with 28, Male, Palabek, 8 June 2016, served in KAR 1954-1960.

<sup>647</sup> BNA, CO 536/215/12, Uganda Affairs Fortnightly Review, Security review sent to the Governor by the Director of Security Intelligence and forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

<sup>648</sup> p’Bitek, ‘Oral literature’, p.310.

<sup>649</sup> p’Bitek, ‘Oral literature’, p.311.

<sup>650</sup> Schoenbrun, p.49; Iliffe, *Honour*, p.4.

surrounding the justification and rationale behind the Second World War and colonial military service more broadly, paired with the fact there were few tangible benefits bequeathed to a soldier's wider community, prevented veterans from systematically claiming honour and respect upon their return to civilian life.

The Acholi context was also more complex than Streets' explanation described above provides room for. Primarily, despite belonging to the same ethnic group, not all returning Acholi soldiers were treated in the same way by their communities upon being discharged; there was not a universal Acholi experience for returning KAR combatants. Rather than solely relying on broad-brush explanations, therefore, we must additionally search for more complex and nuanced reasons to explain why a rise in respectability was far from guaranteed. As will be explained below, a soldier's individual circumstances and their behaviour towards local civilian populations was highly important in this regard.

Significantly, a KAR soldier's physical health could dictate whether or not he was afforded an honourable status upon his return. Some soldiers — especially those who served during the Second World War — were physically maimed through military service. As a result, they were unable to return to farming and perform the role as provider after being discharged. This directly challenged the soldiers' masculine identities and claims to honour as they lost the ability to support themselves and their families independently. Rather than representing an economic asset, disabled soldiers were often forced into the stigmatised position of recipients who had to rely on their families for support.<sup>651</sup> There was some attempt by the British colonial

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<sup>651</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46; Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947. For more information on this theme see Timothy Parsons, 'No Country Fit for Heroes- The Plight of Disabled Kenyan Veterans', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. by Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A.

government to support disabled veterans through the distribution of pensions. Bureaucratic inefficiency, however, made claiming pensions a particularly arduous and exhausting process.<sup>652</sup> In addition, inflation after both the First and Second World Wars caused the real value of these pensions to steadily erode, making them insufficient for a veteran to live on.<sup>653</sup> Often, therefore, physically disabled veterans were left to the care of their communities, particularly their wives, and consequently denied access to respectability.

Sexually-transmitted infections were another unwelcome consequence of military service which obstructed African soldiers' ability to reintegrate into their communities and lay claim to honourable manhood upon their return home.<sup>654</sup> For the most part, this was because they could prevent veterans from fathering children, a key aspect of respected masculinity. A number of Acholi soldiers returned home from the Second World War having been infected with syphilis or gonorrhoea, for example, both of which are known to cause infertility.<sup>655</sup> Songs were even composed to warn women of the dangers of having sexual relations with KAR soldiers. One such song included the lines:

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Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.127-147; and E. Kalema, 'Scars, Marked Bodies, and Suffering: The Mulele 'Rebellion' in Postcolonial Congo', *The Journal of African History*, 59:2, 263-282.

<sup>652</sup> UNA, E.802, Box 3, Series E, Secretariat Topical, War Pension Regulations, Appeals; UNA, F.023/324, Series F, Box 2, Secretariat Topical, Conference on African Demobilisation on the 15 November 1943, Nairobi.

<sup>653</sup> For more information on pensions after the Second World War, see Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, pp.198-199; and Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File*, pp.242-245.

<sup>654</sup> For more on sexually-transmitted infections, see Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men', pp.157-178.

<sup>655</sup> KNA, Uganda Statistics, from Lt Col JSB Mackay to DMS Civil, 18 July 1945. Overall percentage of VD in Uganda recruits in 1944 was 5.19 per cent; CMSA, CMS/AF/AL, Annual Letters 1940-1959, Letter from Re. Moore, Upper Nile 1942.

The great gonorrhoea with which the KAR soldier scorched my aunt's daughter,

My aunt's daughter moans, oyo-yo!

The large penis with which the KAR soldier stabbed my aunt's daughter,

My aunt's daughter moans, oyo-yo!

The many types of venereal diseases that the KAR soldier smeared all over my aunt's daughter,

My aunt's daughter weeps all night long,

She moans oyo-yo-yo!<sup>656</sup>

Thus, being unable to fulfil a key prerequisite of respectable adulthood, as well as placing their wives or other young women in danger of suffering a similar fate, many returning KAR servicemen were not as highly valued amongst their local communities as existing literature has proposed.<sup>657</sup>

For a number of KAR veterans who married prior to enlistment, their access to honourable masculinity upon their return home was further hindered and complicated by their wives' infidelities. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, KAR soldiers' wives — angered at their inability to reproduce while their husbands were fighting abroad — pleaded with their husbands to return home and fulfil their responsibilities. They also, however, employed a less direct but equally powerful

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<sup>656</sup> p'Bitek, 'Oral literature', pp.311-12.

<sup>657</sup> For an example of African KAR veterans being described as almost unanimously respected within existing historiography, see Osborne, p.152.

strategy to resolve their predicament: adultery. Even during the precolonial period an Acholi woman would not have acted complacently towards a context or situation which obstructed her from accessing the social benefits of motherhood. If a woman's husband was impotent or she suspected her husband was sterile, for example, she was socially sanctioned to have sexual intercourse with another man in order to conceive.<sup>658</sup> A woman could also return to her ancestral home in the hope of marrying another, or as the extract below indicates, elicit help from the elders of her husband's lineage to ensure the appropriate ritual was performed.

Women were always the people who discovered whether a man was impotent [...] So she would have told her brother-in-law [...] "Mine is not okay, my husband is more of a woman, he is useless". So she would have taken that issue to the elders who would then have performed the ritual. Then the man would have become a normal person and there would have been no more problems.<sup>659</sup>

Such behaviour was a clear demonstration of the effort a woman would go to in order to rectify her social exclusion in the face of childlessness.<sup>660</sup> Things were no different during the colonial period. As Rennie Bere's account referred to in Chapter Two highlights, soldiers' wives went to extreme lengths to express their anxieties regarding their inability to bear children while their husbands were away. More significantly, however, during the Second World War, incidences of adultery reportedly rose considerably.<sup>661</sup> As one Acholi veteran explained, 'some men would be with soldiers'

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<sup>658</sup> Interview with 45, Male, Alero, 31 August 2016.

<sup>659</sup> Interview with 87, Male, Lamogi, 30 September 2016.

<sup>660</sup> For more information regarding strategies employed by barren women during the precolonial period, see Stephens, pp.50-52.

<sup>661</sup> For more information on rates of infidelity more widely, see Mutongi, p.79; and Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p.100.

wives while they were away, the woman could even conceive'.<sup>662</sup> Archival reports contain similar claims.

The best represented tribe in this Bn. are the Acholi, a poor tribe financially but who have given of [sic] their best in man power. The men's wives must have children to keep the tribe going, and there have been numerous cases of infidelity owing to the absence of the young men.<sup>663</sup>

Thus, military service may have granted some African soldiers masculine superiority over their civilian counterparts through improving their access to women.<sup>664</sup> But the rising levels of adultery during the Second World War suggest there were also times when soldiering served to reduce men's control over their wives and children, which in turn undermined their status within local gendered hierarchies. Although, in reality, Acholi women could wield a significant amount of influence over men's behaviour, embedded cultural norms and idealised representations of masculinity nevertheless dictated that control over women was central to male honour and achieving full adult status in the community. As one elderly informant expressed, 'Men used to think that a woman should always be under his authority and should follow whatever he does'.<sup>665</sup> Thus, when Acholi troops returning home were confronted with rumours of their wives' sexual infidelities it caused both frustration and humiliation. Such reports underscored the soldiers' inability to assert authority over the women they had left behind and thus directly impacted their access to respectable manhood.

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<sup>662</sup> Interview with 1, Male, Omoro, 19 April 2016.

<sup>663</sup> BNA, WO 169/7028, East Africa Command: Infantry: 3/4 Battalion King's African Rifles (KAR). Report submitted to the Commanding Officer by Capt. G. J. Pink.

<sup>664</sup> For more on this argument see Parsons, 'All Askari are Family Men', pp.166-168.

<sup>665</sup> Interview with 121, Male, Paico, 26 October 2016.



Acholi veterans who suffered from mental health problems post-military service were particularly disadvantaged in terms of their ability to lay claim to social prestige. Historian Jessica Meyer has demonstrated the same was true of British soldiers who served in the First World War. Meyer argues ‘among the disabled, those with psychological disabilities faced particular struggles due to the contested nature of their disability’.<sup>666</sup> Amongst Acholi speakers, however, the marginalised position psychologically impaired KAR veterans occupied was not due to disability hierarchies and unhelpful interpretations that question the sincerity of mental illness. As has been noted, psychological consequences associated with violent encounters were understood and accepted by the Acholi as resulting from *cen*. For the Acholi, therefore, veterans who displayed signs of mental impairment were generally deprived of a heroic masculine identity not because their illness was denied altogether but because they were deemed polluted and thus susceptible to outbursts of anti-social and destructive behaviour.<sup>667</sup> As the extract below suggests, it was because these soldiers supposedly posed a threat to their communities’ wellbeing and social harmony that they were consequently feared and found themselves isolated.

Some [veterans] became mentally disturbed [...] if one joked with them they would face it rough. Because when they came back from serving in the army, they would threaten to kill people. It was because they had become mentally disturbed, just because of being in the army.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.98.

<sup>667</sup> ACR, B/186/6, file named ‘Cultura Acioli, Kitgum’, 1985; Interview with 95, Male, Atiak, 6 October 2016; Interview with 119, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>668</sup> Interview with 135, Male, Palabek, 10 November 2016.

Crucially, psychological illness had the potential to alienate and repel family members and loved ones. As one ex-combatant who claimed to have been haunted by *cen* following his military service explained, ‘I sent money back and so my father began to use it to marry for me the women I had conned [meaning courted] but had left behind [...] When the madness began, all the women flew away and I went back to my maternal home’.<sup>669</sup> Acholi speakers avoid close social contact with those who are believed to be haunted by *cen* not just due to the disturbing behaviour of the person possessed, but also due to a fear of being affected by the bad spirit themselves if they were to interact with the afflicted.<sup>670</sup> Thus, it was serving in the army which originally enabled this soldier to secure the wealth required to marry. Yet somewhat ironically, it was also his job as a soldier and the psychological consequences related to engaging in violence which eventually drove his wives to leave him.

## CONCLUSION

African soldiers feature prominently in the historical memory of colonialism and empire. Yet there have been few genuine attempts to interrogate African voices and expose individual soldiers’ experiences within studies concerning colonial military service. By exploiting in-depth oral testimonies this chapter has been able to provide a more nuanced account of ‘fighting for Britain’. Although emotions should not be understood as intrinsic or universal categories, analytical discussions regarding certain

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<sup>669</sup> Interview with 90, Male, Koc, 4 October 2016.

<sup>670</sup> Harlacher, Okot, Obonyo, Balthazard and Atkinson, ‘Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi’, p.62.

emotions such as fear and compassion have been marginalised within contemporary Africanist scholarship for too long.<sup>671</sup> By unpacking the personal accounts provided by Acholi veterans, this chapter has disrupted colonial stereotypes that depicted African soldiers as being incapable of feeling fear and guilt during violence and bloodshed. By exploring more explicitly why returning African soldiers were initially met with merriment and gaiety upon their return, this chapter has additionally refuted normative narratives which have ignored the importance of African demonstrations of compassion, empathy and sentiments of attachment. Moreover, by reflecting on the lasting psychological impact of military service during wartime, this chapter has challenged the racialised colonial notion that African soldiers lacked the emotional depth required to suffer from trauma or psychiatric dysfunction during the aftermath of violent encounters.

This discussion has additionally been concerned with soldiers' initial expectations in comparison to individual realities. Recent scholarship has endeavoured to demonstrate how certain ethnic groups were able to exploit the 'martial race' ideal to enhance their own position within colonial society.<sup>672</sup> Moreover, scholars have highlighted how some African soldiers were able to challenge the constructed racial boundaries of colonial military service. This defiance tended to manifest through covert, prosaic but constant forms of 'everyday resistance' such as insubordination and non-compliance.<sup>673</sup> Nonetheless, it remains important not to let

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<sup>671</sup> Exceptions do exist, however. For example, see M. Ainsworth, *Infancy in Uganda: Infant Care and the Growth of Love* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); and David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012).

<sup>672</sup> For example, see Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*; Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*.

<sup>673</sup> The term 'everyday resistance' comes from James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For more

our search for evidence of African agency conceal the more problematic nature of colonial military service. Primarily, this chapter has demonstrated that soldiering did not always generate the economic and cultural rewards African recruits had initially anticipated. This holds most true for those soldiers whose military service deprived them of their physical or mental wellbeing. Serving a foreign power additionally exposed Acholi recruits to everyday forms of racism when on active service. At best their experiences served as an unremitting reminder of their subordinate status within colonial racial hierarchies, but at worst subjected them to open abuse. What this discussion has further demonstrated, therefore, is that the emergence of a modern army under British colonial rule instigated a period of demilitarisation. Not simply because fewer Acholi men actually bore arms — as was demonstrated in Chapter Two — but because the nature of colonial military service also meant the relationship between soldiering and honourable manhood became an increasingly distorted and complex one.

More broadly this chapter has demonstrated some level of continuity between the precolonial, colonial, and in some cases, even the postcolonial era. As has been established in previous chapters, there is undoubtedly a tendency within existing literature to focus on change orchestrated or exacerbated by the colonial moment. Yet, as this discussion has further exemplified, there is a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that the imposition of British rule did not represent a definitive break from what went before. This goes for how definitions concerning certain forms of violence could be renegotiated depending on the context; the importance of embedded spiritual belief systems for managing the psychological impact of warfare; and finally, the

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on how *askari* challenged their subordinate position, see Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p.43; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp.182-3.

ambiguous social status practitioners of violence held. Indeed, it should be reiterated that even warriorhood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not systematically bestow glory and social prestige upon Acholi men. A warrior's reputation depended upon his ability to maintain a restrained composure and conform to the moral economy of violence.

The final chapter of this thesis further expands this discussion regarding the relationship between militarism and masculinity amongst Acholi speakers by analysing UNLA brutality during Milton Obote's second presidency. In particular, it deconstructs the normative public narrative surrounding the atrocities associated with the UNLA, explores what motivated some Acholi UNLA soldiers to commit illicit acts of violence, and examines how Acholi UNLA veterans themselves remember and talk about this divisive, contentious era.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CULTURES OF MILITARISM: DECONSTRUCTING UNLA BRUTALITY

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During his first administration (1962-1971), Milton Obote not only saw the armed forces as an instrument for safeguarding internal stability, but also as a tool for quashing potential opposition and pursuing particular ethnic, regional and sectional interests.<sup>674</sup> As a result, the Uganda Army (UA) was not only greatly expanded — it had consisted of only 700 men at independence, but by July 1963 it comprised of 1500 men — but increasingly politicised.<sup>675</sup> Shattering the myth that political struggles were the exclusive preserve of professional politicians and destroying the stereotype of the military as an apolitical, pliable instrument did not ultimately work in Obote's favour, however. It enabled the UA to demand an increasingly high profile in national affairs and predisposed ambitious soldiers to political intervention through force, or the threat of it.<sup>676</sup> Even speaking more broadly, by the early 1970s military involvement had become emblematic of African politics. As Richard Reid has noted, between 'the early 1960s and the mid-1990s, there were more than seventy successful military seizures of power, and many unsuccessful attempts'.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> For more on how the military was used within political struggles throughout the 1960s, see Omara-Otunnu, pp.65-77. For more information on the politicisation of postcolonial African armies and political culture more generally, see, Reid, *Warfare in African History*, pp.153-156; Herbert Howe, *Ambiguous order, Military forces in African states* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001); A. B. Assensoh and Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, *African Military History and Politics: Coups and Ideological Incursions, 1900-Present* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001); *The Military in African Politics*, ed. by John W. Harbeson (New York: Praeger, 1987).

<sup>675</sup> Omara-Otunnu, p.51.

<sup>676</sup> For more detail on the 1964 mutiny, see Omara-Otunnu, pp.48-65.

<sup>677</sup> Reid, *Warfare in African History*, p.154.

As was the case with many military interventions across the continent, when Obote's long-time lieutenant Idi Amin staged a military *coup d'état* in 1971 it was initially welcomed with open jubilation by much of the civilian population who saw political and parliamentary structures as inherently weak, and self-serving political elites as failing civil society. The UA, in comparison, was largely viewed as 'unsullied by the filthy business of politics' and thus capable of bringing forth a return to political rectitude and sound economic management.<sup>678</sup> For Acholi speakers, however, Amin's rule (1971-79) represented a period of instability, marginalisation and violence. Acholi soldiers — who were viewed as having comprised the bulk of the army throughout the 1960s and as pro-Obote due to belonging to the same language family, Southern Luo — were specifically targeted by Amin during his repeated attempts to consolidate power and suppress any real, or imagined, resistance to his leadership. By the end of the 1970s, thousands of Acholi soldiers had been killed, with many more having been arrested and tortured.<sup>679</sup> In reality, drawing firm conclusions regarding the ethnic makeup of Uganda's national army throughout the 1960s is practically impossible given that only regional origins were included within the majority of military records. Thus, although the figures which are available indicate that northerners were enlisted in large numbers — in 1969, for example, 61 per cent of the rank-and-file was drawn from northern Uganda — we cannot say for sure that Acholi recruits represented the majority.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> For more discussion on this topic in relation to Africa more widely see Reid, *Warfare in African History*, p.154.

<sup>679</sup> See Omara-Otunnu, p.104; Kyemba, pp.44-7; Kasozi, p.121; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p.303.

<sup>680</sup> 'Uganda Army Tribal Returns', 30 April 1969: UNLA RO. As cited in Omara-Otunnu, p.53, pp.81-82.

Idi Amin was eventually overthrown and chased into exile in 1979 by 20,000 Tanzanian troops together with a coalition of Ugandan opposition forces in a conflict which would come to be known as the ‘Liberation War’.<sup>681</sup> The ousting of Idi Amin was followed by nearly a decade of regime instability and political experimentation characterised by violent turbulence. Amidst economic collapse, a chronic lack of social capital and an unprecedented level of political mistrust and tension, the successive regimes of Yusuf Lule, Godfrey Binaisa, Paulo Muwanga and later Tito Okello were remarkably short lived, each lasting just a few months. Only the leader of the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) Milton Obote, who managed to survive five years in office, proved more resilient to the problems facing Uganda in the early 1980s. Even so, after winning the contentious and widely discredited elections in 1980, Obote’s return to power only served to perpetuate the revengeful and paranoid cycle of political violence which had marred Uganda’s postcolonial history to date. This state brutality was, to some extent, a reflection of the chronic instability and wavering legitimacy which characterised both Obote and Amin’s regimes, forcing them to violently distinguish between ‘enemies’ and ‘supporters’.<sup>682</sup>

Besides the political violence centred around the notorious National Security Agency (NSA), which arrested, detained, tortured and murdered with virtual impunity, much of the violence performed during Obote’s second presidency was conducted by the swollen and unruly armed forces named the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). In November 1979 the UNLA had consisted of a variety of peoples, most of whom actually stemmed from Bantu-speaking communities (66.5 per cent). Thus,

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<sup>681</sup> Omara-Otunnu, pp.145-150.

<sup>682</sup> See Hölger Bernt Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda* (Uppsala: Sias, 1977). For a more recent revisiting of this theme, see Hölger Bernt Hansen, ‘Uganda in the 1970s: A decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7:1 (2013), 83-103.



although Acholi and Langi speakers still represented a significant percentage (30 per cent, the equivalent of 1978 soldiers of a total of 7346), there were also large numbers of Banyankole (40 per cent, the equivalent of 2915 men), Bakiga (12 per cent, the equivalent of 909 men), and Baganda (10 per cent, the equivalent of 702 men).<sup>683</sup> After rejecting the 1980 election result, however, many of the Bantu-speaking soldiers deserted.<sup>684</sup> Unfortunately, figures on recruitment patterns for Obote's second presidency are unavailable having either been destroyed, or never formally collected in the first place. Nonetheless, based on the figures outlined above, we can assume that following this exodus Uganda's national army was once again dominated by northerners.<sup>685</sup>

One of the key areas impacted by UNLA brutality between 1980 and 1985 was West Nile, the ancestral home of Idi Amin. Some of this violence was aimed at Amin's former soldiers who, despite being defeated during the 'Liberation War', fled back to West Nile to launch a poorly supported and futile resistance campaign against Obote's new regime. Most of the violence in West Nile, however, was inflicted upon the civilian population, especially after the Tanzanian army officially withdrew from Uganda in 1981, leaving the UNLA and a number of hurriedly recruited and haphazardly trained local militia forces to maintain 'law and order'. Another area which was significantly impacted by UNLA brutality has become known as the 'Luwero Triangle'. Obote's controversial re-installment had precipitated a bloody civil war with the National Resistance Army (NRA) — predominantly led by the young revolutionary Yoweri Museveni — which framed itself as a progressive guerrilla force

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<sup>683</sup> 'Tribal breakdown of recruits in the Uganda Defence Forces', 23 November 1979: UNLA RO. As cited in Omara-Otunnu, p.150.

<sup>684</sup> Many of them joined Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Army (NRA) in taking up arms.

<sup>685</sup> Omara-Otunnu, pp.158-9.

capable of putting an end to this series of violent and neurotic political regimes.<sup>686</sup> The ‘Luwero Triangle’ encompassed an expansive region spreading northwest from Kampala towards Lake Albert and Lake Kyoga and was the focal point of Museveni and the NRA’s war against Obote’s regime.

This moment in Uganda’s history, known locally as Obote II, has received very little sustained scholarly interest in comparison to the ever-growing body of literature concerned with Idi Amin and the 1970s. This chapter represents an attempt to partially rectify this current trend by exploring the culture of exaggerated militarism and the practice of extreme forms of violence associated with UNLA soldiers. This discussion will be split into three parts. The first section deconstructs the Ugandan national narrative which largely blames Acholi UNLA soldiers for all the atrocities committed throughout Obote II. It will be argued that although some Acholi-speaking recruits engaged in excessive violence against civilian populations, this normative discourse does not accurately reflect what transpired. Most scholarly accounts suggest that this image of Acholi UNLA soldiers stems from the National Resistance Movement’s (NRM’s) intensive propaganda campaign during the early 1980s which was aimed at justifying and defending its insurgency.<sup>687</sup> The NRM represented the political wing of the NRA. This argument is certainly true in part. In an effort to mobilise support during their guerrilla war, the NRM held the North, and particularly Acholi people, wholly responsible for the suffering which was ensuing under Obote’s leadership. However, the underlying argument outlined in this chapter is that even after Museveni eventually captured power in 1986, the NRM continued to frame UNLA violence as solely the

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<sup>686</sup> For more on this election, see Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch and Nic Cheeseman, ‘A valid electoral exercise? Uganda’s 1980 elections and the observers’ dilemma’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59:1 (2017), 211-238.

<sup>687</sup> See Branch, ‘Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence’, pp.30-31; and Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, pp.74-75.

consequence of inherently ruthless and bloodthirsty northerners, which further broadened and intensified anti-Acholi sentiment on a national scale. In addition, what proved crucial in terms of solidifying this narrative regarding Acholi soldiers was the outbreak of successive insurgency movements in Acholiland following Museveni's rise to power. In particular, the extreme forms of violence associated with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by the notorious Joseph Kony, provided the ideal backdrop for conceptualising and remembering UNLA brutality as simply another example of Acholi barbarity. Overall, then, this first section illustrates how collective memory and popular conceptions of the past can be further influenced by more recent events, attitudes and opinions.

There is a general consensus amongst Africanist scholars that the atrocities and brutality associated with Obote II stemmed from the exploitation of ethnic rivalries by political elites.<sup>688</sup> This is unsurprising: periods of violent instability in African history have been attributed to the workings of ethnicity time and time again.<sup>689</sup> As Ali Mazrui once argued, '[w]hile blacks clash with whites in Africa over resources, blacks clash with blacks over their identities', consequently 'Sub-Saharan Africa's worst civil wars

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<sup>688</sup> For example, see Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (Trenton, N. J.: Africa World Press, 1992), p.150, pp.159-162; Jusef Lule, 'Human Rights Violations in Uganda Under Obote', *Munger Africana Library Notes*, 67 (1982), 3-15 (pp.8-9) <[https://authors.library.caltech.edu/25710/1/maln\\_67.pdf](https://authors.library.caltech.edu/25710/1/maln_67.pdf)> [accessed 14 June 2019]; and Kasozi, *The Social Origins*. For historiography which focuses on how and why African political elites manipulate ethnicity more generally, see Bruce J. Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97:388 (1998), 305-341; John Lonsdale, 'Globalization, Ethnicity and Democracy: A view from 'the Hopeless Continent'', in *Globalization in World History*, ed. by A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp.194-220; and Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

<sup>689</sup> For example, see Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995); René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994); and Peter Uvin, 'Prejudice, Crisis and Genocide in Rwanda', *African Studies Review*, 40:2 (1997), 91-115.

have been fundamentally ethnic'.<sup>690</sup> In contrast, the second section of this chapter challenges this commonly cited scholarly assumption by providing a more nuanced and holistic explanation for UNLA violence and, in particular, the offences carried out by some Acholi soldiers. It will argue that although ethnicity clearly played a central role, conflict analyses which emphasise a single cause for violence (such as ethnicity) are often crudely reductive. Importantly, then, this section aims to consider the ways in which chronic political instability and social conflict, as well as economic collapse and inequity, impacted how UNLA violence played out on a local level. By doing so, this section ultimately demonstrates how complex multifaceted explanations for extreme forms of violence should not be reserved solely for studies concerned with African guerrilla movements or rebel insurgencies. These explanations can, in addition, help shed light on what has motivated government troops to engage in shocking acts of violence.

The third and final section of this chapter interrogates how Acholi UNLA soldiers themselves remember and contextualise this period of wanton state brutality. Specifically, this section analyses the different ways in which some Acholi veterans have framed their memories of Obote's second presidency in order to justify and defend the violence employed by UNLA soldiers in general, and themselves in particular. The principle argument underscoring this section is that standardised definitions concerning how ex-servicemen recall and speak about their violent pasts can only partially explain the way in which former Acholi UNLA soldiers discuss the violence of the era. To fully understand the veterans' rhetoric, especially the way in which they use their physical and mental health as proof of their innocence, we must

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<sup>690</sup> Mazrui, *The Politics of War*, p.60, p.283.

draw upon pre-existing, locally constructed ideas and belief systems regarding the relationship between wrongdoing, traumatising and death.

This chapter draws on a number of valuable sources including oral histories, published personal accounts, reports compiled by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and archival data collected from a variety of locations both within the UK and Uganda. One source, however, deserves particular mention. Under Museveni's leadership, a government-sponsored Human Rights Commission (HRC) was set up to investigate and explain the atrocities committed by past governments. This included both the human rights abuses associated with Idi Amin's presidency (1971-1979), as well as those committed under Obote's regimes (1962-1971, 1980-1985). The HRC travelled the length of Uganda interviewing perpetrators, victims and witnesses, before publishing its 720-page final report in 1994 together with the original interview transcripts. This chapter primarily draws on the latter. By providing us with first-hand harrowing accounts of the way some UNLA soldiers maltreated and harassed civilians this collection of interview transcripts offers a unique insight into UNLA violence. Yet the transcripts also elucidate and expose the extent to which evidence can be manipulated and shaped by the context in which it is compiled. Nonetheless, rather than this rendering the evidence unusable, this phenomenon enables us to unravel the historical moment within which people interviewed for the HRC were discussing UNLA violence. Subsequently, as the following section will explore in more detail, the HRC interview transcripts help us unpick why there was such a strong tendency during the early 1990s for participants to place blame on Acholi soldiers in particular for the suffering under Obote II.

SECTION I: 'ACHOLI SOLDIERS WERE SEEN WALKING THROUGH MOYO [IN WEST NILE] WITH THE GENITALS OF THEIR VICTIMS HANGING FROM THEIR BELTS'<sup>691</sup>: EXPLORING IMAGES OF THE UNLA

I found Amin's Regime was not as bad as we were saying at that time [...] Because his [Amin's] killing was not indiscriminate. He would pick up his victims. They would disappear but he wouldn't go killing families. I never experienced wives or children being killed during Amin's time [...] So there was discipline. There was a kind of order, I think, during Amin's time; orders were coming from the top; whereas during this Obote's time every soldier had powers to do what he wanted. So children would be killed, wives would be killed, old men would be killed [...] In Obote's time it was genocide, whereas, during Amin's time, it was calculated killing of victims who were wanted for one reason or another.<sup>692</sup>

The brutality and human rights violations committed by the UNLA under Obote's second presidency are now widely considered to have caused more suffering than Amin's regime of the 1970s.<sup>693</sup> The normative narrative describes a period characterised by indiscriminate killing and escalating violence which surpassed anything that came before, both in terms of the sheer scale of atrocities perpetrated

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<sup>691</sup> Kasozi, p.177.

<sup>692</sup> Kampala, Human Rights Commission Archives (HRCA), VOL. IV, Interview with Emmanuel Kirenga, pp.3940-3975. For a similar account, see HRCA, VOL. X, Interview with Major General Zed Maruru, pp.9459-9533.

<sup>693</sup> See Gérard Prunier, 'The Armies of the Great Lakes Countries', *PRISM*, 6:4 (2017) 98-111 (p.101); Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, 'Introduction', in *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development*, ed. by Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1988), pp.1-27 (p.3); Mutibwa, p.148; and Lule, p.4.

and the material devastation.<sup>694</sup> As Abdu Kasozi has proposed: ‘violence under Amin was like a tide, peaking and subsiding at certain periods [...] But in the second Obote period, violence was always at high tide’.<sup>695</sup> Primary source material largely supports this depiction and makes for both shocking and terrifying reading. Ugandan refugees fleeing West Nile during the initial years of Obote’s regime reported, for example, that UNLA soldiers had stoned to death old and disabled people, that ‘whole families had been burnt alive in their huts, and that the dismembered bodies of men hacked to pieces were displayed on the branches of trees’.<sup>696</sup> Christopher Terrill described a similar level of brutality when likewise writing about UNLA violence in West Nile for *The Times* in 1983:

In dilapidated lorries which bring refugees from [Uganda] [...] to the transit camps are women who have been raped, who have seen their husbands shot, and even some who swear they were forced at gunpoint to kill their own babies by smashing them with a pestle in the mortars they use to grind corn.<sup>697</sup>

Testimonies collected from local witnesses for the HRC likewise support this image of UNLA violence.<sup>698</sup> Emmanuel Eluwaga, for example, who claimed he observed UNLA soldiers attacking civilians in West Nile described the following scene:

When they [the soldiers] came they started looting properties from people [...] As soon as they arrived they started shooting [...] rampant killings,

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<sup>694</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.89.

<sup>695</sup> Kasozi, pp.145-6.

<sup>696</sup> Jeff Crisp, ‘Ugandan Refugees in Sudan and Zaire: The Problem of Repatriation’, *African Affairs*, 85:339 (1986), 163-180 (p.165).

<sup>697</sup> Christopher Terrill, ‘Terror of army that writes its own rules’, *The Times*, 21 August, 1983.

<sup>698</sup> For example, see HRCA, VOL. IV, Interview with Emmanuel Kirenga, pp.3940-3975; HRCA, VOL. XII, Interview with John Mwitil, pp.11051-11083; HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Rotino Wilson Anyayo, pp.5891-[?]; and HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Masimo Olukwa Kenyi, pp.5767-5777.

beatings and so on [...] there were two children killed, they were removed from their parents and then beaten, banged against walls or trees.<sup>699</sup>

Witnesses to the bloody counter-insurgency in the ‘Luwero Triangle’ likewise claim UNLA soldiers murdered, abducted and maimed civilians, looted property and raped girls and women, often in front of their parents or husbands.<sup>700</sup>

In contrast to the crude caricature of Idi Amin as a manic, unstable, one-man cyclone of bloody destruction, Obote has largely escaped such labelling.<sup>701</sup> This is partially because unlike the atrocities and human suffering of the 1970s, for which Idi Amin himself bears the brunt of the blame, the violence committed under Obote II is more strongly associated with the UNLA rank-and-file. More specifically, the general consensus amongst Ugandans is that it was Acholi soldiers in particular who were responsible for most of the devastation and excessive brutality. When acting as a witness for the HRC, Rotino Wilson Anyayo was asked for example, ‘there has been the impression given to us that the Acholi [soldiers] were special in their badness [...] [is that] because the Acholi were the majority of the people in the army or did they in

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<sup>699</sup> HRCA, VOL. IV, Interview with Emmanuel Kirenga, pp.3940-3975.

<sup>700</sup> See ‘Women’s Experiences of Armed conflict in Uganda: Luwero District 1980-1986’, ISIS- WICCE Report, 1998, <<http://www.nzdl.org/gsd/mod?e=d-00000-00---off-0unescoen-00-0----0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11--11-en-50---20-about---00-0-1-00-0--4----0-0-11-10-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&c=unescoen&cl=CL2.4.4&d=HASH0106ccfa8a2df11e91b4ea7f.6.2.4>> [accessed 14 June 2019]; Jeff Crisp, ‘National Security, Human Rights and Population Displacements Luwero District, Uganda, January-December 1983’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 10:27-28 (1983), 164-174; CUA, MMLP/DINW, Dr M.M. Louise Pirouet, Box 1, photocopy entitled ‘Reflections on Human Rights in Uganda’ 12 March 1984; CUA, MMLP/UG/POL/1-6, photocopy of report entitled ‘Protected Village or Prison Camp? Report of a Trip to Kapeka, Uganda’ by Henk Zomer; HRCA, VOL. IV, Ronald Mutale Kakooza, pp.3663-3780; and HRCA, Summary of Findings, pp.300-304.

<sup>701</sup> See Thomas Melady and Margaret Melady, *Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977); Semakula Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda* (München: Weltforum Verl., 1979); and Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.79.



fact behave worse than the other people [?]' <sup>702</sup> To which Anyayo responded, 'It was because of their [the Acholi soldiers'] habits. They were [...] [being] rougher than others'. <sup>703</sup> In some parts of Uganda the most common appellation used to describe the UNLA is simply 'the Acholi soldiers' or 'the Acholi army'. <sup>704</sup> One of Mark Leopold's informants from West Nile proclaimed, for example, 'it was in 1979 up to 1984 [...] [we fled] in fear of *Acholi soldiers*. They were bad; they tortured people'. <sup>705</sup> According to the council in charge of questioning the witnesses for the HRC, this terminology was widely used by both those interviewed in West Nile and those interviewed in Luwero. When probing Lieutenant Colonel Olanya Ojara, for example, they asked, 'we have had evidence from West Nile. We have had evidence from Luwero [...] witnesses tended to call the [UNLA] armies Acholi [...] Had it come to you that they called the Uganda army [an] Acholi army'? To which the witness replied, 'Yes, that one I heard it because there was a general feeling that the army composed of Acholi'. <sup>706</sup>

This linguistic phenomenon and collective memory of the UNLA is of clear sociological and historical importance. Primarily it raises the crucial question of why this period of violence has been interpreted and contextualised in such a way? First, we must consider the possibility that these images of the UNLA and Acholi soldiers accurately reflect the past, that they unproblematically reproduce the realities of

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<sup>702</sup> HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Rotino Wilson Anyayo, pp.5891-[?]. The way the HRC phrased questions and the impact this had over witnesses' responses will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>703</sup> HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Rotino Wilson Anyayo, pp.5891-[?].

<sup>704</sup> Branch, 'Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence', pp.30-31; Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*, p.9.

<sup>705</sup> Mark Leopold, *Inside West Nile: Violence, History and Representation on an African Frontier* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), p.56. Emphasis added. For an additional example of this linguistic phenomenon, see HRCA, VOL. VI, Masimo Olukwa Kenyi, pp.5767-5777.

<sup>706</sup> HRCA, VOL. VII, Lt. Col. Olanya Ojara, pp.6391-6440.

Obote's second presidency. There is certainly ample evidence to suggest that atrocities and human rights violations, including looting, rape and murder, were committed by some Acholi UNLA soldiers. Even Acholi people themselves tend to claim soldiers under Obote II demonstrated more brutality than those enlisted under earlier regimes. As one Acholi elder from the chiefdom of Patiko explained:

The soldiers of the King's African Rifles, when they come back home I remember telling you that they were so much loved and they also did not disturb people [...] During Obote's second regime, that was when soldiers didn't live well [...] [soldiers] of Obote's second regime were the ones who were generally bad.<sup>707</sup>

Similarly, another Acholi elder from Padibe suggested:

When Obote returned from Tanzania [...] the people he recruited were called the UNLA [and] their destructive natures began to be seen [...] Some [UNLA soldiers] who came back from the army [...] were saying that they used to write using blood "I killed seven" or what, with the blood of those that they had killed.<sup>708</sup>

Moreover, the fact that some communities from West Nile were initially occupied by a poorly trained, government-sponsored Acholi militia group might help further explain why a number of witnesses from this area in particular referred to the military force which harassed them as simply 'an Acholi army'. In February 1980, when it became clear the Tanzanian army intended to depart the following year, Obote directed that militia forces be formed with immediate effect in each district of

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<sup>707</sup> Interview with 148, Male, Patiko, 21 November 2016.

<sup>708</sup> Interview with 131, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016.

Uganda.<sup>709</sup> Following this announcement an Acholi militia force was sent to West Nile on the pretext of flushing out guerrillas from what was once Amin's stronghold. According to a number of the HRC witnesses, these Acholi militiamen mistreated and tortured civilians on an unprecedented scale.<sup>710</sup> Even the Chairman for the HRC stated during one interview:

Now, what we were told in West Nile was that while the Tanzanians were there [...] there were (sic) some kind of discipline [...] [but that when] they had recruited a number of militia soldiers into West Nile, mostly from the Acholi and Langi areas [...] these people systematically carried out genocide against the people of West Nile.<sup>711</sup>

On the surface then, such evidence indicates Acholi UNLA soldiers, or at least Acholi militia recruits, were responsible for many of the atrocities committed under Obote II. We must, however, exercise caution here. Firstly, careful reading of the transcripts collected for the HRC reveals an explicit bias in the way questions were phrased by the council. For instance, Rotino Wilson Anyayo from West Nile was asked:

We have already been told by evidence we have received here that there was a very bad feeling between the local people here and the Acholi who presumably came in as Government troops for the majority of the

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<sup>709</sup> Moroto, Moroto District Archives (MDA), Box P.024, C/MIL/1, Military Affairs, letter dated 15 February 1980.

<sup>710</sup> For example, see HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Emmanuel Eluwaga, pp.5755-5767; Interview with 103, Male, Gulu, 11 October 2016, served with Ugandan Federation Alliance, FRONSA, UNLA 1971-1985.

<sup>711</sup> HRCA, VOL. XI, Interview with Leander Komakech, pp.10828-1098.

Government troops were said, to have been Acholi. Did you yourself notice this very bad feeling between these two [groups of] people?<sup>712</sup>

Likewise, an Acholi civil servant Opika Opoka was asked:

[Does it] surprise you that when we were in Arua [an area of West Nile], people used to label every hated soldier as an Acholi. And that when we specifically asked them why they say they were Acholi. They said, because it were (sic) Acholi who were killing us [...] you see we were told, it is on record [...] it was given in evidence that actually the Acholi did [act] very badly.<sup>713</sup>

Leading questions of this kind, which were laced with provocative comments, clearly aimed to both confirm and reinforce preconceived assumptions regarding Acholi soldiers. Although they were used less frequently during the early stages of the HRC investigation, they were not wholly absent. Such questions were thus shaped by both the statements the council heard whilst interviewing witnesses and, importantly, existing stereotypes.

Secondly, this inherent bias did not just manifest itself in the way the HRC hearings were conducted. It was also discernible in the way witnesses responded to and discussed UNLA violence both for the HRC in the early 1990s, and during interviews collected more recently. Rumours and allegations regarding Acholi soldiers massacring civilian populations in brutal and shocking ways were, for example, often heralded as indisputable fact by people who did not actually witness the events. General Mustafa Adrisi, for instance, despite being in exile during Obote's second

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<sup>712</sup> HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Rotino Wilson Anyayo, pp.5891-[?].

<sup>713</sup> HRCA, VOL. X, Interview with H. S. Opika Opoka, pp.9245-9296.

presidency assured the HRC council that it was Acholi soldiers who ‘pounded some children in mortars’, ‘cut women who were pregnant to remove the children’, and locked the lame in houses before setting them ablaze.<sup>714</sup> In addition, even when witnesses to UNLA violence lacked sufficient evidence to prove the soldiers who maltreated them were Acholi, or even from the North, they tended to doggedly repeat their accusations nonetheless. A Munyoro man interviewed by the author, for example, explained that his community referred to all the UNLA soldiers who mistreated civilians in his region as ‘northerners’. When asked how they had been able to identify where the soldiers who caused such suffering were from, he replied:

Okay we have not researched to find out who killed [our people] [...] [for] those who came to our home, funny enough there was a Muganda whom I talked to, but most of them were from the North [...] for us we were calling them northerners [anyway].<sup>715</sup>

Thus, even when this man’s personal experiences actively challenged the normative narrative, he nonetheless maintained that those soldiers who had terrorised his community were mostly from the North. Similarly vague and ambiguous statements were provided to the HRC. A number of witnesses, for example, suggested they could identify the soldiers based on the language they spoke.<sup>716</sup> As was discussed at length in the introduction to this thesis, Acholi is one of eight languages — namely Lango, Alur, Labwor, Kumam, Adhola, Chope, Dholuo and Acholi — which are genetically related, meaning they all descended from the same ancestral language, proto-Southern Luo. These languages are spoken in various parts of Uganda as well as eastern Kenya.

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<sup>714</sup> HRCA, VOL. VII, Interview with General Adrisi Mustafa, pp.6053-6282.

<sup>715</sup> Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2018.

<sup>716</sup> For example, see HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Emmanuel Eluwaga, pp.5755-5767.

Some of these languages, which are in a sense siblings, are mutually intelligible. It seems doubtful, therefore, that Central Sudanic speakers from West Nile or Bantu speakers from the 'Luwero Triangle', having been unfamiliar with the intricate differences between these individual languages, would have been able to accurately distinguish between an Acholi-speaking soldier and a Langi-speaking soldier, for example.

Many of the ethnic groups that speak a dialect of proto-Southern Luo also share a distinctive feature in that most male names begin with the letter 'O'. To some extent this linguistic phenomenon makes it relatively easy for an outsider to identify a person as belonging to the Southern Luo language and cultural cluster, much to the disadvantage of those Southern Luo-speaking soldiers targeted under Idi Amin's regime. In turn, however, this makes it incredibly difficult for an outsider to distinguish between, for example, an Acholi man and a Langi man, solely based on their name. This was something Opika Opoka made an impassioned statement about whilst acting as a witness for the HRC.

Take Otim, Okello – these names are shared by – I do not know how many tribes in Uganda. They are shared by Jopadhola they are shared by [...] Kuman, Lango, Alur [...] So for anybody going by name, anything spelt like that, [and suggesting that] he is an Acholi without even verifying it [...] it is not fair [...] I feel that Acholi is earning a bad name for nothing <sup>717</sup>

And yet, this sort of assumption about a soldier's ethnic identity based on the spelling of their name was prevalent throughout the HRC transcripts and has even crept its way

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<sup>717</sup> HRCA, VOL. X, Interview with H. S. Opika Opoka, pp.9245-9296.

into scholarly writing. Whilst describing UNLA violence in southern Uganda, for example, historian Phares Mutibwa, commented that:

The callousness of the UNLA soldiers is shown by the kind of graffiti they left on the walls of the houses whose inhabitants they had hacked to death. At Kilolo, some 15 miles north of Kampala, one soldier wrote: ‘Killing a Muganda or a Munyankole is as easy as riding a bicycle’, followed by his *Acholi name*<sup>718</sup>

Thus, as will be argued in more detail below, what this evidence ultimately demonstrates is that individual memories, recollections and opinions can be shaped and manipulated by dominant discourses and the collective memory of an event or era.<sup>719</sup>

The above evidence has not been outlined with the intention of freeing Acholi soldiers of any culpability for the violence which ensued during Obote II. Such an aim would prove futile considering the sheer mass of testimonies which indicate otherwise. Even so, such evidence does suggest that throughout Museveni’s rule there has been a strong desire amongst parts of the Ugandan population to blame the atrocities of the 1980s on Acholi soldiers, even when practical experience has proven contradictory, or verifiable evidence has been lacking. Both Sverker Finnström and Adam Branch have argued this anti-Acholi sentiment stemmed from the way the NRM justified and defended its insurgency against Obote’s regime. They argue the NRM framed its

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<sup>718</sup> Mutibwa, p.59. Emphasis added.

<sup>719</sup> For more on how memories of violent pasts are reshaped, see *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

revolution as a civil war, alleging that the enemy were northerners in general, and the Acholi in particular, and that this designation resonated with beleaguered Ugandans who had experienced violence on behalf of Acholi soldiers first-hand.<sup>720</sup> Moreover, they argue Museveni's war propaganda was able to draw on the Acholi's disproportionately large presence in the armed forces, as well as the colonial stereotype which heralded the Acholi as the embodiment of northern political-military power, to evoke fear and mistrust of Acholi soldiers even in those who had not come into direct contact with them.<sup>721</sup>

Clearly, both Branch and Finnström are correct to argue that the violence committed by some Acholi soldiers during Obote II unfolded in parallel with a growing attempt on behalf of the NRM to direct how this conflict was being contextualised on a national scale. Throughout its guerrilla war, the NRM certainly prided itself on its socially progressive ideals and the professionalisation of its soldiers, which the charismatic Museveni argued stood in stark contrast to the Acholi UNLA recruits who abused their power and privilege through engaging in indiscriminate rape, looting and human slaughter. The following extract written by Grace Ibingira, an ex-UPC cabinet minister, highlights Museveni's increasing skill in mobilising popular discontent and justifying the Movement's insurgency in these terms.

I have been deeply impressed by the generation of leaders who took the gun to fight the civil war in the NRA. Their conduct towards our population deserves the highest commendation from us all. Even when more deprived than government troops, they do not loot people's property. Even when

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<sup>720</sup> Branch, 'Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence', pp.30-31; and Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, pp.74-75.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.



endowed with the power of the gun and with young hot blood they do not rape. They have preserved life even of army captives and re-established peace and tranquillity in areas they now control, in sharp contrast to what occurs in places under the UNLA.<sup>722</sup>

But this interpretation of Museveni's insurgency as a struggle over power between the North and the South, and this stereotype of the UNLA as a group of murderous and revengeful Acholi soldiers, were also shaped in the aftermath of the NRM seizing power in 1986. For example, official propaganda on the radio and in newspapers which followed Museveni seizing power continued to hold the people of the North, and especially the Acholi, responsible for all the sufferings that Ugandans had undergone throughout Obote's second presidency.<sup>723</sup> Moreover, in his autobiography, published eleven years after he captured power, Museveni himself wrote:

Since the army was dominated by people from the north, and since the first Prime Minister, Milton Obote, came from the north [...] [Obote] could not resist using the army in order to keep himself in power. Since the army itself was not well trained and had a colonial mentality, it engaged in numerous anti-people activities, including mass killings of Ugandans. This made the northern politicians and their army very much hated in other parts of the country. For the army, murder had become a way of life<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> CUA, MMLP/DINW, Dr M. M. Louise Pirouet, extract included within a photocopy entitled 'The present situation in Uganda and the future prospects for the country', written by Hugh Dinwiddy.

<sup>723</sup> Heike Behrend, 'War in Northern Uganda: The Holy Spirit Movements of Alice Lakwena, Severino Lukoya & Joseph Kony', in *African Guerrillas*, ed. by Christopher Clapham (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp.107-119 (p.109).

<sup>724</sup> Museveni, *Sewing the Mustard Seed*, p.213.

Finally, Dennis Pain's urgent appeal in 1997 for the NRM government to stop 'blaming the Acholi for Luwero rather than [the] multi-ethnic UNLA', further demonstrates this propaganda which implicated and incriminated the Acholi as proving relentless even a decade after the NRM captured power.<sup>725</sup>

To explain this phenomenon it is important to recognise how this damaging image of northerners, and Acholi UNLA soldiers in particular, not only helped legitimise the NRM's insurgency during Obote's regime, but has also served a more recent function. For one, NRA soldiers (initially sent north to chase down former Acholi recruits who had fled upon the collapse of Tito Okello's regime in 1986) engaged in widespread killing, rape and wanton destruction of property upon their arrival in Acholiland.<sup>726</sup> Thus, by further fostering and disseminating this image of his 1986 victory as one of a righteous, morally superior south defeating a primitive, barbaric north, Museveni has helped legitimise the way in which NRA recruits treated Acholiland as occupied territory, and the local Acholi people as enemies, during the late 1980s.<sup>727</sup> In addition, this distorted imagery has helped justify the political isolation and economic marginalisation of northern Uganda under Museveni's rule.<sup>728</sup> It is important to note that remembrance is a fundamentally political act; selectivity, in terms of what is recorded and what is discarded, can serve a specific political purpose by helping to promote the interests and aspirations of contemporary political agents.<sup>729</sup> Thus, throughout Museveni's protracted presidency, the NRM has

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<sup>725</sup> Pain, p.28.

<sup>726</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.101.

<sup>727</sup> See Finnström, 'For God and my Life'.

<sup>728</sup> See E. A. Brett, 'Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Rôle of the Military in Politics', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33:1 (1995), 129-152 (p.145).

<sup>729</sup> See *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. by Michael Lambek and Paul Antze (London: Routledge, 1996).

continued in its attempts to control the public representation of this contentious past largely because it has justified its actions towards Acholiland and Acholi people both to the international community and to local Ugandan people.<sup>730</sup>

Nonetheless, the string of local insurgencies which erupted in Acholiland after 1986 helped further position UNLA Acholi soldiers as the embodiment of cruelty and primitive barbarity in collective memory. The LRA in particular provided the ideal context for reinterpreting UNLA atrocities as solely the result of Acholi savagery. As Maurice Halbwachs has effectively demonstrated, remembering is a process which involves reshaping the past based on the present. Rather than simply being preserved, the past is reconstructed in accord with, and under the pressure of, contemporary society. To remember, therefore, is not just to reproduce in thought events of the past, but through an effort of reasoning and through a wish to introduce greater coherence, remembering involves touching memories up, rearranging them, eliminating some, whilst giving others prestige. It is through this process that alterations and distortions occur.<sup>731</sup> As has been mentioned previously, the LRA acted brutally towards the local Acholi population, causing suffering on an appalling scale. Children were routinely kidnapped and inducted as rebels, while punishments towards supposedly recalcitrant Acholi communities involved facial disfigurement and the removal of limbs.<sup>732</sup> Many Ugandans, therefore, who routinely heard and read reports regarding LRA brutality,

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<sup>730</sup> See Derek R. Peterson, 'A History of the Heritage Economy in Yoweri Museveni's Uganda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 10:4 (2016), 789-806 (p.793, p.802); Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.1-65.

<sup>731</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp.40-53, pp.183-84.

<sup>732</sup> For more information on this violence, see Rosa Ehrenreich, *The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997); Dunn, 'Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army'; *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myths and Realities*, ed. by Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010); Zachary Lomo and Lucy Hovil, *Behind the Violence: The War in Northern Uganda* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2004); and Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.102.

concluded that it must have been Acholi UNLA soldiers who committed the atrocities in the ‘Luwero Triangle’ and West Nile during the early 1980s. For example, whilst explaining how his community had been viciously attacked by Acholi soldiers during Obote II, a Munyoro man interviewed for this project inferred how his understanding of the Acholi as ‘very dangerous people’ had been manipulated by the recent cycle of violence under the LRA:

I kept on seeing some scenarios where they [the Acholi] were involved, like the Kony war, what we were seeing on TV, where they were cutting people’s lips, ears, innocent people, killings, children, raping of women, it brought me back the other imagination [memory/interpretation], that they [the Acholi] are dangerous.<sup>733</sup>

Similarly, in his book regarding post-colonial Uganda Mutibwa argued the soldiers responsible for the massacres and human rights abuses at the ‘Luwero Triangle’ were men from the north, and more specifically, ‘Langis and Acholis, especially the latter’.

<sup>734</sup> This comment is accompanied by an endnote which reads:

My judgement of the soldiers from the north in regard to the atrocities they committed in the Luwero Triangle may be thought by some to be too harsh, and that bitterness has been allowed to predominate over historical objectivity. But similar atrocities have been and still are being committed in the north by the rebels fighting the NRM government against innocent civilians who have nothing to do with the rebellion going on there.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2018.

<sup>734</sup> Mutibwa, p.157.

<sup>735</sup> Mutibwa, p.165.

Rather than discrediting any suggestion that Mutibwa's assessment of UNLA violence lacked historical objectivity, such a statement only further confirms the author's inability to separate the present from the past — a failure to prevent the LRA violence in more recent years from influencing his interpretation and memory of the UNLA.

To briefly conclude, the past is controlled by the present just as much as the present is influenced by the past. This violent imagery surrounding Acholi UNLA soldiers has thus been significantly influenced by the spasms of fierce resistance to Museveni's rule which rippled through Acholiland from 1986 up until 2006, as well as NRM propaganda during the 1990s and early 2000s. Together, these factors popularised a general consensus regarding Acholi UNLA soldiers being largely culpable for the human suffering which transpired under Obote II.

SECTION II: 'THOSE [SOLDIERS] WHO RAPED, WHO PERHAPS STOLE [...] ALL THOSE PEOPLE WERE LIKE THAT BECAUSE OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF POVERTY'<sup>736</sup>: EXPLAINING UNLA BRUTALITY

Critics of Maurice Halbwachs' presentist approach to memory claim new interpretations of the past must always contain traces of continuity.<sup>737</sup> As Lewis A. Coser has argued, although the needs and thoughts of current society might impel it to

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<sup>736</sup> Interview with 107, Male, Palenga, 13 October 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL, UPDF 1984-2004.

<sup>737</sup> See Barry Schwartz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory', *Social Forces*, 61:2 (1982), 374-97.

refashion and revise the past, it cannot erase all that went before.<sup>738</sup> Remembering thus compounds preservation with change, continuity with alteration.<sup>739</sup> As was briefly mentioned above, despite the evidence indicating Uganda's collective memory of Obote's second presidency has been distorted and reconstructed over time, Acholi soldiers cannot be relieved of all responsibility. Horrific acts of brutality were committed by UNLA soldiers during the early 1980s, some of whom were without doubt Acholi. How this era is remembered, therefore, does involve some level of continuity with the realities of the past. In light of this, the following section asks one fundamental question: how can we explain the excessive violence associated with Obote's second regime, and in particular, the brutality of some Acholi UNLA soldiers?

There is a general consensus within existing literature that UNLA violence was the result of entrenched ethnic cleavages and the calculated exploitation of ethnocultural variables. Philip Roessler has argued ethnic pogroms can serve a communicative role by signalling to other potential dissidents the costs of challenging the regime. Moreover, when a rival ethnic group is widely regarded as posing an existential threat, targeting them through communal violence can shore up support within the ruling party's own ethnic heartland.<sup>740</sup> For many scholars, this hypothesis reflects what happened under Obote II. Mutibwa, for example, has argued, 'Obote came back as a wounded buffalo, determined to crush all those whom he believed had supported Amin'. Moreover, as Museveni's insurgency gathered pace and began to threaten the stability of Obote's regime, the 'Luwero Triangle' became a laboratory

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<sup>738</sup> Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945', in *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.26.

<sup>739</sup> Schwartz, pp.374-97.

<sup>740</sup> Philip Roessler, 'The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa', *World Politics*, 63:2 (2011), 300-346.

for experiments of genocide. Obote played upon local and primordial loyalties, turning his ‘barbarous soldiers’ into ‘instruments to wipe out a whole nationality’.<sup>741</sup> For Mutibwa, then, UNLA violence was predominantly driven by the manipulation of ethnicity on behalf of the political elite.

How believable is this narrative? Can the atrocities committed under Obote II be explained in such simple terms? The short answer is, of course, no. Primarily, it is important to remember that ethnic categories do not only assume significance when politicians and leaders find a use for them.<sup>742</sup> Rivalries based on ethnicity can also play out on a profoundly local level, meaning some of the violence associated with Obote II was also shaped by the prejudices and preconceptions individual soldiers held. For example, as will be demonstrated below, the brutality which unfolded in West Nile during the initial years of Obote’s rule was no doubt partially the result of Acholi and Langi soldiers seeking to punish and humiliate communities they deemed culpable for the persecution and oppression they had been subjected to throughout the 1970s.<sup>743</sup>

Few would doubt the unlawful imprisonment, torture and systematic murder Acholi and Langi soldiers faced under Idi Amin’s rule. Several thousand were murdered by Amin’s forces as early as July 1971 for alleged or possible (and only

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<sup>741</sup> Mutibwa, p.150, pp.159-162.

<sup>742</sup> For an opposing argument, see Christopher Wrigley, ‘Four Steps Towards Disaster’, in *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development*, ed. by Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1988), pp.27-36.

<sup>743</sup> Gulu, Gulu District Archive (GDA), Box 541, Letter from the DC of Gulu to the Military Commission, 17 October 1980; GDA, Box 541, Letter from the Vicar General of the Gulu Diocese to DC Gulu, 15 October 1980. For historiography which refers to this argument, see Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.65; Decker, *In Idi Amin’s Shadow*, p.171; Crisp, ‘Ugandan Refugees in Sudan and Zaire’, pp.163-180; Brett, ‘Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda’, p.142; Kasozi, p.179, p.177; and David Shukman, [title N/A], *Sunday Times*, 10 April 1983.

occasionally actual) dissent.<sup>744</sup> A military report dated 24<sup>th</sup> July 1971, for example, documents what was in retrospect no doubt a premeditated and politically directed massacre. The report details how all the Acholi and Langi recruits stationed at the military barracks in Moroto were loaded in troop carriers and driven to just outside the town where they were slaughtered.<sup>745</sup> Even top army officials such as Major Lazarus Orombi and General Adrisi Mustafa, both of whom served under Idi Amin, have admitted knowledge of formal directives to arrest and kill Acholi and Langi soldiers during the 1970s.<sup>746</sup> Personal accounts provided by Acholi soldiers who managed to evade being killed, have also proven critical in shedding light on this era of wanton state violence. They reveal the brutal fate many Acholi recruits suffered under Amin's regime and as such it is worth quoting from one account directly.<sup>747</sup>

The Amin soldiers who rounded us up consisted of Lugbara, Kakwa and Madi [all of these ethnic groups are based in West Nile] [...] The only group that were arrested were Acholi and Langi [...] soldiers grabbed me and pushed me against the wall where I banged my head and collapsed and they handcuffed me and one of them hit me with the butt of the gun and my face was covered in blood [...] [they then] started pounding my fingers with the butts [of their guns] because I had wiped the blood off my face. I was [then] caned and thrown in the land rover [...] The land rover was full of dead and live soldiers [...] As we were approaching the river I made up my mind to

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<sup>744</sup> Reid, *Warfare in African History*, p.72; Kyemba, pp.46-7; and Nelson Kasfir, 'Uganda: An Uncertain Quest for Recovery', *Current History*, 84:501 (1985), 169-173.

<sup>745</sup> MDA, Box P.013, C/MIL/I/1, Military Disturbances, Letter written 24<sup>th</sup> July 1971 entitled 'Confused military insurrections in Moroto Army Barracks 11.7.1971'.

<sup>746</sup> HRCA, VOL. VII, Interview with General Adrisi Mustafa, pp.6053-6282; and HRCA, VOL. XIII, Interview with Major Lazarus Orombi, pp.12502-12550.

<sup>747</sup> HRCA, VOL. XI, Interview with Julius Peter Mwaka, pp.10213-10217.



jump off the land rover. When I jumped off they fired at me but I rolled and ran.<sup>748</sup>

Some UNLA veterans explicitly acknowledge they enlisted into the army during Obote II because of the anger and resentment they felt towards Idi Amin. As one former Acholi soldier explained:

What made many people join the [UNLA] army was Amin's atrocities, Amin slaughtered the Acholi to a great extent [...] He killed six people from amongst us here, he slaughtered all of them with a knife. Most of them even worked in the army, so they were all killed. It was anger that made people join the army.<sup>749</sup>

Similarly, another UNLA soldier claimed it was the 'bad killings that happened during the time of Amin' which encouraged people to enlist: 'they did not join with innocent interests, some joined with the intention of taking revenge, to go and kill'.<sup>750</sup> Finally, one veteran from the Acholi chiefdom of Padibe openly admitted:

What made me want to join the army was the anger I felt as a result of Idi Amin Dada. When he took power from Obote I, he killed a lot of people. He even killed two of my brothers. I was angry so I thought that I should join the army so that I could get revenge.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>748</sup> HRCA, VOL. VII, Lt. Col. Olanya Ojara, pp.6391-6440.

<sup>749</sup> Interview with 155, Male, Gulu, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, NRA, and CILIL 1981-1989.

<sup>750</sup> Interview with 92, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with the UNLA 1984-1989.

<sup>751</sup> Interview with 130, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-86.

It is important to note how Acholi veterans use phrases such as ‘Amin slaughtered the Acholi’.<sup>752</sup> In reality, of course, it seems unlikely any of the specific acts of violence described by these former UNLA soldiers were performed by Idi Amin himself. In fact, some of these atrocities were likely committed by government soldiers who did not even originate from Idi Amin’s homeland (West Nile) or speak his language (Central Sudanic). Throughout the 1970s the rank-and-file of the UA was certainly dominated by ‘Amin’s people’. In 1978, for example, 3486 soldiers out of a total of 5066 (69 per cent) were either Central Sudanic speakers or from other language communities based in West Nile. But even so, other ethnic groups were also well represented. There was, for instance, 395 Baganda soldiers in the army in 1978, as well as 281 Bakonjo and 117 Bayankole. In fact, Bantu speakers made up a significant 25 per cent.<sup>753</sup> Nevertheless, based on the extracts outlined above, it is clear that Acholi UNLA soldiers tended to either attribute the atrocities of the era to Idi Amin himself, or project the violence and other failures of the regime onto people from West Nile more generally.<sup>754</sup>

Persecution, maltreatment and feelings of oppression can often produce fierce emotion and drive people to seek vengeance. But for Acholi UNLA soldiers, their desire for retribution was likely compounded by how killing has been historically interpreted, confronted and managed on a local level within Acholi communities. To some extent, seeking revenge for the atrocities committed under Idi Amin’s leadership by targeting his people more widely represents a continuation of how Acholi speakers

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<sup>752</sup> Interview with 155, Male, Gulu, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, NRA, and CILIL 1981-1989.

<sup>753</sup> ‘Tribal Breakdown of Recruits’, July 1978: UNLA RO. As cited in Omara-Otunnu, pp.134-5.

<sup>754</sup> HRCA, VOL. VI, Interview with Emmanuel Eluwaga, pp.5755-5767; and Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.65.

have handled violence in the past. As Paul Richards has convincingly argued, modern African conflicts need ‘to be understood in relation to patterns of violence already embedded within society’.<sup>755</sup> Ethnographic data indicates that when a member of an Acholi community was killed by a stranger during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a blood feud could operate whereby the agnatic kin of the dead could legitimately seek *culu kwor*, meaning revenge or compensation, through killing any member of the perpetrator’s lineage.<sup>756</sup> In a sense, then, an entire community was held accountable for a murder committed by just one individual. This notion is still prevalent amongst Acholi speakers today. Although in more recent years the victim’s relatives have usually sought redress from the perpetrator’s clansmen in the form of livestock, a blood feud between two communities can still erupt if the offending party fails to pay the required compensation.<sup>757</sup> This shared set of cultural standards and norms regarding murder means that even today it remains an obligation and duty for the victim’s kin to seek retribution for the death of a relative from the perpetrator’s community as a whole, be it in the form of wealth or further violence. This no doubt helps us further understand why some Acholi soldiers felt morally compelled to avenge those hurt or killed under Idi Amin through committing violence against ‘Amin’s people’ as a whole.

Nonetheless, the horrors of Obote’s second regime cannot be solely rationalised in terms of exacerbated ethnic tensions. For one, accounts of the

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<sup>755</sup> Paul Richards, ‘New War and Ethnographic Approach’, in *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, ed. by Paul Richards (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp.1-21 (p.11).

<sup>756</sup> Uma, ‘Acholi Arab Nubian Relations’; and Okech, *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo*, p.15.

<sup>757</sup> Author’s field notes and informal interviews; Girling, p.66; GDA, Box 579, File 73, Letter dated 10-09-1990 from Chairman RC III, ‘Voice of the People of Lalogi Division’; and Jalobo Jacan Ngomlokojo, *The Acholi, My Souvenir* (Kampala: [n.pub], 1999), pp.50-51. This is despite the rise in Christianity which can cause the notion of individual culpability to become more prevalent.

oppression and tyranny under Amin's regime do not reflect the full reality of the 1970s. Embedded in the tales recited by survivors of Amin's rule are stories of heroic self-sacrifice, whereby non-Acholi officers risked their lives to help save the Acholi soldiers Amin's regime had destined for slaughter.<sup>758</sup> One UNLA soldier interviewed for this project, for example, described how his Etesot commanding officer had secretly allowed all the Acholi soldiers in his unit to collect the wages they were due and return home unharmed.<sup>759</sup> Similarly, another UNLA combatant claimed that:

Many Acholis and Langis were destroyed [under Amin] [...] We were arrested also but luckily there was a colonel called Toko. He was a Lugbara [from West Nile], a pure Ugandan and a protestant, a Christian. He was the one who helped us [...] So [that] colonel picked us, [and] negotiated with the Muslims of Uganda to transport us [out of the country].<sup>760</sup>

As both these examples of interethnic solidarity highlight, hardened, dogmatic, ethnic cleavages did not systematically resonate with society as a whole. The Acholi were not branded as enemies by all throughout Amin's rule. Equally, but more importantly to this discussion, not all Acholi UNLA soldiers identified those from West Nile or those living in and amongst the NRM insurgency as their opponents. During this period of wanton state brutality, understanding, tolerance and benevolence can nonetheless be found. Under Obote II, a Muganda, Charles Muyanja, was arrested and taken to the notorious Makindye military barracks — where an indeterminate number of people were killed and tortured throughout the early 1980s — after having been

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<sup>758</sup> HRCA, VOL. VII, Interview with General Adrisi Mustafa, pp.6053-6282; and Interview with 128, Male, Palenga, 4 November 2016, served with UA, UNLA, NRA 1971-1992.

<sup>759</sup> Interview with 136, Male, Palabek, 10 November 2016, served with UA and UNLA 1969-86.

<sup>760</sup> Interview with 157, Male, Gulu, 1 December 2016, served with UNLA and LRA 1970-2004.

accused of being a NRA guerrilla. Whilst imprisoned, it was an Acholi soldier who prevented him from being executed. During his testimony for the HRC, Muyanja explains how this Acholi soldier convinced his colleagues Muyanja was not a guerrilla fighter. Thus, Muyanja claimed, ‘through him I was saved and not killed’.<sup>761</sup>

Secondly, most UNLA soldiers did not initially join the army with the underlying intention of mistreating civilian populations based on their ethnicity. Instead, their motivations for joining the army strike a startling resemblance to the reasons provided by veterans who had joined the KAR under British rule, or the UA during the 1960s, or indeed even the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) more recently.<sup>762</sup> For one Acholi UNLA soldier who joined in 1980, for example, it was the possibility of acting as a heroic provider of peace and stability; for another, there were few alternatives, ‘you just decided to join the army because there was nothing to do’; another man who joined in 1979 envisioned soldiering, and in particular wearing the military uniform, as a platform for reputation-building; for another man, who likewise joined in 1979, it was familial pressure which seemingly left him no choice but to enlist; and finally for numerous others, referred to locally as ‘the children of the poor’, it was economic deprivation coupled with an underlying desire to use the wages for marriage which drove them to join the UNLA.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>761</sup> HRCA, VOL. II, Interview with Charles Muyanja, pp.1337-1347.

<sup>762</sup> For example, see Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45; Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71; Interview with 133, Male, Gulu, 18 October 2016, served with NRA Local Defence Unit, 1991-93; Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-96; Interview with 97, Male, Gulu, 7 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-1992; and Interview with 104, Male, Atiak, 12 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-1996.

<sup>763</sup> Interview with 117, Male, Gulu, 21 October 2016, served with UNLA, NRA/UPDF 1980-2015; Interview with 96, Male, Gulu, 7 October 2016, served with UNLA 1984-86; Interview with 154, Male, Atiak, 23 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA/UPDF 1979-1993; Interview with 141, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-85;

Finally, this rhetoric regarding an ethnically-defined civil war ignores the fact UNLA brutality was not confined to either West Nile or the ‘Luwero Triangle’. Security intelligence reports, for example, detail UNLA soldiers robbing and physically abusing local people in Karamoja district.<sup>764</sup> Even more tellingly, the administrative secretary in Gulu wrote numerous letters during the early 1980s complaining about UNLA soldiers harassing and abusing Acholi civilians.<sup>765</sup> As one dispatch stated:

I have received a letter from the Brigade Commander, Northern Region, requesting us to cooperate with him in arresting loitering soldiers, who, when on Pass Leave, go about disturbing the peace of the general public. On many occasions these soldiers have involved themselves in robbery, rape and general public nuisance.<sup>766</sup>

Thus, this narrative revolving around existing ethnic rivalries and an underlying desire for revenge cannot fully grasp the reverberating and refracting social, political and economic drivers behind young Acholi men’s enthusiasm for soldiering during this period, or the extreme forms of violence which ensued. It is important to remember that people act both as members of socially constructed communities (i.e. ethnic

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for example, see Interview with 156, Male, Gulu, 29 November 2016, served with UNLA and NRA Local Defence Unit 1980-1995; Interview with 116, Male, Payira, 19 October 2018, served with UNLA and NRA/UPDF 1979-1991. For the phrase ‘the children of the poor’, see Interview with 120, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>764</sup> For example, see MRA, Box P.013, C/N/INT/1, Security Intelligence Report; and MRA, Box P.038, S.INT,1/1, Security General, letter entitled ‘Seizure and robbery of properties by army soldiers’, 4 July 1980.

<sup>765</sup> For example, see GDA, Box 536, C.MIL 1, letter from Administrative Secretary dated 23 December 1982 to The Commanding Officer 12<sup>th</sup> Bn. Gulu; GDA, Box 536, C.MIL 1, letter from Administrative Secretary dated 26 April 1983 to The Commanding Officer 12<sup>th</sup> Bn. Gulu; and GDA, Box 531, C.MIL 3, letter from Administrative Secretary dated 11 September 1984 to The Brigade Commander Northern Region.

<sup>766</sup> GDA, Box 531, C.MIL 3, letter from Administrative Secretary dated 24 July 1984 to All Sub-County Chiefs and All County Chiefs in the Gulu District, entitled ‘Loitering Soldiers on Pass Leave’.

groups), and at the same time as private persons, who are impacted by an underlying layer of unique, personal motivations.<sup>767</sup> Thus, any single, overarching explanation for the complexity and hybridity which characterised UNLA violence (such as ethnicity) can only ever prove to be reductive. As Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn have succinctly suggested, ‘monocausal perspectives and broad-brush explanations’ tend to obscure more than they reveal.<sup>768</sup>

Recent historiography regarding African guerrilla movements can be of real use when it comes to searching for a more nuanced, holistic explanation for UNLA violence under Obote II.<sup>769</sup> If the wave of publications concerned with the brutality employed by Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia, or Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front based in Sierra Leone, have taught us anything, it is that however horrific the violence may at first appear, we should never dismiss it as incomprehensible. There is always some sense of internal logic, some sobering explanation for atrocities and human rights violations. From the late 1990s there was a surge of scholarship which contextualised recent conflicts in Africa as a veritable explosion of violent entrepreneurialism, commonly known as the ‘greed kills’ narrative.<sup>770</sup> This scholarly development emerged largely as a response to the ‘new

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<sup>767</sup> Lonsdale, ‘Agency in Tight Corners’, p.13.

<sup>768</sup> Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn, ‘African Guerrilla Politics: Raging Against the Machine?’, in *African Guerrillas: Raging Against The Machine*, ed. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), pp.9-39 (p.14).

<sup>769</sup> See *African Guerrillas*, ed. by Christopher Clapham (Oxford: James Currey, 1998); *African Guerrillas: Raging Against The Machine*, ed. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007); *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, ed. by Paul Richards (Oxford: James Currey, 2005); and Thandika Mkandawire, ‘The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial “Rebel Movements” in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence against the Peasantry’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40:2 (2002), 181-215.

<sup>770</sup> For example, see *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, ed. by Mats R. Berdal and David Malone (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013).

barbarism' tropes of the early 1990s, which identified post-Cold War violence in Africa as irrational and illogical in nature.<sup>771</sup> Thus, in some sense a backlash against this heart-of-darkness and violence for the sake of violence paradigm, those such as Klaas van Walraven and Jon Abbink suggested that when trying to further understand extreme forms of violence we should not rule out material desire and the incentive of plundering and tribute, especially within a context of deprivation and scarcity.<sup>772</sup> David Keen and Paul Collier likewise argued that physical force is first and foremost aimed at the enrichment of the fighters.<sup>773</sup>

Taking into account the above economic explanations, Kasozi seems to misinterpret the evidence somewhat when he describes those who turned to looting during the widespread breakdown of law and order in Uganda during the 1970s and 1980s as 'social deviants' who turned to 'extortion, and theft in a frenzy of random sociopathy'.<sup>774</sup> In reality, looting rarely represents irrational brutality, even when accompanied by extreme forms of physical violence. When the Tanzanian forces that ousted Amin departed Uganda in June 1981, they left behind a national army which was 'practically unpaid, and unprovided with food or accommodation'.<sup>775</sup> Acholi

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<sup>771</sup> For a scholar who employed evocative imagery of Africa and Africans see Robert Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet', *The Atlantic*, 2 (1994), 44-76; and Robert Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1996).

<sup>772</sup> Klaas Van Walraven and Jon Abbink, 'Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction', in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, ed. by Jon Abbink, Mirjam De Bruijn and Klaas Van Walraven (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp.1-43 (pp.14-15).

<sup>773</sup> David Keen, 'The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars', *Adelphi Papers*, 38:320 (1998), 1-89; Paul Collier, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict And Their Implications For Policy* (Development Research Group, World Bank, 1998) <[https://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/economic\\_causes\\_of\\_civilwar.pdf](https://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/economic_causes_of_civilwar.pdf)> [accessed 14 June 2019]; and Paul Collier, 'Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective', in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, ed. by Mats R. Berdal and David Malone (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

<sup>774</sup> Kasozi, pp.4-5.

<sup>775</sup> Crisp, 'National Security', p.165.



troops were thus driven to steal, loot and plunder by a feeling of relative deprivation, by a shared experience of economic despair and by an underlying sense that as gun-wielding soldiers they were entitled to redistribute resources. As one former Acholi UNLA soldier explained, ‘several cases came up against the soldiers. Those who raped, who perhaps stole [...] All those people were like that because of different forms of poverty’.<sup>776</sup> The items commonly stolen from civilians included food, clothing, blankets, mattresses and livestock: a further indication that pillaging and predation were being used as means to escape the drudgery of poverty through basic material improvement.<sup>777</sup> Theft through violence essentially became a survival strategy. Economic incentives are clearly, then, an important element in any form of armed struggle, not just African guerrilla insurgencies. The desire to supplement insufficient wages and accumulate wealth can influence both government and rebel soldiers to engage in violent entrepreneurialism.

Nonetheless, over the last twenty years the ‘greed kills’ analysis has been attacked on a number of fronts. Most notably it has been criticised for mistakenly conceptualising modern African conflicts as apolitical and thus ignoring the extent to which they represent ‘a rage against the “machinery” of the dysfunctional neopatrimonial state’.<sup>778</sup> More relevant to this discussion, though, is how the economic narrative can fail to integrate social factors. As has been consistently argued throughout this thesis, economic incentives cannot be separated from social impetuses. For example, pillaging offered disaffected young Acholi UNLA soldiers, who had had

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<sup>776</sup> Interview with 107, Male, Palenga, 13 October 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA/UPDF in 1984-2004.

<sup>777</sup> Interview with 154, Male, Atiak, 23 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA/UPDF 1979-1993; and ‘Women’s Experiences of Armed conflict in Uganda’, ISIS-WICCE Report, 1998.

<sup>778</sup> See *African Guerrillas: Raging Against The Machine*, ed. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn.

little opportunity for personal enrichment over the preceding decade, not only unique access to property and possessions, but through that, upward social mobility. In particular, UNLA soldiers returning home to Acholiland with stolen goods were better equipped to help care and provide for their wives and extended families, which directly impacted their access to respectable manhood. In addition to this, serving in the UNLA granted Acholi men access to that rarest of all commodities, young women.<sup>779</sup> It is not only the numerous accounts of rape, or the reports of UNLA soldiers returning to Acholiland with young girls as abductees, which indicate this was the case, but also the simple fact that looting helped young UNLA soldiers not yet married secure the necessary bridewealth payments.<sup>780</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Three, access to socially accepted adulthood amongst the Acholi is, at least in part, determined by young men's capacity to both accumulate and assert control over dependents such as women.

In addition to this, UNLA violence stemmed from an injured or 'hurt sense of honour'.<sup>781</sup> Although the Acholi were not completely dislocated from high politics and military endeavours throughout Idi Amin's regime, many individuals experienced a loss of military authority and blocked political aspirations.<sup>782</sup> Moreover, some men underwent a reduction in domestic power, in that their capacity to create and provide for a family had been inhibited as a result of the region's marginalisation.<sup>783</sup> Franz Fanon famously argued violence could act as a cleansing force, freeing the perpetrator from his inferiority complex.<sup>784</sup> More recently, Chris Dolan has similarly claimed

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<sup>779</sup> Iliffe, *Honour*, p.360.

<sup>780</sup> Gersony, p.9.

<sup>781</sup> For the phrase 'hurt sense of honour', see Moyd, 'From a hurt sense of honour'.

<sup>782</sup> For more information on politics amongst the Acholi during Amin's regime, see Laruni, 'From the Village to Entebbe'.

<sup>783</sup> Of course, for some, life continued fairly normally, see Laruni, pp.239-240.

<sup>784</sup> Fanon, p.94.

there is a link between feelings of resentment and violence.<sup>785</sup> Based on this, UNLA brutality can also be explained as a violent reaction to social desperation, as an attempt by some discontented Acholi men to wrest control over their life trajectories and reassert their power, strength, and importantly manhood, through physical force. As such, extreme forms of abuse were likely performed by some Acholi soldiers as a way of reclaiming and retrieving their masculine military power after the humiliation and oppression they experienced throughout the 1970s under Idi Amin.<sup>786</sup> As processes of emasculation are often associated with internally directed violence, this explanation also helps clarify why some Acholi soldiers mistreated and abused members of their own community. Acholiland witnessed a surge of lawlessness during the early 1980s, which mainly took the form of armed robbery, molestation, and murder.<sup>787</sup> Acholi soldiers stationed in the region played an active role in this climate of disorder through using their status as armed and uniformed men to terrorise civilians and acquire resources and commodities previously denied them through violence and intimidation.<sup>788</sup> In this way, although UNLA violence may not always have been specifically about getting revenge on ‘Amin’s people’, it may well have reflected individual expressions of emasculation which were rooted in Acholi people’s collective experience of marginalisation, exclusion and subordination throughout Amin’s rule.

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<sup>785</sup> Dolan, ‘Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States’.

<sup>786</sup> For a similar argument in relation to agents of the state under Idi Amin, see Decker, pp.41-42.

<sup>787</sup> Kitgum, Kitgum District Archive (KDA), District Intelligence Report, 20 March 1985; GDA, Box 529, PR1/2, Departmental Brief from Uganda Government Prison Gulu (author unknown) to DC Gulu, received 28 January 1985. For more information on this period, see Laruni, ‘From the Village to Entebbe’.

<sup>788</sup> GDA, Box 532, Letter from Prison Administrator to DC Gulu, 2 January 1980.

As a final point, ill-discipline and a lack of training also played a major role here. The bypassing of procedures historically used for vetting, training and disciplining recruits may not have instigated UNLA brutality, but it certainly aggravated the situation by permitting abuses which were primarily shaped by social and economic incentives, as well as local ethnic rivalries. As Nelson Kasfir has argued, ‘were UPC politicians to take a hard line with army violence, they would risk being overthrown’. Thus, soldiers were often highly undisciplined, ‘self-recruited, untrained, intermittently paid and apparently not always accompanied by their officers when sent into battle’.<sup>789</sup> Even army commanders who served in the UNLA have admitted that ‘training during the war [meaning the ‘Liberation War’ to topple Idi Amin] was not enough. We were in a hurry to build up the numbers’.<sup>790</sup>

Of course, this narrative regarding indiscipline partially serves to protect Obote and the UPC’s reputation at the expense of UNLA soldiers themselves.<sup>791</sup> Pro-Obote journalists writing during the 1980s, for example, adopted and publicised this notion of an uncontrollable army to counter claims that UNLA violence reflected official party policy. Writing for the *Sunday Nation* Anthony Denton, for example, noted that:

Uganda has been much in the news here recently, with the [...] reports of arrests, torture, killings, brutality by the army and so on. What has not been reported, or only mentioned in passing, is President Milton Obote’s strenuous

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<sup>789</sup> Kasfir, ‘Uganda: An Uncertain Quest for Recovery’, pp.169-173. Also, see Brett, p.136, p.143; Tindigarukayo, pp.616-618; and Crisp, ‘National Security’, p.165.

<sup>790</sup> HRCA, VOL. X, Interview with Major General Zed Maruru, pp.9459-9533.

<sup>791</sup> Explaining UNLA brutality through army indiscipline does not sit well with all, therefore. Former Ugandan President Yusuf Lule, for example, has suggested, ‘top officials of the regime are personally involved in these acts. It is also clear that the acts of lower cadres of the army are officially condoned [...] [and] happen under the benevolent gaze and encouragement of the Obote regime [...] all these atrocities are [thus] the full responsibility and deliberate policy of the regime, and the army is only its instrument’. See Lule, pp.8-9.

efforts to try to inject some discipline into those sections of his armed forces which so obviously need it.<sup>792</sup>

Furthermore, in his somewhat romanticised description of Obote's life, Kenneth Ingham similarly wrote that 'false rumours of *official* acts of cruelty circulated freely among the more accurate accounts of army violence'. Obote, according to Ingham, inherited an ill-trained rabble that proved impervious to his consistent attempts to intervene and restore discipline.<sup>793</sup> And yet, former Acholi soldiers themselves are surprisingly sympathetic to this explanation regarding insufficient training as opposed to official government policymaking. As one former combatant explained:

Many people went and joined the UNLA and they [did not have] proper training, some of them were just brought in as militias. They [the new recruits] wanted to control people by force so they spoilt things. That was why there was hatred between the South and the North [...] at the beginning during [the] Obote I regime when the British had just left, it was so good. The soldiers respected the civilians and the civilians respected the soldiers [...] They were well trained. But after that, when they got the training from Tanzania [...] [that] level of training changed the whole situation. People were not respected [...] [The new soldiers] used power and force and ruled the civilians [using] guns so people lost respect for the armed forces.<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> Anthony Denton, [title N/A], *Sunday Nation*, 25 October 1981.

<sup>793</sup> Kenneth Ingham, *Obote: A Political Biography* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.180-1.

<sup>794</sup> Interview with 157, Male, Gulu, 1 December 2016, served with UNLA and LRA 1970-2004. For a similar description, see Interview with 155, Male, Gulu, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, NRA, and CILIL 1981-1989.

In addition, former Acholi UNLA soldiers corroborate the accusation that recruitment patterns were irregular. One veteran, for example, suggested:

At that time they did not test us. As for questions, they asked that, “Have you accepted to join?”, then we said we wanted to join. There was no kind of test [...] At that time in Obote II’s army, they recruited just anyone.<sup>795</sup>

Taking such comments into account, then, it seems that insufficient directives, a failure to define the repercussions for abusive behaviour and inadequate enlistment requirements did at least further exacerbate the issue of unlawful violence against civilian populations.

### SECTION III: ‘IT WAS JUST LIKE KILLING A SNAKE’<sup>796</sup>: UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE FROM THE PERPETRATORS’ PERSPECTIVES

Most UNLA veterans do not refute the violence associated with Obote’s second presidency, but this is not to say former soldiers willingly admit to having harassed or mistreated civilians themselves. Although often content to discuss UNLA brutality more generally, most Acholi veterans still find rhetorical ways of distancing themselves as individuals from the violence committed. Overall, the veterans’ narratives reflect their capacity to discuss the violence associated with the UNLA

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<sup>795</sup> Interview with 141, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-85. For another example, see Interview with 130, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-86.

<sup>796</sup> Interview with 103, Male, Gulu, 11 October 2016, served with Ugandan Federation Alliance, FRONSA, UNLA 1971-1985.

whilst simultaneously defending their own behaviour. More specifically, they reveal the veterans' ability to internally conceptualise any violence they personally committed as justified and legitimate.

According to social anthropologist Alan Young, rationalising the violence they personally committed is a key way through which ex-servicemen handle 'cognitive dissonance; that is the gap between their preferred version of their life and self and what they have actually experienced'.<sup>797</sup> Former soldiers who believe themselves to be moral and honourable, may have acted during their period of service in ways they think were immoral and dishonourable. Young indicates a number of ways veterans might try to handle this dissonance and thus expel any feelings of guilt or shame. One technique involves structuring their memories in such a way as to make the content fit pre-existing cognitive schema. So, for example, 'the story might be that: "I've always been a kind person who believes in justice; he was a terrorist full of hate. I had to stop him before he hurt people"'. Another involves ex-servicemen assimilating or denying their memories in an attempt to empty them of their power to hurt. So, for example, 'by telling how: "We all have to do terrible things in war. I was no different from anyone else"; or: "He was probably already dead before I stuck the bayonet in"'.<sup>798</sup>

To some extent, the above analysis corresponds to how former UNLA soldiers talk about their personal experiences of violence. A number of veterans, for example, frame their memories in such a way as to ensure the content fits with locally

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<sup>797</sup> Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.8.

<sup>798</sup> See Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*. This description comes from Jo Stanley, 'Involuntary Commemorations: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and its Relationship to War Commemoration', in *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004), pp.240-259.

constructed morals and values by focusing on the abominable and monstrous nature of the enemy. By doing so, they identify the violence they personally committed as not only acceptable but desirable. One UNLA soldier who fought throughout the ‘Liberation War’, for instance, described feeling no sense of guilt or remorse at having to fight his own countrymen because Amin’s troops had been ‘killing the innocent’ with impunity. ‘It was just like killing a snake’, the veteran explained, ‘I know a snake is dangerous so when I go and hit a snake I could not get traumatised’.<sup>799</sup> It is important to note how former Acholi soldiers tend to equate not experiencing trauma (and thus not having to undergo a local cleansing ritual) as evidence to the fact they only committed justified violence. This is something we will return to below.

Other UNLA veterans had emptied their memories of the power to induce guilt or shame by assimilating them. Some, for example, focused on the nature of warfare, highlighting the necessity of killing people when under threat yourself. As one former Acholi soldier claimed:

Even though it was a war that I killed people in, that was just the exchange of fire, he shot at me, so I also shot back at him [...] I [just] killed some rebels who wanted to shoot me [...] so I found that it was useless to [be] cleanse[d].<sup>800</sup>

Alternatively, some veterans prevented their memories from stimulating feelings of remorse by solely talking about the unjustified violence ‘other soldiers’ committed

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<sup>799</sup> Interview with 103, Male, Gulu, 11 October 2016, served with Ugandan Federation Alliance, FRONSA, UNLA 1971-1985.

<sup>800</sup> Interview with 154, Male, Atiak, 23 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA/UPDF 1979-1993.



and how ‘other soldiers’ maltreated civilians without due cause, without ever mentioning their own behaviour. As one former soldier proposed:

*Some* people [meaning some UNLA soldiers], the bad members of the human race, *some* went and took food, *others* went to take money from the civilians [...] If *some* found girls, they wanted to sleep with them forcefully. That was what *some* soldiers did.<sup>801</sup>

In addition, in a similar way to KAR veterans, a number of former UNLA soldiers defended their own actions by holding those in command ultimately responsible. One former UNLA recruit stated, for example:

What I did not like about it [being a soldier] was, when there was war, even though you were not ready, they forced you, you had to do that thing that you did not want to [...] Acts such as killing, shooting people to kill them, and yet you did not want to, but they forced you to do it.<sup>802</sup>

Finally, some soldiers tended to justify the violence they committed by drawing comparisons with the supposedly more extreme, and thus less socially acceptable, forms of violence committed by other armed groups, most notably Joseph Kony’s LRA. In the minds of these soldiers, the atrocities committed by the LRA prove that in comparison their own actions were permissible. As one Acholi veteran stated, ‘[our] tactics were better because actually, if you saw the number of people under Kony who

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>802</sup> Interview with 108, Male, Gulu, 14 October 2016, served with UA and UNLA 1968-1986.

died, you could not compare it with our [casualties]. For us, only a few people died'.<sup>803</sup>

Likewise, another former UNLA soldier suggested:

The soldiers who are even currently the rebels of Kony in the bush, they broke the rules, which was not a good thing. They came and killed the civilians [...] At the time of the UNLA, it was [...] not an army [just] for killing.<sup>804</sup>

Despite the evidence outlined above, Young's approach can only partially explain what motivates former Acholi soldiers to remember, frame, and subsequently discuss UNLA brutality in the way they do. What becomes clear when analysing the veterans' narratives is their emphasis upon the relationship between being killed in action or experiencing trauma, and committing violence considered illegitimate or unjustified. For example, a number of Acholi veterans essentially claim their own survival is evidence to the fact they did not act immorally or perform any violence which might be deemed unacceptable. Similarly, as briefly mentioned above, a number of UNLA soldiers use the fact they did not suffer any form of trauma after returning home, and thus the fact they were not required to go through a local cleansing ceremony, as proof of their innocence. In order to understand comments such as these, we must situate the veterans' narratives amidst spiritual belief systems already embedded within Acholi society.

As noted in Chapter One, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Acholi-speaking communities believed any warrior who violated the moral economy of violence was more susceptible to being killed by his opponents on the battlefield. Moreover, it was widely understood that a recalcitrant warrior was more likely to

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<sup>803</sup> Interview with 155, Male, Gulu, 24 November 2016, served with UNLA, NRA, and CILIL 1981-1989.

<sup>804</sup> Interview with 130, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-86.

become mentally unstable and susceptible to outbursts of destructive and violent behaviour upon his return home due to being haunted by *cen*, the evil spirits of those he had slain.<sup>805</sup> Although, as will be illustrated below, these embedded spiritual beliefs regarding killing, psychological trauma and *cen* have been modified and adapted over time, they continue to influence how Acholi UNLA veterans' both conceptualise and talk about violence today.

Throughout the late precolonial period, despite those who performed unjustified violence being viewed as more likely to suffer from outward displays of mental instability, Acholi-speaking communities believed all those who had killed in battle were possessed by *cen* and thus required cleansing. As Chapter Three illustrated, however, by the time Acholi men were serving as KAR soldiers for the British, understandings of this ritual and the subsequent eradication of *cen* had begun to change: only when a soldier could distinguish and identify the specific individual he shot was it regarded as an action demanding purification. Over the course of the postcolonial era, perceptions regarding the relationship between violent performances and purification were once again refashioned and remodelled. For example, Abrahamic religions had already begun to influence African soldiers' spiritual beliefs during the colonial period, but following independence they become even more significant. Christianity, for instance, provided UNLA soldiers with new attitudes and practices which necessitated a transformation in how they conceptualised the implications of unnecessary or unacceptable uses of physical force.<sup>806</sup> As the following testimony by a UNLA veteran indicates, although many Acholi soldiers still

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<sup>805</sup> ACR, B/186/6, file named 'Cultura Acioli, Kitgum', 1985; Interview with 95, Male, Atiak, 6 October 2016; Interview with 119, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>806</sup> For more on how Christianity can impact pre-existing religious systems, see David Maxwell, 'Witches, Prophets and Avenging Spirits: The Second Christian Movement in North-East Zimbabwe', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 25:3 (1995), 309-339.

believed committing violence deemed unjustified could result in being killed on the battlefield, some of them had begun to understand misfortune and calamity following immoral behaviour as having been orchestrated by God rather than *cen*.

If you committed such a crime, you did not have a good future [...] most of those people that did unlawful things are no more [...] They died on the battle front because they did things that were not in line with what God stipulated was to be followed [...] God also saw if the things you did were not appropriate, he said, “Why are you hurting other people? You also have to lose your life like those people whom you hurt”.<sup>807</sup>

More importantly, though, killing per se no longer warranted purification, even if the perpetrator had been able to identify who he had killed. Instead, only a physical act deemed a transgression from the moral economy of violence could bring forth signs of mental instability caused by *cen* or, for some, God. Many Acholi UNLA veterans, for example, claim their local communities only demanded they go through a cleansing ritual if the violence they engaged in constituted wrongdoing or the illegitimate use of physical force. One former UNLA soldier claimed, for example, ‘[in the past] the Acholi used to say that if you killed a foreigner [meaning anyone from a different clan], you came and were cleansed’. However, despite killing whilst serving in the UNLA and informing his community of this, the veteran claimed no ritual to eradicate *cen* was ever required because he committed no illegitimate forms of violence.<sup>808</sup>

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<sup>807</sup> Interview with 117, Male, Gulu, 21 October 2016, served with UNLA, NRA/UPDF 1980-2015.

<sup>808</sup> Interview with 141, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-85.

As the following two extracts indicate, as a result of this adjustment not only are soldiers who served during the postcolonial period able to use their very survival as testimony to the fact they did not commit any wrongdoing, they are also able to use their mental health and wellbeing to defend their individual morality.

Committing atrocities like robbing people's properties, the civilians' property, that was useless. Raping women, all those [acts] were useless and if you kept doing that, even if you just went on patrol, you did not return [alive] [...] I am still here, if I had not had a good time, perhaps I was committing atrocities, I would not be here now.<sup>809</sup>

[A] ritual was not performed [for me] [...] [because] They [only] welcomed you with a ritual back home when you had done something wrong [...] There were different offences, do you see? [...] you could have stolen things [...] you could have injured people [...] you could have accidentally killed people because sometimes those who were drunk shot people with the gun. Those were big offences that the rules did not permit.<sup>810</sup>

Overall, then, Acholi veterans use a combination of standard and culturally specific techniques to exempt themselves personally from UNLA brutality. As a result, they are able to prevent their past experiences from impacting their current mental state. Moreover, as both Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have famously argued, 'traditions' can be invented, as well as reconstructed and modified over time in accordance with novel circumstances.<sup>811</sup> The evolution of practices and attitudes

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<sup>809</sup> Ibid.

<sup>810</sup> Interview with 115, Male, Payira, 19 October 2016, served with UR and UA 1962-68.

<sup>811</sup> *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

surrounding *cen* and wrongdoing amongst the Acholi further demonstrates how spiritual belief systems and accompanying rituals can be adapted in order to fit with changing norms and values and, importantly, the realities of modern warfare.

## CONCLUSION

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, scholars often mistakenly attribute the violent imagery surrounding Acholi speakers to colonial recruitment policies and the pragmatic application of British ‘martial race’ theory.<sup>812</sup> This chapter has further demonstrated why this interpretation is problematic. Firstly, external depictions of Acholi UNLA soldiers as cruel and barbaric do not represent continuity with British colonial conceptions, which as Chapter Two illustrated, marked the Acholi soldiery as highly disciplined, loyal and easy to control. Secondly, Uganda’s collective memory of Acholi UNLA recruits, and thus by extension Acholi soldiers more broadly, has partly been constructed in accordance with more recent attitudes and events. Notably, the LRA insurgency and the NRM’s political propaganda, which was aimed at ‘othering’ the Acholi, have proven particularly influential. Thus, history is made and remade for a multitude of reasons and in pursuit of a variety of aims. Just as the past continues to influence and manipulate the present, so does the present continually shape memories of the past and historical knowledge.

This is, of course, not to say interpretations of the past preserve nothing or contain no traces of continuity. As section two in particular has demonstrated, the

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<sup>812</sup> Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, p.8.

general consensus that Acholi UNLA soldiers were largely to blame for the human suffering under Obote II is not a complete fabrication. Indeed, some Acholi UNLA recruits — as a complex response to a multitude of economic and social factors, as well as local ethnic cleavages — did commit horrific acts of violence whilst serving in the armed forces. But even so, neither collective nor individual memories ever embody unaltered, accurate representations of the past. Subsequently, how the past is currently remembered and contextualised can thus inform our understanding of the present. As such, the contemporary normative narrative which holds supposedly barbaric Acholi soldiers solely to blame for UNLA violence under Obote II reveals much about how the Acholi have been interpreted and labelled by outsiders throughout Museveni's rule.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS AND A REFLECTION ON MEMORIES OF MILITARISM IN MODERN ACHOLI SOCIETY**

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This thesis is primarily a history of militarism and masculinity aimed at identifying and explaining the nuances and inconsistencies which have characterised Acholi men's relationship with violence since c.1750. Over the past two hundred and fifty years Acholi men have been challenged with negotiating a respected masculine identity for themselves within an economy of honour that both requires and condemns the use of physical force, and which in addition has been repeatedly contested in the context of existing power relations. Warriorhood and soldiering have certainly enabled some Acholi men to acquire honour through the selective deployment of violence, but military endeavours have not guaranteed a valued position within local male hierarchies. Although, as Robert Morrell has suggested, there can be little doubt that manhood and violence are sometimes intrinsically linked, exactly how engagements in violence are connected to honourable masculinity is anything but clear-cut.<sup>813</sup> Riddled with subtleties and contradictions, the historical relationship between masculine identities and violence in Africa deserves far more attention than it has previously been granted.

This study has focused on three specific time periods — the vibrant though turbulent eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; British colonial rule, a regime underpinned by an unstable mix of muscular authority and chronic fragility; and Milton Obote's second presidency, an era marked by multiple but overlapping vectors

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<sup>813</sup> Morrell, 'Men, Masculinities and Gender', pp.17-19.



of violence. Each of these historical moments engendered both new opportunities and new constraints for Acholi speakers, causing the relationship between Acholi masculinity and militarism to vary over time. The colonial period serves as an excellent case in point. The introduction of a standing professional army certainly provided some unskilled Acholi men with a route to higher wages and social prosperity. Nonetheless, securing a privileged social status through military service became an increasingly complex and problematic process. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a warrior's access to individual distinction was typically based upon his ability to abide by the constructed moral economy of violence and heroic demonstrations of bravery and physical strength. King's African Rifles (KAR) soldiers, however, had to try and negotiate an honourable masculine identity whilst grappling with the everyday forms of racism which framed their experiences of soldiering under British colonial rule, exposure to sexually-transmitted diseases known to impact fertility, rumours of their wives' sexual infidelities, and a loss of control over their dependents triggered by long absences from home. In addition, Acholi KAR soldiers' experiences varied over the course of the period; colonialism itself was not a fixed entity. For example, whereas throughout the interwar era securing a privileged status through soldiering was certainly feasible, both before the First World War and during the Second World War enlisting into the KAR was less likely to engender social mobility. The relationship between militarism and masculinity amongst the Acholi has thus been marked by a significant amount of flexibility, meaning it has been adapted and modified in response to new circumstances and unforeseen situations.

Nonetheless, although characterised by transformative dynamics, these individual time periods have proven to be neither inseparable nor wholly distinct.

Some level of continuity is discernible and worth emphasising. For example, while both KAR soldiers under British colonial rule and Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers under Obote II believed they could use their status as military personnel for personal advancement and individual gain, this notion that engagements in certain forms of violence represented a route to social mobility and maturity is precolonial in origin and thus of considerable antiquity. It can be dated back to the late eighteenth century and the expansion of military power and authority which marked the period. There is undoubtedly a tendency within existing literature to focus on change and developments generated by imperial partition and the colonial moment.<sup>814</sup> In comparison, precolonial legacies are routinely excluded or rendered of little historical consequence.<sup>815</sup> As was demonstrated in Chapter Two, then, historiography concerned with the roots of Acholi militarism has tended to focus almost entirely on colonial recruitment policies.<sup>816</sup> And yet, this shift in the social and economic value of warriorhood during the late precolonial period, which made the practice of violence increasingly attractive to the aspirational and ambitious, clearly indicates the significance of the colonial encounter has been vastly exaggerated. This, in turn, underscores the importance of studying cultures of violence which long pre-dated the

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<sup>814</sup> For scholarship concerning African masculinity which focuses on change instigated by colonialism, see Mazrui, 'The Resurrection of the Warrior Tradition', pp.71-78; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Grove Press Inc. (London, Pluto Press, 1986); Robert Morrell, 'Men, Movements, and Gender Transformation in South Africa', in *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.271-289 (p.283); Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, 'Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence', *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Series*, 26 (Washington: World Bank, 2005), p.12.

<sup>815</sup> For key exceptions in terms of East African military history, see Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*; and Reid, *Warfare in African History*.

<sup>816</sup> See Amone, 'The Creation of Acholi Military Ethnocracy', pp.141-150; Acker, pp.338-342; Doom and Vlassenroot, pp.8-9; Mazrui, 'Soldiers as Traditionalizers', pp.258-261; and Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, p.49.

formal creation of 'Uganda' and writing history over the *longue durée*.<sup>817</sup> Only by doing so are we equipped to identify and appreciate any longstanding patterns and processes relating to militarism and the practice of violence which continued unabated throughout both the colonial and postcolonial eras.

A key aim of this thesis was to expose and give prominence to African voices. Whether it was through demonstrating how Acholi speakers themselves impacted 'martial race' ideology and colonial recruitment patterns under British rule, or illustrating how individual KAR and UNLA soldiers contextualised and coped with the violence they engaged in, this study has sought to place Acholi people firmly at the centre of its analysis. The final section of this conclusion aims to employ the same approach to comment on how Acholi people today understand and depict both their current and historical relationship with violence. By doing so, it brings the thesis forward into the present and draws together some of its major themes including masculinity, the production of historical knowledge and imagery, as well as popular conceptions of militarism and violence.

To describe the Acholi solely in terms of a 'militarised ethnicity' or a 'military ethnocracy' is to ignore the heterogeneous and ever-evolving nature of Acholi identity which has constantly been reinvented and reinvigorated, contested and renegotiated, consolidated and expanded. As this thesis has demonstrated, Acholiland has witnessed periods where honourable manhood has been more intricately linked to marriage, reproduction and farming than violent performances: during the Second World War, for example. Nonetheless, over the past two centuries Acholiland has experienced episodic militarisation underscored by the recurrent forging of militant identities.

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<sup>817</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.18.

Violence has thus played a fundamental part in individual struggles for opportunity and survival, as well as the internal development and consolidation of Acholi identity. As will be illustrated below, Acholi people today do not wholly reject their so-called martial identity. In fact their reputation for violence and militarism is as much a product of the way many Acholi people today interpret, discuss and propagate their history, as it is a consequence of external stereotyping. Bound up in storytelling, rituals and ceremonial dances, the way past violence is remembered and imagined amongst the Acholi has proven critical for creating and fostering a collective identity and social cohesion.<sup>818</sup>

Over the last three decades much has been said in regard to how the Acholi have been identified and stereotyped. The conclusion reached, almost without exception, is that since the onset of colonial rule the Acholi have been relentlessly designated as bloodthirsty savages within external discourse.<sup>819</sup> As Sverker Finnström, for example, has argued, ‘Still today it is common for people in Kampala and beyond to regard people from northern Uganda as backward and martial, and in the Ugandan context, sometimes the very epitome of primitiveness’.<sup>820</sup> Chris Dolan has similarly argued:

Under British divide and rule Acholi men were singled out for service in the military and the police, and under the Obote regime prior to Museveni’s take-

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<sup>818</sup> Reid, *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa*, pp.22-23. For a discussion of the two main paradigms relating to war memory see Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, ‘The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics’ in *The Politics of Memory: Commemorating War*, ed. by Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004), pp.3-87.

<sup>819</sup> For example, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p.102, pp.186-7.

<sup>820</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.79.

over they dominated the armed forces [...] This has left them with a reputation for militarism and violence.<sup>821</sup>

There is, undoubtedly, much evidence to support these claims made by both Finnström and Dolan. For example, when attempting to justify military violence under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Major General James Kazini, a Musongora man from south west Uganda, stated in an interview for Human Rights Watch that, ‘it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems [...] It is the cultural background of the people here, they are very violent. It’s genetic’.<sup>822</sup> Even Acholi people themselves suggest this is how outsiders interpret their cultural heritage. As one elder remarked during a recent interview:

In terms of the ethnic groups that surround us, the way other tribes view us — because I visited some of them — they see that we the Acholi are strong people, we are people who like fighting and they fear that a lot.<sup>823</sup>

The reality is, of course, more complex. Many southern Ugandans, for example, do not pay heed to what in their mind represent arbitrary distinctions between the different ethnic groups inhabiting northern Uganda. As one Mukiga man claimed ‘For us we do not distinguish between them [meaning people from northern Uganda]. For me I consider all people from that side to be the same, I cannot tell that this one is a Langi or this one is an Acholi’.<sup>824</sup> Thus, Acholiland is not always singled out as a place of primitive barbarity, but more considered as just one indistinctive part of a so-called savage north. Moreover, despite the mainstream narrative, personal accounts

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<sup>821</sup> Dolan, ‘Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States’, pp.57-83.

<sup>822</sup> As cited in Finnström, ‘An African Hell of Colonial Imagination?’, p.80.

<sup>823</sup> Interview with 120, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016.

<sup>824</sup> Interview with 161, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017. For an additional example, see Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017.

produced by southern Ugandans often illuminate shifts in opinion and contrasting views based on personal experience. As one elder living in Kampala divulged, ‘When you interact with the Acholi people, based on my experience with them, they are not bad people as we used to think, they love people and they are religious people, yes’.<sup>825</sup>

Similarly, a Munyoro man recalled:

When I was studying in primary school, I was told that these [meaning the Acholi] are dangerous people [...] [but when] I went to secondary school, and I studied with those people [...] I discovered they were not really how I was told. Some of them became my best friends.<sup>826</sup>

The fact that more nuanced external descriptions exist is not, however, the key problem with scholarly discussions concerning Acholi identity and Acholiland’s martial reputation. Their major weakness stems from almost exclusively focusing upon external image making, rather than exploring how Acholi people themselves interpret the role of violence within their culture. First, then, how do Acholi people today conceptualise and talk about past warfare and militarism? There is an unmistakable shift in the language Acholi people use to describe soldiering and conflict under both British colonial rule and following independence, in comparison to how they portray precolonial warfare and warriorhood. As was mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis, some elders interviewed for this project had a tendency to almost dehumanise the Acholi of the past, claiming they engaged in

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<sup>825</sup> Interview with 160, Male, Kampala, 14 April 2017.

<sup>826</sup> Interview with 162, Male, Kampala, 18 April 2017.

irrational, ceaseless, internecine conflict driven by fanatical fury and untameable wildness.<sup>827</sup> The following interview extracts serve as apt examples of this.

Before the whites came, people used to live primitive lives [...] There were some people who were like dangerous wild animals, who would want to kill any human they came across. That was a period of primitiveness. That is what the elders narrated to us back then [...] That was how people were living because they were still ignorant.<sup>828</sup>

There were wars. Bad wars [...] It was ignorance, people wanted to kill each other. Like you if you came here, we had to kill you. If other people also came here, we had to kill them. They killed people anyhow [...] They were ignorant people [...] Modern people know things but we the people of those days, we were ignorant, we still focused on, “We shall fight and kill you. If you joke around, we shall kill you”.<sup>829</sup>

According to these informants, then, precolonial Acholi speakers were simply *gèr* —which translates to aggressive, wild, ferocious, fierce, angry and unrestrained— and thus it was only after the British administration managed to carve out some sort of order from the chaos that the chronic instability, low-level violent criminality and fierce internal struggles over people and land ceased to exist.<sup>830</sup> In contrast, rarely did

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<sup>827</sup> For additional examples of this rhetoric, see Interview with 36, Female, Gulu, 21 July 2016; Interview with 45, Male, Alero, 31 August 2016; Interview with 46, Female, Patiko, 1 September 2016; Interview with 47, Male, Patiko, 1 September 2016; Interview with 49, Male, Lamogi, 5 September 2016; Interview with 63, Female, Ajali, 9 September 2016; Interview with 79, Female, Pabo, 21 September 2016; Interview with 131, Male, Padibe, 7 November 2016; Interview with 148, Male, Patiko, 21 November 2016; Interview with 72, Male, Palabek, 13 September 2016; and Interview with 95, Male, Atiak, 6 October 2016.

<sup>828</sup> Interview with 65, Male, Pajule, 12 September 2016.

<sup>829</sup> Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46.

<sup>830</sup> For the translation, see Crazzolara, *A study of the Acooli Language*, p.225.

a participant identify more recent soldiers as simply inherently violent or naturally aggressive. Instead, Acholi people today typically described KAR recruits or postcolonial soldiers as brave, physically fit and receptive to discipline.<sup>831</sup> Moreover, when asked what motivated some Acholi men to enlist into modern armies, interviewees generally provided insightful and perceptive responses which identified a variety of socially acceptable incentives. These included the prospect of economic advancement and social mobility, the possibility of enforcing political innovation and transformation, and finally for individual defence and security.<sup>832</sup> One man from eastern Acholiland proposed, for example, ‘[for] the Acholi, the one biggest problem is what to do, what to do for work, so it is unemployment [...] That is why people join the army’.<sup>833</sup>

This important alteration in vocabulary does not result from distinct realities. As was discussed at length in Chapter One, warfare amongst precolonial Acholi-speaking communities was not simply anarchic, savage and unrestrained. Warriors’ use of physical force was regulated and violence was subjected to predefined restrictions, albeit these could be adapted or renegotiated over time according to the needs of the context. Equally, violence committed by Acholi soldiers since the advent

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<sup>831</sup> For example, see Interview with 83, Male, Pabo, 23 September 2016; and Interview with 141, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016, served with UNLA 1979-85.

<sup>832</sup> For example, see Interview with 147, Male, Pajule, 16 November 2016; Interview with 140, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016; Interview with 142, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016; Interview with 33, Male, Awere, 26 June 2016, served in the KAR 1942-45; Interview with 15, Male, Awac, 17 May 2016, served in the KAR 1939-45; Interview with 17, Male, Laroo, 23 May 2016, served in the KAR 1960-71; Interview with 22, Male, Nwoya, 27 May 2016, served in the KAR 1942-1947; Interview with 113, Male, Gulu, 18 October 2016, served with NRA Local Defence Unit 1991-93; Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-96; Interview with 97, Male, Gulu, 7 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-1992; Interview with 154, Male, Atiak, 23 November 2016, served with UNLA, CILIL and NRA/UPDF 1979-1993; and Interview with 156, Male, Gulu, 29 November 2016, served with UNLA and NRA Local Defence Unit 1980-1995.

<sup>833</sup> Interview with 140, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016.



of British colonial rule cannot be categorically labelled as unavoidable and justified without exception: the brutality committed by some Acholi UNLA soldiers during the early 1980s represents a notable example. How, then, can we explain this established public narrative? For one, it seems clear that this notion regarding fundamental differences between precolonial warriorhood and colonial and postcolonial soldiering is, in part, a product of British colonial discourse. As the following extract indicates, this representation of precolonial Acholi society reflects, to some extent, how some Acholi people today think about and conceptualise British colonial rule, especially in relation to demilitarisation and the introduction of law and order.

When the whites came, that was the time when the whites stopped a lot of this aggression. Yes that made the people follow the law. Yes, and if the whites had not come here to the Acholi, the Acholi would have just continued living this kind of life akin to that of wild animals. Yes because there was no education.<sup>834</sup>

This notion regarding the capacity for British intervention to bring forth peace and stability amongst African communities previously troubled by violent barbarity was much reiterated and recycled throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within both popular and scholarly accounts sympathetic to the colonial enterprise.<sup>835</sup> Even the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote of the Nuer of South Sudan, for example, ‘To-day such fights are less common because fear of Government intervention acts as a deterrent [...] at one time [though] fights must have been very

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<sup>834</sup> Interview with 62, Male, Ajali, 9 September 2016.

<sup>835</sup> For example, see Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*; Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*; T. F. Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840); G. H. Portal, *My Mission to Abyssinia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1892); Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Nile*; and H. M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (London: G Newnes, 1899).

frequent'.<sup>836</sup> In reality, of course, such a narrative fails to truly appreciate the power and authority of traditional mediation and reconciliation processes. It also ignores how Britain's imperial project often served to further entrench ethnic rivalries, internal fissures and contests.<sup>837</sup> Nonetheless, Acholi speakers' claims that people lived ignorant lives characterised by unnecessary and irrational acts of aggression before the onset of British colonial rule are significant. They demonstrate how the racist ideas that dominated imperial Europe have also infiltrated local African discourse regarding colonialism, and in conjunction, local understandings of precolonial communities. In other words, this interpretation of British rule as having instigated the demilitarisation of Acholi society and the termination of senseless violence through disarmament policies, the creation of professional armies, as well as the introduction of a judicial system and formal education, has served to simultaneously implant an understanding of precolonial Acholi-speaking societies as barbaric and violently primitive.

Even so, Acholi speakers' perceptions of precolonial warriorhood and warfare have also been shaped by, and evolved through, internal mechanisms. There is a popular and enduring notion of past civilisations as more violent, more gruesome, and more frightening than today's societies. Rather than aggression and ruthlessness being categorically characterised as negative or disadvantageous attributes, however, they are often deemed as a normal, accepted product of the time. One Acholi participant's assertion that 'a warrior would be a warrior, and that was how God designed them to be in those days. Right? You had to be aggressive to protect yourself', serves as an apt illustration of this philosophy.<sup>838</sup> In fact, as the following extract additionally

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<sup>836</sup> Evans-Pritchard, p.152.

<sup>837</sup> For more information on this, see Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, pp.290-318.

<sup>838</sup> Interview with 59, Male, Patongo, 9 September 2016.

highlights, warriorhood is interpreted as having represented such a fundamental element of honourable manhood that some interviewees found the very idea of men in the past not wanting to engage in conflict to be absurd.

It did not cross my mind that someone would say that “I do not want to go to war”. Because in war, you can show your prowess, everybody would like to be known by his manhood. What sort of man was he? Courageous? In any case even brutal? [...] Yes so, I think everybody wanted [...] to be remembered, or be known by, his prowess in war.<sup>839</sup>

Although Acholi people use derogative and condescending language when describing warfare and warriorhood before the onset of colonial rule, then, there is simultaneously an element of admiration to their rhetoric. Having a reputation for being warlike in the past is perceived, in part, as something to take pride in. Thus, alongside being labelled aggressive and volatile, romanticised images of precolonial Acholi warriors as ‘great fighters’ and as ‘famous’ for their skills on the battlefield are evoked.<sup>840</sup> As one elder claimed:

During that era [...] the Acholi fought many people. The Acholi were great fighters. They swung the spears like this. That was one reason why they [meaning other ethnic groups] used to fear the Acholi so much [...] if you rushed anyhow to fight the Acholi, you went back with a lot of casualties [...] Acholi was not a tribe to mess with.<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>839</sup> Interview with 61, Male, Patongo, 9 September 2016.

<sup>840</sup> For example, see Interview with 36, Female, Gulu, 21 July 2016; and Interview with 79, Female, Pabo, 21 September 2016.

<sup>841</sup> Interview with 62, Male, Ajali, 9 September 2016.

Statements of this kind are clearly used to underscore Acholiland's historical power, strength and influence throughout the region. Thus, the militarisation Acholiland experienced throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is recalled within social memory in such a way as to enable Acholi speakers to carve out legitimacy and authority in the present.

Dolan has argued the Acholi people's 'national reputation for militarism sits uneasily with Acholi self-perception as being well able to reconcile with others and resolve differences through discussion'.<sup>842</sup> The research carried out for this project, however, suggests contemporary opinion is more varied and less rigidly opposed to the concept of Acholi martiality than Dolan's analysis suggests. Alternative interpretations regarding the ways in which Acholi identity interacts with the ideology and practice of militarism are, of course, widespread. It is undoubtedly important to extract these contrasting perspectives, especially as the dominant public discourse which identifies the Acholi as simply a 'military ethnocracy' can serve to exclude more complex, less visible opinions regarding the nature of Acholi society. There are Acholi people, for example, who argue honourable masculinity revolves around marriage and fatherhood, not soldiering. As one elderly man claimed 'Becoming a man [...] mostly with us black people, a person becomes a man when he brings a woman. He would have married a woman, then he is considered a man'.<sup>843</sup> There are also those who argue that rather than military service, it is farming which represents the most prestigious and reputable occupation amongst the Acholi. One interviewee declared, for example, 'Joining the army did not bring about much prestige [...] In Acholiland here, most of the men wanted to farm. They loved farming. Thinking about,

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<sup>842</sup> Dolan, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States', pp.57-83.

<sup>843</sup> Interview with 121, Male, Paico, 26 October 2016.

or having an interest in, joining the army was minimal'.<sup>844</sup> Finally, there are even Acholi speakers who claim to be conscientious objectors, who suggest they abhor the very idea of the armed forces. As one young man argued, for example:

I did not join the army because firstly I do not like the army. If for myself, I would choose a country where I do not see soldiers [...] Whilst I was growing up, I saw a lot of bad things that the army did. Starting from my childhood days up to now. Therefore for myself, I do not love the army. Also for the work of the army, even if they said they were going to send me into it, I would not want to go, because I know what the army did in this our country up to now [...] the army destroyed good things that we had in the Acholi area [...] The army also killed a lot of people [...] [and] inflicted a lot of injuries on people, and some people have those injuries even up to now<sup>845</sup>

Even so, comments such as these do not prove Acholi people today invariably reject militarised versions of masculinity or their supposed reputation for sterling military service. The extracts above might not represent anomalies or anachronisms, but neither do they expose the full picture. We cannot escape from the fact that many Acholi people actively contribute to this carefully crafted and cultivated image regarding their so-called martial qualities, which is then eagerly consumed by some outsiders. Acholi people today may fervently refute attempts to posit Acholiland as a place of savagery and primitive barbarity, but many Acholi speakers certainly take pride in being identified as inherently brave, courageous, as well as physically formidable and resilient in battle.<sup>846</sup> As the following quote highlights, Acholi people

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<sup>844</sup> Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-96.

<sup>845</sup> Interview with 126, Male, Paico, 28 October 2016.

<sup>846</sup> For example, see Interview with 120, Male, Payira, 25 October 2016; Interview with 122, Male, Paico, 26 October 2016; Interview with 140, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016;

often refer to their skills on the battlefield as being ‘natural’, as being ‘in their blood’, and as having been assigned by God.

They [the Acholi] were strong fighters! They were strong hearted! They had the skills for and knowledge of fighting, which was given to them by God. Even up to date. What they know really well is fighting. There is nothing else they know really well. They can master things, they can study very hard, they work hard and very well, but they were born fighters. It is in their blood. Even if you were to meet one of them in England, you would just know that this person is a fighter. You can even identify them by their mere walk; they do not move lazily, they move with energy!<sup>847</sup>

Moreover, when discussing hegemonic masculinity, Acholi people will often place emphasis on a strong physique and valorous disposition. The following quote is emblematic of this gender stereotyping amongst the Acholi as it intersects with militarism.

An Acholi man is firstly, one who is brave. Even during times of trouble, of hardships, he is a brave person. He works without fear. Also an Acholi man should be someone with strength [...] according to the Acholi, they say that a man has to be physically strong to prevent enemies from entering the home [...] Like for us the Acholi, we have gone through many troubles, so if you

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Interview with 144, Male, Pajule, 16 November 2016; Interview with 3, Male, N/A, 26 April 2016 and 27 March, served in the KAR 1939-46; Interview with 93, Male, Gulu, 5 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-96; Interview with 21, Male, Laroo, 26 May 2016, served in the KAR 1947-56; Interview with 96, Male, Gulu, 7 October 2016, served with UNLA 1984-86; Interview with 107, Male, Palenga, 13 October 2016, served with the UNLA; and Interview with 104, Male, Atiak, 12 October 2016, served with NRA/UPDF 1986-1996.

<sup>847</sup> Interview with 31, Male, Lugore Market, 23 June 2016, served in the UA 1971-[?].

are not brave, if you are a coward, you cannot be or, I cannot say that you will be, an Acholi man.<sup>848</sup>

Acholi people even have a tendency to claim their daily staples such as millet and cassava, make them both physically and mentally stronger than their ‘banana eating’ southern counterparts.<sup>849</sup> As one Acholi former soldier argued when describing why the Acholi represented a martial elite while the Baganda exemplified weakness, ‘those people are born soft [meaning weak]. Even their food is soft, only bananas, for us we eat cassava, sorghum, millet and so it has made us strong’.<sup>850</sup> Similarly another veteran claimed ‘the central people were very cowardly and they feared hard work, it broke them because of the soft food they ate [...] but for us we ate cassava, hard food like the mangoes [...] That was why we were strong’.<sup>851</sup> This notion can also be found in the Acholi poet Okot p'Bitek's widely acclaimed ‘Song of Lawino’:<sup>852</sup>

Why the knees

Of millet-eaters

Are tough?

Tougher than the knees

Of the people who drink bananas!

Where do you think

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<sup>848</sup> Interview with 140, Male, Lira Paluo, 14 November 2016.

<sup>849</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.35.

<sup>850</sup> Interview with 128, Male, Palenga, 4 November 2016, served with UA, UNLA, NRA[?] 1971-1992.

<sup>851</sup> Interview with 96, Male, Gulu, 7 October 2016, served with NRA/UNLA 1986-1992.

<sup>852</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, p.35.

The stone powder

From the grinding stones goes?<sup>853</sup>

To finally conclude, then, we cannot deny violence a place in Acholi history, or ignore the way in which Acholi people themselves have sought to foster and manipulate their identity during different historical moments in pursuit of individual and collective gain. Acholi speakers continue to wrestle over the nature of their society. This process represents an internal struggle for control, rights, authority, power and ontological security.<sup>854</sup> As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, Acholi speakers comprise of a whole range of actors and interest groups — including men, women, the old, the young, soldiers and civilians — each with their own understanding of what constitutes the basis of Acholi identity, or more importantly for this project, an Acholi man. Thus, just as it would be reductive to imply Acholi identity revolves around a culture of militarism and the practice of violence, it would be incorrect to wholly dismiss the significance some Acholi people place upon martial values, or to disregard how serving in the armed forces is often still perceived as an important platform for personal advancement, despite the fact it does not always generate the economic advantages or social rewards Acholi recruits anticipate when initially enlisting.<sup>855</sup>

By presenting themselves as brave, courageous and physically strong people who have a proven history of successful soldiering, some Acholi people are embracing a particular vision of their past and present. Regardless of whether it is imagined and

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<sup>853</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966).

<sup>854</sup> Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.154.

<sup>855</sup> Interview with 144, Male, Pajule, 16 November 2016.



artificial, or authentic and real, they are using this identity as a form of leverage and as a demonstration of power. Northern Uganda suffered nearly a quarter of a century of violent insecurity, as well as a profound level of marginalisation and alienation from the rest of Uganda's development, from which it is only just recovering. It is amidst this backdrop that some Acholi people are using this concept of a militarised ethnic identity to create a space for themselves in the present, as well as to further popularise their valuable contribution to the processes, dynamics and cycles of Ugandan history. It gives them a sense of agency and control in the face of disempowering circumstances and existential uncertainty.<sup>856</sup>

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<sup>856</sup>Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2002), p.15.

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