# "ACORD Chiefs were wrongly installed…": Political Contestations within a "Cultural" Institution in Northern Uganda

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## ABSTRACT

This paper uses popular pressure to reform the Acholi cultural institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi-KKA), as an entry point to understanding the nature and life character of a political institution cloaked in a cultural garb. Tracing its emergence, growth and subsequent fragmentation into two parallel factions with multiple social constituencies, this paper argues that KKA was fundamentally an institution imagined by and propped up by state power using its financial, legal, violent and political machinery to mobilize underlying cultural sentiments within Acholi society clamoring to reinvent chiefly power. I argue that the state utilized two significant contexts to influence cultural agents in Acholiland. First, the state used the end of the LRA war as a context to construct a developmentalist NGO logic that used Acholi cultural brokers as the gatekeepers and custodians of economic and social change. Second, the state also utilized the wave of resurgent chiefly and kingdom restoration elsewhere in Uganda as a benchmarking precedence for Acholi society to copy the experience of others to entrench itself in society on the backdrop of society-state animosity in post-LRA northern Uganda. By propping up new cultural brokers to become political actors under the purview of state supervision, financial and violent protection, this paper shows that the state re-politicized cultural institutions and rolled back the nationalist project of the First Republic, which had, with minimal success, attempted to depoliticize customary authorities under the nationalistic pretentions of the first postcolonial regimes. The despotic turn of many actors in KKA was attributed to the benevolent legal and violent machinery of the state. By deploying the chiefly component of the customary authority as a point of political governance, the NRM regime continued in the bifurcated legacy of British colonial governance, in which the state attempts to successfully construct social subjection using its machinery of politics. The paper also explores the claims to hereditary or non-hereditary leadership dynamics within KKA while emphasizing that the character of leaders and the claims they made in their daily performance of roles and functions reflect the nature of their source of legitimacy. Actors propped up by state power have acted with minimal accountability to society due to the lack of social legitimacy, which has allowed resistance from within the very KKA structures and from the society below. Focusing on the resistance against KKA's controversial activities, legitimacy concerns, corruption, despotic and undemocratic practices, the paper emphasizes the precarious circumstances under which the contestation between political brinkmanship and cultural pretentions manifest and the consequences for state and society relations. Importantly, the mismatch between cultural rhetoric and practice accounts for what I consider as *re-politicization of the cultural*.

**Keywords:** Chiefly authority, Acholiland, political governance, postcolonial statecraft.

## INTRODUCTION

The period between April to December 2023, involved immense pressure to cause reforms in Acholi Cultural Institution locally known as Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA). On 18th June 2023, a group of chiefs *(Rwodi)* led by Rwot Apire Richard Santo of Atiak chiefdom, Rwot Peko Lugai II of Pajule Palwo chiefdom, Rwot Binyi Justine of Pagak chiefdom, Rwot Michael Ojok Aginya of Bwobo chiefdom, Rwot Jimmy Ochan Luwala of Puranga chiefdom, Rwot Ogenga John Otika of Labonga Amida chiefdom, and Rwot Collins Muttu Atiku of Patiko chiefdom, held a press conference in Gulu City where they denounced Rwot Onen David Acana II, the sitting paramount chief *(Lawirwodi—*head of chiefs) of Acholi Cultural Institution . The paramount chief was accused of selling the institution's land located in Gulu city, which had been donated by the NRM government. He was also accused of failing to account for Uganda shs 100 million given by president Yoweri Museveni in 2022 and of "embezzling" Uganda shs 230 million given by the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), a Civil Society Organization—way back in 2012 for project activities.

The paramount chief was further accused of being a dictator, citing his maneuvers to centralize power by making unilateral decisions concerning KKA affairs. This follows his action of blocking some chiefs from accessing *'Gang Kal Madit'* (palace of the paramount chief) to discuss the land matter. The aggrieved chiefs argued that the paramount chief was elected to be a spokesperson for the institution but not the overall leader or head of chiefs. To these chiefs, the sole purpose of instituting KKA was to have one voice or position when dealing with issues of concern to the people of Acholi but not centralizing power and making decisions on their behalf. Underpinning this claim is the notion that all chiefs in Acholi have equal status and each chiefdom has its own jurisdiction over its own affairs. Customary power in Acholi is diffused with multiple centers. Therefore, the attempt by the paramount chief to imagine himself above other chiefs was viewed as an illegitimate interference in Acholi traditional affairs.

The aggrieved party further accused the paramount chief, Rwot Onen David Acana II, of failing to formulate a constitution for KKA after 20 years in power, which they perceived as a well-intended plot to remain in power for life despite holding a time-bound non-hereditary office. The rival chiefs cited precedence by Rwot Matayo Lamot of Adilang chiefdom and Rwot Philipo Adonga of Pajule Palwo chiefdom who served as paramount chiefs on a rotational basis. They also accused the paramount chief of ascending to the position illegitimately. According to their recollection, his election had been "influenced" by "manipulations" from "outsiders" (officials from the Uganda state) and international agencies (NGOS) particularly Action for Cooperation, Research and Development (ACORD). State officials were accused of bribing chiefs to elect Rwot David Onen Acana II in absentia while ACORD was accused of funding and facilitating anointment/installation of illegitimate chiefs.

Around the same time, a faction loyal to the paramount chief, Rwot David Onen Acana II, emerged. Led by the deputy paramount chief, Rwot Otinga Atuka Yai from the Lamogi chiefdom, this faction disassociated itself from the decision and the aggrieved party of chiefs whom they denounced as "self-seekers" bent on causing instability in KKA. For instance, Rwot Santo Apire of Atiak chiefdom was publicly accused by the paramount chief of hijacking the throne of Atiak chiefdom from his nephew one Mandela. Later, Mandela's recorded message was trending on social media demanding Rwot Apire Santo to relinquish his throne. All in all, the top contenders for the position of the paramount chief were counter accused of illegitimately occupying their chiefly positions. During this moment of accusations and counter accusations, the paramount chief dismissed the Prime Minister of the KKA, Olaa Ambrose, accusing him of conniving with the rival faction to overthrow him.

These leadership wrangles provided an opportunity to various categories of Acholi people to openly express their sentiments and contestations against the contemporary chiefs using various fora, including social media platforms, TVs and local radio stations. For example, Tara pa Luo online TV and Lakwed online TV ran panel discussions on this matter for months, hosting prominent Acholi elites, elders and academicians as well as chiefs from the rivaling factions to debate the matter. The debates on online TVs and other fora showed that whereas the Acholi people are still passionate about their customs and traditional practices, there was a general display of mistrust and negative sentiments against the contemporary chiefs who are not only considered as illegitimate, but also irrelevant to the needs of their society. Commenting on the conflict, one of the Acholi elders observed:

> We were aware of this mess from the very beginning but painfully buried our heads in the sand to protect the image of Acholi cultural institution… now that they have started it, we shall expose them and mobilize the community to protest their illegality[1].

Another comment came from Rosalba Oywaa, a former manager at ACORD who observed:

> The problem in Acholi is weak leadership… chiefs have deviated from the purposes for which we instituted them. They are busy grabbing land even from orphans and widows whom they are supposed to protect.[2]

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[1] Interview with Ladit Okidi Ladwar, Gulu City, 28th July 2023. Ladwar is a respected legal expert and a consultant on Acholi customary law.

[2] Rosalba Oywaa, interviewed by Bernard Onen of Lakwed online TV, Gulu City, on 4th August 2023. Mego Rosalba Oywaa worked at ACORD at the start of reinstitution customary leaders. She criticizes KKA for diverting from the original plans for which they revived.

The above reactions, and many others from elsewhere, generally showed strong sentiments against chiefly authority, which was perceived as a construction of the NRM regime and international organizations intended to serve their own interest at the expense of significant sections of Acholi society who viewed the KKA as socially illegitimate. This is evident in the ways in which the local people referred to these chiefs as '*Rwodi pa Museveni'* (Museveni's chiefs) and *'Rwodi pa* ACORD' (ACORD's chiefs), depicting a distance between them and the chiefs. To the people, the contemporary chiefs draw their legitimacy more from the NRM regime and international organizations. It is worth emphasizing that the Acholi people are not opposed to customary authority as an institution but to the processes that reproduced chiefly authority as the only dominant symbol of customary power. Furthermore, the personal character and behaviors of some chiefs have been contradictory to popular customary norms and perceptions of traditions popularly held in Acholi society. In what ways would scholarship engage with the foregoing contestations? Multiple lenses can be discerned: first, the meaning, scope, character of the concept chiefly power are always evolving to include new actors and interests. Second, the important role of the modern state as an intervenor in the social terrain, which shows that the postcolonial state in Uganda continues the legacy of the colonial power in maintaining forms and tactics of governance directed at society. It could be interpreted therefore as a case of change and continuity. Third, the response of society in contesting some of the chiefly appointments shows the need for a rigorous investigation of the dynamic interplay between state-society relations, which can help to theorize how new forms of social agency manifest as responses to state power. Fourth, the increasing presence of international development agencies such as ACORD in Acholi chiefly politics shows how the Uganda state relegated some of its developmentalist roles to powerful NGOs, who supplement the state in the era of neoliberalism.

This paper argues that by its nature and character, Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) is a fundamentally political institution of the Acholi people under the NRM governance disguised in a 'cultural' attire. Tracing its emergence, growth and subsequent fragmentation into two parallel factions with multiple social constituencies, this paper shows that KKA was fundamentally an institution imagined by and propped up by state power using its financial, legal, violent and political machinery to mobilize underlying cultural sentiments within Acholi society clamoring to reinvent chiefly power. I argue that the state utilized two significant contexts to influence cultural agents in Acholiland. First, the state used the end of the LRA war as a context to construct a developmentalist NGO logic that used Acholi cultural brokers as the gatekeepers and custodians of economic and social change. Second, the state also utilized the wave of resurgent chiefly and kingdom restoration elsewhere in Uganda as a point of reference for Acholi society to copy the experience of others to entrench itself in society on the backdrop of society-state animosity in post-LRA northern Uganda. By propping up new cultural brokers to become political actors under the purview of state supervision, financial and violent protection, this paper shows that the state re-politicized cultural institutions and betrayed the nationalist project which had, with minimal success, attempted to depoliticize customary authorities under the nationalistic pretentions of the first post-independent regimes. The despotic turn of many actors in KKA was attributed to the benevolent legal and violent machinery of the state. By deploying the chiefly component of the customary authority as a point of political governance, the NRM regime continued in the bifurcated legacy of British colonial governance, in which the state attempts to successfully construct social subjection using its machinery of politics.

The paper also explores the claims to hereditary or non-hereditary leadership dynamics within KKA while emphasizing that the character of leaders and the claims they made in their daily performance of roles and functions reflect the nature of their source of legitimacy. Actors propped up by state power have acted with minimal accountability to society due to the lack of social legitimacy, which has allowed resistance from within the very KKA structures and from the society below. Focusing on the resistance against KKA's controversial activities, legitimacy concerns, corruption, despotic and undemocratic practices, marginalization and exclusion, and deviations from traditional Acholi customs and norms as well as historical inter-clan rivalries, the paper emphasizes the precarious circumstances under which the contestation between political brinkmanship and cultural pretentions manifest and the consequences for state and society relations.

Importantly, the mismatch between cultural rhetoric and practice accounts for what I consider as *re-politicization of the cultural*. For, whereas KKA is projected as a unifying 'cultural' institution for the whole Acholi people, created to promote unity, preserve culture and resolve armed conflicts through Acholi transitional justice mechanism *(mato oput),* there is a sharp departure in real practice as the current leadership is exploiting the institution for personal material and political interest. The exclusionary character of KKA as an institution also

defeats its all-embracing pretentions because some chiefs and other ingredients of Acholi customary authority such as *Ladit Kaka* (clan head), *Dar ker* (chiefdom wife), *Rwot Kweri* (Chief of hoe—responsible for production and conflict resolution) and *Rwot Okoro* (chief of snail shell—a female leader responsible for mobilizing women for weeding and harvesting) have been excluded from KKA structure. The current nature of KKA and the roles of its leadership has resuscitated debate on what "authentic" Acholi culture should be and who are its guardians?.

This paper is organized into four major sections, the first of which discusses the debates on the discourse surrounding the restoration of customary authority in Acholi under the NRM regime. Revisiting the debates, this section shows that out of three camps that underlined the restoration discourse, advocates for a rival customary authority triumphed over their opponents and imagined an institution which would bring together all customary actors in Acholi to address the existing challenges on the backdrop of the LRA conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. I analyze these debates within the larger theoretical literature regarding the restoration of customary forms of governance broadly. The second section analyses the evolution of KKA into a political-cultural body, its work dynamics and the key actors. I show here the daily workings of the KKA reflected the governance logic of its state benefactor, who mobilized state laws, legal culture, machinery of violence and political patronage to prop up chiefly leaders friendly to the NRM logic of rule. The third section discusses the character that forms resistance to KKA both from within and below take. The fourth section presents political and theoretical implications that emanate from this re-politicization of cultural authority.

## Debates on the resurgence of Customary Authority

Different scholarly camps have debated the resurgence of customary authority in postcolonial Africa. Some camps perceive this resurgence in form of the colonial legacy while others consider the post-cold war neoliberal development related discourses, such as democratization, globalization, peace building and conflict resolution. The camp which situates the resurgence of customary authority in the literature surrounding the historical legacy of imperial colonial governance is led by Mahmood Mamdani has situated the restoration of customary authorities in the theory regarding the legacy of the bifurcated colonial state and its policies of indirect rule and decentralized despotism. In this line, Mamdani observes that: "indirect rule left post-colonial Africa with a legacy of decentralized despotism that inhibited the development of a meaningful democracy"[3]. More importantly, he argues that the post-colonial state in Africa failed to de-politicize customary authority however much it succeeded in de-racializing the state[4]. Other scholars agree with Mamdani's view. Charles Piot, in his study of the 'post- Cold War moment' in Togo, affirms that the system of indirect rule and decentralized despotism unleashed under British colonialism continued to inform the resurgence of customary authority in the 1990s[5]. Furthermore, Paul Nugent attributes the resurgence of customary authority to the unwillingness of post-colonial state to dismantle colonial structure of the customary authority[6]. Investigating the resurgence of customary authority in Mozambique, Juan Obario argued that the neoliberal state which brought the customary at the center stage retained key features borrowed from previous political regimes and that neoliberal deregulation had not by itself produced "a blanket, all-encompassing transformation."[7]

Democratization discourse: Proponents of the democratization associate the resurgence of customary authority in the 1990s to democratization process that was taking place in Africa at that time (Englebert 2002[8], Skalnik[9] and Kyed 2007[10] ). To Englert, the resurgence of customary authority cannot be decoupled from the wave of democratization process which was taking place in Africa in the 1990s[11]. In supporting this view Kyed argues: "the liberal democratic ingredients of multi-party democracy, decentralization, and civil society resurrection

[3] Ibid, p.13.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Piot, Charles. "Nostalgia for the Future." In *Nostalgia for the Future*. University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 7.

[6] Nugent, Paul. "An abandoned project? The nuances of chieftaincy, development and history in Ghana's Volta region." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 28, no. 37-38 (1996): 203-225, p.222.

[7] Obarrio, J. "Third contact: Invisibility and recognition of the customary in northern Mozambique." *The politics of custom: Chiefship, capital, and the state in contemporary Africa* (2018): 305-335, p.315.

[8] Englebert, Pierre. *State legitimacy and development in Africa*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, p.97.

[9] Skalník, Peter. "Authority Versus Power: Democracy in Africa, Must Include Original African

[10] Kyed, Helene Maria. "State recognition of traditional authority." *Citizenship and State Formation in Rural Post War Mozambique (PhD Dissertation, Roskilde University, 2007),* p. 6.

[11] Englebert, Pierre. *State legitimacy and development in Africa*, p.97.

provided an important context for formal recognition of customary authorities"[12]. The process of 'democratic consolidation' was believed to be consolidating traditional institutions in modern African governance and development[13]. The claim is that the relative democratization of many countries in Africa opened public space for customary authorities and other interest groups to voice their demands and concerns and provided space for creation of collective identities as an alternative power center[14].

Similarly, Logan argues that there is a strong correlation between democracy and chieftaincy, citing the relationship between selected chiefs and elected councilors in some countries like Ghana and South Africa[15]. According to van Ray and van Nieuwaal customary authority is a vital "vehicle for more or less authentic indigenous political expression, capable of influencing state-society relationship[16]. On his part, Skalnik locates the principles of democracy in the deep past. He argues that the 'original' and 'authentic' African traditional institutions were based on democratic principles contrary to the Eurocentric view[17]. Citing the traditional consensus politics of chiefship, Skalnik argues that customary authorities are genuinely democratic and their involvement provides a mechanism for check and balances in line with elected politicians and bureaucrats[18]. Skalnik's narrative fits well in Acholi society where customary power is diffused among different power holders with significant autonomy in their specific areas of jurisdiction. For example, the paramount chief, despite the powerful image created of him, does not have power over other chiefdoms other than his own chiefdom. According to Acholi tradition, all chiefs are considered as equals and chiefdoms are independent of each other in terms of leadership, religious inclination and rituals[19]. However, Skalnik's privileging of the pre-colonial as democratically authentic tends to mask undemocratic tendencies and brutally exercised by some pre-colonial chiefdoms/kingdoms, especially those that expanded through conquering weaker groups. In Acholi the chiefdom of Padibe was known for its aggressive nature, especially during the formative stages.[20]

Critics of the democratic discourse refute the link between democratization and the resurgence of customary authority. Disagreeing with the democratic discourse, Englebert argues that chiefly structure may be threatened rather than bolstered by democratization because of their own lack of democratic credentials[21]. Branch reinforces this argument, claiming that the empowerment of customary authorities in Acholi by the state and international donor organizations would entrench their undemocratic nature to further discipline and coercion[22]. This resonates with the critique of Williams challenging the claim that democratization provides spaces for traditional authority to re-emerge. Citing the case of South Africa, Williams argues that despite the democratization, traditional authorities have increased their undemocratic functions, thereby undermining efforts to create democratic institutions at the grassroot[23]. Relatedly, Mamdani's claims that the bifurcation of the state constructed chiefs into decentralized despots, thereby leaving them with few democratic claims to build upon in the 1990s[24]. He further argues that "failure by the post-colonial states to dismantle partly hierarchy, partly appointed chiefly positions is counter -productive to democratization because it produces the kind of decentralized despotism that resulted from the colonial indirect rule in the rural areas"[25]. Mamdani's claim, however, cannot be taken as a universal phenomenon. For instance, Chabal shows that some chiefs such as the Emirates of northern Nigeria and the Muslim brotherhood of Senegal were not despotic and did not loose much political legitimacy from

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[12] Kyed, Helene Maria. "State recognition of traditional authority.", p .10.

[13] Laakso, Liisa and Olukoshi, Adebayo O. "The Crisis of the Post-Colonial Nation-State Project in Africa.", p6.

[14] Ottaway, Marina, *Africa's New Leaders: democracy or state reconstruction?* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p.10.

[15] Logan, Carolyn. "Selected chiefs, elected councillors and hybrid democrats: popular perspectives on the co-existence of democracy and traditional authority." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 101-128, p.112.

[16] Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, Emile, and Rijk van Dijk. "The domestication of chieftaincy: the imposed and the imagined." *African Chieftaincy in a New Socio-Political Landscape. Hambourg, LIT Verlag* (1999), p.7.

[17] Skalník, Peter. "Authority Versus Power: Democracy in Africa" p. 110.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Atkinson, Ronald R. *The Roots of Ethnicity,* p. 17-20.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Englebert, Pierre. "Patterns and Theories of Traditional Resurgence in Tropical Africa.", p.58.

[22] Branch, Adam. *Displacing human rights: War and intervention in northern Uganda*. Oxford University Press, 2011, p.178.

[23] Williams, J. Michael. *Chieftaincy, the State, and Democracy: political legitimacy in post-apartheid South Africa*. Indiana University Press, 2010.

[24] Mamdani, Mahmood. "Citizen and subject", p.38-61.

[25] Ibid.

below[26]. The use of western lens to interpret democracy in local context appears problematic in the case of Acholi where power is diffused. This raises the question: What is the logic of democracy in Acholi?

Globalization discourse: Another camp of scholars posit that the resurgence of traditional authority across Sub-Saharan Africa is attributed to the influence of globalization championed by Western governments and institutions. The economic and political conditionalities attached to aid by international financial institutions and donors is viewed as weakening the sovereignty and integrity of the central state in Africa in favour of non-state actors[27]. Engelbart argues that the World Bank and other international donors began inquiring into traditional leaders and institutions as useful agents and structures in the processes of political decentralization and austerity programs.[28] This resonates with Kleist's view that the resurgence of customary authority has mainly been driven by globalization in which there have been rapid increases in social change and continued desires in people everywhere to redefine their identity and reinforce their sense of belonging[29]. Furthermore, Geschiere claims that Structural Adjustment demanded that the state recognizes civil society in which customary leaders are considered as suitable representatives by development experts. According to Geschiere, "the slogan such as 'bypassing the state', 'reaching out to civil society' and 'betting on NGOs', provided an opportunity for traditional leaders to present themselves as alternatives to national governments and as champions of the local people"[30]. However, authors such as Nyamnjoh, rejects this assertion and instead emphasizes agency of customary chiefs arguing that they have agency and capacity to renew traditional structures to meet emerging demands without state and international influence/intervention[31]. This speaks to Englebert's claim that, the state and international institutions have never been the main source of legitimacy for the customary authority[32]. It should be emphasized nevertheless that non-state entities such as NGOs and chiefly institutions can only act within the purview allowed by the specific state structures and legal frameworks that authorize their activities. This means that their agency is produced by the state structure itself and cannot be seen as totally independent and automous; it is a weak form of agency.

Conflict resolution and peace building discourse: This is the dominant discourse used in explaining resurgence of customary authority in conflict affected areas. Elders, chiefs, civil society organizations (local and international), political and local state officials in Acholi appropriated the discourse of peace-building and conflict resolution for the revival of Acholi customary authority (Paine[33], Branch[34], Komujuni[35], Omach[36]). Underpinning the call for the revival of customary authority was the imagination that Acholi transitional justice system locally known as *'mato-oput'* would bolster peace building and conflict resolution efforts as opposed to military campaigns which had resulted into loss of lives, destruction of property and other forms of socio-economic hardships.

However, Paine, in her study of Acholi Cultural Institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi-KKA) suggests that the discourse of development and peace building was a ploy to obscure the hidden discourse to serve the political and economic interest of the political elite behind the formation of the institution. He further posits that the international community and NGOs recognized and partnered with KKA because they did not understand the hidden intentions of its framers. Whereas, findings of this study indeed confirm personal interest from some KKA leaders, the implementation of this discourse on peace-building and reconciliation was largely successful and

[26] Chabal, Patrick. *Power in Africa: an essay in political interpretation*. Springer, 2016, p.50.

[27] de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. "The Heterogeneous State and Legal Pluralism in Mozambique."*Law and Society Review*, 40(1)*,* (2006):39-76, p. 61.

[28] Englebert, Pierre. "Patterns and Theories of Traditional Resurgence in Tropical Africa.", p. 60-61.

[29] Kleist, Nadja. "Modern chiefs: Tradition, development and return among traditional authorities in Ghana." *African Affairs*110, no. 441 (2011): 629-647.

[30] Geschiere, Peter. "African chiefs and the post-cold war moment.", p. 67.

[31] Nyamnjoh, Francis B. *Modernizing Traditions and Traditionalizing Modernity in Africa: chieftaincy and democracy in Cameroon and Botswana*. Langaa RPCIG, 2015, p.5-10.

[32] Pierre Englebert, *'State Legitimacy and Development in Africa',* p. 97.

[33] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p. 2.

[34] Branch, Adam. *Displacing human rights: War and intervention in northern Uganda*. Oxford University Press, 2011, p.178.

[35] Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief: the production of customary authority in post-post conflict Northern Uganda." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019.

[36] Omach, Paul. "Civil society organizations and local-level peacebuilding in Northern Uganda." *Journal of Asian and African studies* 51, no. 1 (2016): 77-96.

chiefs are credited for using their traditional capital with the support of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), donor agencies and Uganda government to persuade a big number of rebels to come out of the bush and for addressing intra-and inter-communal conflicts through traditional reconciliatory mechanism.

It is also important to mention that the resurgence of customary within Uganda was not universal in terms of discourses and response from below. Preponderance of authors suggest that the resurgence of customary in Uganda, especially Buganda was driven by two conceptual understanding the demand from cultural institutions (homeland demand)[37] and neopatrimonialism[38]. After the NRA's 1986 military takeover, the Baganda Elites and masses, who had supported the NRA's victory[39], expected rewards and were initially granted prominent representation in the government. Later, in 1993, the NRM recognized Buganda Kingdom and this paved way for cultural institutions to place the same demand to NRM government. Joshua Rubongoya, building on the work of Bayart situates resurgence of customary authority in Uganda to patron-clientele relationship[40]. To this group, to understand African problems is to look at the behaviors of African leaders such as Milton Obote, Idi Amin and Yoweri Museveni. These leaders are accused of creating patron-clientele networks which involves award of personal favours (patronage) through informal channels to selected groups of people (clients) in return for political mobilization/support and deference to key political elites or patrons on most political matters[41]. This patron-clientele relationship leads to high level of corruption and rent-seeking behaviour, violence and civil strife[42].

With respect to the resurgence and recognition of customary authorities, authors such as Joshua Rubongoya suggests that president Museveni flourishes on neo-patrimonial legitimacy characterized by award of favours in form of patronage[43]. His claim is that President Museveni recognizes cultural institutions and kingdoms for purposes of gaining popular support and creating a regime hegemony in Uganda[44]. Citing the cases of Buganda, Ankole, Busoga and Rwenzururu kingdoms, Komujuni shows how presidential interference into internal matters of customary authorities, have resulted into violence reactions from below[45]. In Acholi, Paine views the building of new houses for customary chiefs by president Museveni as evidence of patronage to build political capital in the region[46].

In Acholi, however, it is difficult to differentiate between the behavior of president Museveni as a private individual and as the head of state in dealing with the public. This also seems to exaggerate agency of leaders (bigmanism), while ignoring the power of institutions in shaping discourses. Muhereza and Otim for example, argue that the agency to restore Buganda Kingdom was driven by popular demand from below but not from the head of state (Museveni)[47]. Building on the critique of Mkandawire that challenges the assumption that self-interests are limited to 'big men'[48], Sseremba observes that "to assume that the president manipulates societies and instigates them to act in a certain way is to ignore the popular demand of the tribal homeland"[49], especially because monarchism predates Museveni's ascendancy to power.

[37] Muhereza, Frank Emmanuel, and P. Omnirange Otim. "Neutralizing Ethnicity under the NRM Government in Uganda." *Nov., Centre for Basic Research, Kampala, mimeo*(1997), p.193

[38] Rubongoya, Joshua. *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda: Pax Musevenica*. Springer, 2007.

[39] Goodfellow, Tom, and Stefan Lindemann. "The clash of institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of 'hybridity'in Buganda." *Commonwealth & comparative politics*51, no. 1 (2013): 3-26, p.16.

[40] Bayart, Jean-François. "The State in Africa: the politics of the belly." (2009), p.viii-xv

[41] Green, Elliott. "Patronage, district creation, and reform in Uganda." *Studies in comparative international development* 45 (2010): 83-103, p.94.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Rubongoya, Joshua. *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda: Pax Musevenica*. Springer, 2007, p.10.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019, p.58.

[46] Paine, Clare. "A Re-invention of Traditional Authority in Northern Uganda.", p.2.

[47] Muhereza, Frank E., and Peter Omurangi Otim. "Neutralizing ethnicity in Uganda." *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa, edited by MAM Salih and J. Markakis. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet* (1998), p.193-194.

[48] Mkandawire, Thandika. "Neopatrimonialism and the political economy of economic performance in Africa: Critical reflections." *World Politics* 67, no. 3 (2015): 563-612, p. 569.

[49] Sseremba, Yahya, and Makerere institute of social research (Kampala). *The State and the Puzzle of Ethnicity: Rethinking Mass Violence in Uganda's Rwenzori Region*. Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Makerere University, 2021, p.23.

Other scholars argue that the creation of patron -clientele networks is not a new phenomenon in Uganda or Acholi for that matter. In this, Doornbos suggests that patronage existed in pre-colonial Ankole[50]. Similarly, the creation of the paramount chief in Acholi did not start with Museveni but it was a creation of the colonial state in 1950s[51]. Moreso, the process of reproducing the current paramount chief was not initiated by Museveni but by a group of Acholi elders/chiefs with support of international organisations[52] and the Uganda state. Unlike in Buganda and other kingdoms/chiefdoms, in Acholi the resurgence of customary authority was mainly driven by discourses aimed at resolving the longstanding armed conflict and those related to preservation of culture.

With respect to responses from below, it is important in this study to take note that, in Uganda responses to the state recognition of the customary varied due to political, cultural and ethnic specificities and the resurgence of customary authority have had differential impact on communities in the context of the 'centralized' and segmentary political community. Unlike in the centralized kingdoms in southern Uganda where the resurgence of customary authorities was characterized by enthusiasm and popular support from below, in the decentralized/acephalous/segmentary society in northern Uganda (Acholi, Lango and Alur) the resurgence of customary authority attracted resistance, recalcitrance and contestations from a larger section of the local population, questioning the legitimacy of the process. Additionally, resurgence of customary authority in Uganda has been shaped differently, with majority of neoliberal scholars privileging development as being at the core while ignoring the political agenda of the state, chiefs and international agencies. In this connection, this section attempts to bring to light the 'hidden' discourse of the political perspective in the case of Acholi.

**Evolution of KKA into a political-cultural institution**

How did KKA evolve into an entity that fused both political and cultural components of Acholi society? How did actors in KKA become both political and cultural brokers? What claims did they make on culture that lacked recognition from the larger Acholi social body? Since its creation in 2000, the evolution of KKA has been characterized by rise within the purview of the war and immediate post-war periods and its decline at the end of the war. It is important to note that the revival of Acholi customary authority and the creation of KKA in particular was framed by conflict resolution related discourses that became less relevant with the end of the armed conflict. As a result, KKA chiefs have been trying to reposition themselves to maintain dual legitimacy and relevance, in the eye of the state and international community as well as attempting to maintain their traditional legitimacy[53]. This balancing act of having dual legitimacy has proven problematic to achieve as discussed below:

**a). The roles of international NGOs and donor agencies**

International agencies in form of NGOs and donor organizations played crucial roles in the recognition of Acholi customary authority and creation of KKA as a centralized cultural institution. As observed by Bierschenk et al., trainings and workshops transformed customary chiefs into "masters of developmentalist jargon," enabling them to navigate the international aid landscape as development brokers[54]. Additionally, as brokers, they must function as "translators" between diverse narratives and registers, conveying community needs to donors and donor language back to communities[55]. Chiefs' connections, resources, and registers were deeply rooted in both the past and present, encompassing their royal lineage tracing back to pre-colonial times, their involvement in peace negotiations, and their familiarity with development agendas. During interview, chiefs would often proudly showcase their mastery of these repertoires by sharing inherited cultural knowledge, traditional rituals, and terminologies that blended with modern development jargon. As indispensable brokers in the post-conflict intervention landscape, chiefs became influential figures who actively shaped humanitarian discourses and

[50] Doornbos, Martin R. "Not all the King's Men." In *Not all the King's Men*. De Gruyter Mouton, 2019, p.48.

[51] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p.147-149.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief: the production of customary authority in post-post conflict Northern Uganda." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019, P.16.

[54] Bierschenk, Thomas, Jean-Pierre Chauveau, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, and A. Kossi. "Local development brokers in Africa." *The rise of a new social category* 13 (2002).

[55] Kappler, Stefanie. "The dynamic local: Delocalisation and (re-) localisation in the search for peacebuilding identity." In *The'Local Turn'in Peacebuilding*, pp. 59-73. Routledge, 2018. See also, Lewis, David, and David Mosse, eds. *Development brokers and translators: The ethnography of aid and agencies*. Kumarian Press, 2006.

practices, rather than simply being passive operators. As demonstrated by Schlitz and Büscher, these brokers strategically reproduced the dominant social order and its registers, maintaining their own privileged position[56]. Customary chiefs became experts in crafting humanitarian narratives on local "needs" and participatory solutions for reintegration, reconciliation, and other buzzwords in the post-conflict reconstruction lexicon, which they transformed into mobilizing repertoires to advance their own agenda[57].

In this process KKA emerged as a significant development broker, partnering with international agents in post-conflict reconstruction at the end of the war and in the immediate post-war period. KKA's reputation as a mediator in conflict resolution attracted external funds which were used to influence chiefs by offering or promising assistance to their communities, further solidifying its image as a powerful mediator. Additionally, KKA was recognized by external donors and the Ugandan state as both a cultural institution and a development organization. It received support from various international agencies, serving as both consultants and project implementers, including International Alert, UNIFEM, Oxfam, Caritas, and World Vision. Local NGOs like Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ALPI), Justice and Reconciliation Project, and NGO Forum also partnered with KKA[58]. This collaboration ensconced KKA cultural agenda in a donor-driven post-conflict development discourse. The European Union, for instance, funded housing infrastructure for KKA's offices and individual leader's residences, which was perceived locally to enhance their prestige and legitimacy. Between 2003 and 2013, KKA solidified its position as a major player in the aid economy, exemplified by its appointment as the lead actor in the Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management (CRCM) component of the World Bank-funded Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) program in 2005[59]. As a broker, KKA connected aid and development agencies to local communities, wielding significant influence as it legitimized and facilitated foreign organization's work in the region. In recognition of its crucial role, donors consistently invested in empowering and capacity-building for KKA, viewing it as a vital partner in delivering aid and development initiatives[60].This highlights that external empowerment played a crucial role in the resurgence of customary authority in northern Uganda, with KKA occupying a key position in this process. Traditionally, customary authority was embodied in individual chiefs representing clans and chiefdoms, but it has evolved to be mainly represented by KKA, an institution with centralized leadership and administration

## b). Influence of the LRA armed conflict

The armed conflict did not only undermine customary authority and cultural values but also provided an opportunity for the chiefs with the support of the state and international bodies to call for the revival of Acholi customary authority. In this connection, advocates for the revival of customary power in Acholi advanced the discourses of preservation of culture and conflict resolution through reconciliation and transitional justice system of *'mato oput'*[61]. In this process, two dominant images of KKA were presented, with hereditary chiefs depicted as playing cardinal traditional roles in reconciliation and conflict management. The second image is KKA being the custodian of Acholi cultural practices and traditions[62]. Besides, KKA was also produced as not only rooted firmly in the past through the 'traditional leaders' but is also relevant for the present through its recognition of women and young people on the governing council of Ker Kwaro Acholi. Acholi culture was also presented as something that was bounded and stable in the past and inherently good, 'promoting economic development, good health, unity, education and the general standard of living', but 'since the war' it has been in a steady decline[63] The decline in 'cultural development' is then said to have been the cause of the decline in health standards, production levels, education and unity, and rise in spread of diseases, deaths, conflicts, frustrations among

[56] Schiltz, Julie, and Karen Büscher. "Brokering research with war-affected people: The tense relationship between opportunities and ethics." *Ethnography* 19, no. 1 (2018): 124-146.

[57] Cornwall, Andrea. "Introductory overview–buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse." *Deconstructing Development Discourse* 1 (2010): 1-18.

[58] Focus Group Discussion with Staff of Gulu NGO Forum, May, 18 2023, Gulu City.

[59] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p. 2.

[60] Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief: the production of customary authority in post-post conflict Northern Uganda." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019, p.58.

[61] Omach, Paul. "Civil society organizations and local-level peacebuilding in Northern Uganda." *Journal of Asian and African studies* 51, no. 1 (2016): 77-96.

[62] Komujuni, Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief: the production of customary authority in post-post conflict Northern Uganda." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019, 16.

[63] Ibid

others.[64] In brief, the discourse of a cultural breakdown in Acholi is re-produced alongside descriptions of KKA as the 'custodian of Acholi cultural practices and traditions', which has the effect of presenting the institution as part of the solution to what it describes as the 'steady decline in the cultural development of the people of Acholi. This resonates with the report of Pain entitled, *gomo tong (Bending of Spears-symbol of reconciliation)* in which chiefs were presented, as traditional and neutral mediators of conflict, custodians of a 'true' Acholi culture and in need of empowerment so they can resume their traditional roles and be restored as unproblematic or neutral actors of customary authority in Acholi[65].

Similarly, a report by Baines, *Roco Wat I Acholi, (rebuilding relationship in Acholi),* presents Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) as a neo-traditional institution or contemporary institution, as it operates within the framework of Acholi traditional leaders, but with a modern approach[66]. The report recognizes the importance of restoring this institution and advocates for its revival, citing its central role in reviving transitional justice mechanisms, which are deemed crucial for restoring relationships and resolving conflicts in Acholi[67]. These articulations were not only viable to the state and international organizations but also to the Acholi elite and the masses. This positive portrayal of KKA as a legitimate institution led to its recognition and support by the state, international organizations and also initially support from below.

## c). Roles of Acholi elites

The institutionalization and growth of KKA was not only the result of a deliberate donor policy, but also by the agency of the chiefs themselves, especially the three key personalities of the Paramount chief Onen David Acana II, Kenneth Oketta, KKA prime minster and Rwot Francis Lagony of Koch chiefdoms, who building on the earlier efforts of Acholi elders and support of NGOs, reproduced dominant narratives to position KKA as a legitimate traditional authority in both national and international spheres. The behavior of the Paramount Chief contributed to producing the idea that Ker Kwaro Acholi is not only rooted firmly in the past through the 'traditional leaders' but is also relevant for the present through its recognition of women and young people on the governing council of Ker Kwaro Acholi. The leadership of the KKA has strived to portray itself as a robust institution with diverse capabilities and capacities, going beyond its initial focus on reconciliation. The Paramount Chief was instrumental in shaping KKA's initial structure and organization, while subsequent institutionalization efforts saw the creation of a hierarchical system akin to Uganda government, featuring a Paramount Chief as the overall head of the institution with cabinet of ministers, council of chiefs and the secretariat under him. As noted above, there was the Paramount Chief, Rwot David Acana who strategically used the emergence of KKA as a favorite 'donor darling' to emerge as a strong 'Big Man' in Acholi society. Paine argues that from the start, KKA deliberately produced its image to be well positioned to tap into donor and government funding[68].

Furthermore, it was also important for individual chiefs to remain well connected to the institution through which resources and projects were controlled,[69] although membership to KKA was much more important back then than it is today. For the individual chiefs it was beneficial to align oneself to KKA to tap into external resources, which were crucial to construct their own, individual authority and legitimacy. Not only because a chief is supposed to have sufficient 'standing', but also eventually to be able to further redistribute these resources through patron-client relations in ways that grants them prestige and legitimacy.

In summary, just as in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the transformation of customary authority in northern Uganda was not solely imposed by external actors, but rather emerged through a co-production process. Creation of KKA was shaped by humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts, as the result of a dynamic interplay

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[64] Ibid

[65] Pain, Dennis. *" The Bending of Spears": Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda*. International Alert, 1997. p.75.

[66] Baines, Erin K. "The haunting of Alice: Local approaches to justice and reconciliation in Northern Uganda." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 1 (2007): 91-114, p.95.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p. 146-193.

[69] Ibid.

between external and local forces[70]. While KKA was certainly influenced by "foreign desires" it was also locally shaped, reimagined and reinterpreted, reflecting a complex and interactive process of cultural exchange and adaptation[71]. While it is important to recognize the agency and navigation strategies of chiefs in adapting to the post-conflict context, we must also be mindful not to overstate their control and agency. For many chiefs, their involvement in humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts was a means of survival, as they were simply adjusting to the situation to remain relevant[72]. Some chiefs may have even viewed the offered meals and allowances as their only means of earning a living, highlighting the limited options available to them.

## Contestations/Resistance within/without KKA

### a). Contestation within KKA

The tension among KKA chiefs has been building up since its inception, culminating in the emergence of parallel factions with the election of Rwot Apire Santo Richard as the alternative Paramount Chief on 14th June 2024. This was met with protests from chiefs loyal to the embattled Paramount Chief Rwot Onen David Acana, who refused to relinquish the seat after 20 years of rule. The resulting instability in Acholi customary authority is due to the presence of the two parallel offices, driven by several major factors analysed below:

*Contested tenure of office of the Paramount Chief:* The term of office of the Paramount Chief has been key in the conflict between the two factions of chiefs. The faction of Rwot Apire is contesting the continued occupation of the office by Rwot Onen David, disregarding the resolution of the council of chiefs that the position of the Paramount chief is rotational for a term of five years[73]. The group argues that Rwot Onen David Acana was allowed to continue occupying the seat beyond the expected period because they wanted to resolve the armed conflict first before electing a new Paramount Chief[74]. However, Rwot Onen David Acana has been blocking the process claiming the position is hereditary and belongs to his clan of Payira. Rwot Acana's defiance speaks to the historical attempt by Payira as the largest chiefdom to take up the mantle of leadership of Acholi customary authority and making it an hereditary structure which contradicts the traditional political system of having independent chiefdoms. For example, the former prime minister of KKA, Kenneth Oketa opposed to the system of rotating the paramount chief was optimistic that "rotation will not happen', because Payira chiefdom has a big network of chiefs allied to it"[75]. He also associated leadership rotation to violence and instability citing the leadership wrangles in Busoga kingdom[76]. Oketta's position was that the paramount chief should serve until he passes away, and then an election should follow, 'so that people (chiefs ) can be given a chance to elect', but was confident the paramountcy would always be occupied by Payira[77].

Even when colonial authority introduced the office of the Paramount Chief for a short time, it was occupied by people from minor chiefdoms rather than Payira. Rwot Lamot Matayo of Adilang chiefdom and Rwot Philipo Adonga of Pajule Palwo chiefdom served as paramount chiefs on a rotational basis[78]. It is noteworthy that the British colonial officials deliberately sought to prevent a dominant chiefdom like Payira from taking over the position of Paramount Chief, fearing opposition to their rule and creating hereditary rule at the paramountcy level[79]. Additionally, local politicians in the district council had concerns about the potential for hereditary succession and clan rivalries, which led them to appoint Yona Odida from Payira and a son of Rwot Awich and grandfather of the current paramount chief Acana as Chief Jude *(Langokop Madit)* instead of the Paramount

[70] Hviding, Edvard. "Contested rainforests, NGOs, and projects of desire in Solomon Islands." *International Social Science Journal* 55, no. 178 (2003): 539-554, p.541.

[71] Ranger, Terence. "The invention of tradition revisited: the case of colonial Africa." In *Legitimacy and the state in twentieth-century Africa: essays in honour of AHM Kirk-Greene*, pp. 62-111. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993, p.33.

[72] Rwot John Lugai (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.

[73] Rwot John Lugai (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.

[74] Rwot Apwaa Orik (Crisis at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.

[75] Kenneth Oketta (Tenure of the Paramount Chief) cited in Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p.146-193.

[76]Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

Chief ( *Lawirwodi)* which went to Rwot Philipo Adonga, a leader from a minor chiefdom of Pajule Palwo[80]. Eventually, due to intense clan rivalries in the District Council, the position of the *Lawirwodi* was abandoned and replaced with *Laloyo Maber* (a good ruler) which was open to non-royals[81].

Whereas this fact is well documented in history books and available in public domain  there have been continued attempts by Rwot Acana to distort it for personal interest. It is important to emphasize here that a chief can only enjoy hereditary power at individual chiefdom where they are traditionally installed but not at the paramountcy level which is elective, and no traditional rituals performed. Despite these documented historical facts, Rwot Acana and his group have continued to distort facts and manipulate the situation to remain in power against the wishes of other chiefs and a big section of the Acholi community. Rwot Acana also has been using the narrative of entitlement that, it was through his efforts that  peace was achieved  in Acholi, claiming that other chiefs opposed to his leadership are targeting to enjoy the fruits of his sweat. Responding to the election of the new rivaling Paramount Chief, Rwot Acana expressed anger that:

> "they were not here during the war and now that I brought peace they want to take over
> the leadership of KKA which I struggled for… this will not happen and I urge the  council
> of chiefs  to make a resolution that we chase them away from KKA. Let them form their
> own institution and should not use our official stamp and emblems"[82].

Rwot Acana, believes that he has earned the right to maintain his position, citing his efforts in bringing peace to the region and claiming that others who opposed him are trying to reap the benefits of his hard work. While it is acknowledged that Rwot Acana and other chiefs, with the support of NGOs and donor agencies, played a significant role in the peace and conflict resolution process by facilitating talks between the government and LRA rebels and performing transitional justice rituals, it is important to recognize that the end of the LRA rebellion was a collective effort involving multiple stakeholders, both local and international, and cannot be attributed solely to the efforts of the chiefs.

*Marginalization and Exclusion  of some   chiefs and other customary actors*: Preeminent leaders, including some chiefs and their prime ministers, expressed concerns that chiefs were being marginalized from key activities within the Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) institution due to the influence of the Paramount Chief.  Sections of chiefs and employees at KKA have decried unequal and humiliating treatment at *Gang Ker Kwaro Madit* (KKA palace) orchestrated by members of the Secretariat, chiefs allied to the Paramount chief and his relatives employed at the institution. Accordingly, Okot Phillip Ongom, the prime minister of Pajule Palwo chiefdom who often accompanied his Chief to *Gang Ker Kwaro Madit* (palace) shared his experiences, stating that chiefs were often excluded from major decisions and were subjected to discrimination by those close to the Paramount Chief[83]. There is discriminative treatment, with others given respect, listened to and given money for facilitation while others are not only accorded the same treatment but also humiliated and treated as ordinary people by members of the secretariat[84]. Some chiefs are gagged from raising their views during council meetings in favor of non-members of the council.  He noted:

> My chief George William Lugai, despite being the 1st Deputy Paramount Chief was not
> always consulted or informed on major decisions concerning the institution. Chiefs are
> also discriminated  against when they come to KKA headquarters, with those close to the
> Paramount Chief given better treatment than others. For example, during the cultural
> festival some chiefs who came to witness the three-day function were not given
> accommodation and transport. I saw some chiefs being pulled out of a vehicle which was

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[80] Okot Billy (Ker Kwaro Acholi), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July  10 2023, Gulu City.

[81] Okidi Ladwar  (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 20, 2023, Gulu City.

[82] Rwot David Onen Acana II (Election of the New Paramount Chief ),  Press Conference, 12th June 2024, KKA Hall, Gulu City.,

[83] Okot Phillip Ongom (Corruption and Abuse of Office at KKA),  interview by Maktunu, Press Conference, June 16, 2024, on Acholi eVO TV.

[84] Ibid.

transporting other chiefs to a hotel on claim that they were not on the list to benefit from the accommodation offer"[85].

Similarly, the Paramount Chief is accused of not sharing money and other forms of support given by the state and donor organizations. He is particularly accused of excluding some chiefs from benefiting from housing project for chiefs offered by Uganda government. The situation is compounded by negative perception among members of the secretariat that chiefs belong to the old tradition with limited knowledge in modern management skills, including issues of accountability[86]. The above situation contradicts the dominant image of Ker Kwaro Acholi as a traditional cultural institution led by the 58 traditional leaders of Acholi, raising questions about the *Rwodi's place* within this framework. The situation highlights the fallacy of the dominant image of chiefs under KKA as a uniform group of equally placed traditional authorities, which masks the reality of unequal power dynamics between different "traditional" leaders in Ker Kwaro and Acholi, where some chiefs, such as the Paramount Chief, wield more influence and authority than others. The discontent stemming from the issues mentioned earlier led to a significant outcome, where 37 out of 58 chiefs under KKA voted in favor of Rwot Apire Santo as the new Paramount Chief, citing the power imbalance and neglect of traditional leaders' involvement in decision-making processes. This has led to widespread protests and discontent among most chiefs and their supporters, who feel marginalized and disrespected by the institution's actions.

The exclusion of certain chiefdoms, such as the Bwobo and Pageya chiefdoms, from KKA adds another layer of tension to the organization, despite its public image of unity and recognition. The Paramount Chief's authority in determining membership, though guided by Rwodi and elders, perpetuate existing power dynamics and create feelings of marginalization among excluded chiefs. The exclusion of certain chiefs like Rwot Yusuf Adek of Pageya challenges the notion that KKA is a homogeneous group of chiefs who were uniformly recognized and revived through a seamless process, instead revealing a more complex and contested history[87]. Rwot Yusuf Adek's exclusion from KKA and his reputation as a government critic, despite being accused of being a rebel collaborator during the war, has led to a peculiar situation where he is viewed by some section of the Acholi people as the one championing Acholi culture and traditions, while others see him as a controversial figure. He has become the darling of the local communities outside his chiefdom.

During the research periods, I attended three funeral functions where Rwot Yusuf Adek was invited to represent customary leaders in which he enthusiastically kept on teaching the gatherings on Acholi culture including traditional dances, maintaining marriage and respect in community, something that chiefs under KKA have failed to do due to their detachment from the rural community. The most important point to note in this section is that other vital ingredients of Acholi customary authority have been excluded from the composition of KKA. KKA has continued with the colonial logic of segregating chiefly authority from the other ingredients making them as the only symbols of political power. It is worth noting that Acholi pre-colonial political system had multiple centers of power within a given chiefdom in which the chief was socially embedded. Notable customary actors in Acholi political systems are the *Dar Ker,* (chiefdom wife), *Ajwaka* (diviner/priest), *Rwot Kweri* (chief of hoe), *Rwot Okoro* (female chief in charge of production), *Ludito Kaka* (clan heads). The *Dar ker,* is not only a privileged position but also considered vital in determining a heir to the throne[88]. She is considered as a role model for all women in terms of morals and for upholding customs and traditional practices. She is also considered as the mother of the chiefdom and responsible for welfare of chiefdom members[89]. Another influential position in the chiefdom that women shared with men was the *Ajwaka* (diviner/priest). The relationship between the living and chiefdom *Jok* (supreme being) and the ancestors is mediated by powerful figure of a diviner (Ajwaka) who is respected and gifted for his/her direction and guidance[90]. Another important figure in the chiefdom is the *Rwot Okoro* who is responsible for women community workforce, especially
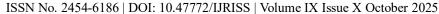
[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Rwot Yusuf Adek, (Resurgence of Customary authority in Acholi ) interviewed by Ladit Deben, Lakwed TV, 16 June 2023, Gulu City.

[88] Rwot Solomon Oyat (Resurgence of Customary authority in Acholi ) interviewed by Tony Apecu, Koch Goma chiefdom palace, Nwoya District, 18th May 2023.

[89] Charles Ocitti, (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, 29 July 2023, Gulu City.

[90] Allen, Tim. "War and justice in northern Uganda: an assessment of the International Criminal Court's intervention." *London: Crisis States Research Centre, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics* 6 (2005).

mobilizing women to handle the weeding and harvesting of crops. In the processes of weeding and harvesting also involved decision-making on issues that affect women in the chiefdom[91]. *Rwot Kweri* was the head of *Awak* system (village community work force) in which political and economic issues are determined[92].

The head of *Awak* system was the *Rwot Kweri* loosely translated as 'chief of hoe' who was elected by the village members whom he represents in the clan assemblies or gathering. *Rwot Kweri* plays critical roles in mobilizing the *Awak* group and is also responsible for handling land disputes and issues related to pestilence in their area of jurisdiction. According to the LC5 Chairman (elected political head) of Kitgum District, *Rwodi Kweri* still play key role in community production and dispute resolutions at lower levels[93]. However, he acknowledged that no deliberate attempts have been put in place to formalize this category of power holders both at the local government and KKA[94]. Lineage/ Clan heads are the core of chiefdom decision making. The chiefdoms were a collection of clans and each village clan was responsible for their own internal matters[95]. Decision -making was arrived at by the council of elders and clan heads which constituted advisory team to the chief on both internal and external matters of the chiefdom[96]. According to Atkinson, the lineage villages were the core of socio-economic and political foundation of Acholi[97]. Clan heads, therefore, were not only the heads of their lineages in terms of social and political roles but also had the primary responsibility of settling disputes and managing lineage affairs in general. They also functioned as the main representatives for and spokesmen of their lineages within the polity (chiefdom) as a whole. The above articulations show that clan heads had and still have more, and critical roles compared to the chiefs and other power holders. This view agrees with Atkinson's findings that Acholi chiefdom clearly accepted the basic values of a lineage/clan -based society which gave lineage heads and elders a prominence in the socio-political order[98]. Girling further shows that unlike clan heads, the roles of the chiefs were limited to rainmaking in which he participated directly, in addition to subordinate roles in other clans[99]. Besides, chiefs intervened in inter-clan conflicts only when clan leadership failed to exhaustively handle the matter[100].

Circumscribing the chiefs from the other elements of the same political system, the chiefs have been isolated from the community despite being recognized by the state as the key symbol of traditional power. The segregation is like cutting off umbilical cord that connects them (chiefs) to the community. As noted by Girling, the *Rwot* was dependent on the support of his people[101]. This is because unlike in the pre-colonial past, where chiefs used to get advice from clan heads and elders as well as depended on them for other functions (rituals, tribute, war etc.) in the chiefdom, the contemporary chiefs are being segregated from this socially embedded network of customary power holders. Findings of this study indicate that chiefs cannot effectively work without the support of other lower power holders and society generally. As a result, since the resurgence of KKA, clans have been empowering clan leaders to handle their affairs outside the chiefly structures[102].

*Despotic and undemocratic behavior of KKA leadership:* The Paramount Chief, Rwot Onen David Acana and his deputy, Rwot Otinga Atuka Yai are facing resistance for exhibiting despotic and undemocratic tendencies as key decisions concerning the institution are decided by them sidelining council of chiefs. This concern resonates with articulation by authors showing continuation of colonial despotic and democratic tendencies in the post-colonial moment as shown by Mamdani in his theory of the decentralized despotism[103], Charles Piot, in

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[91] Okidi Ladwar (resurgence of Acholi Customary authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 2023, Gulu City.

[92] Atkinson, Ronald R. "The evolution of ethnicity among the Acholi of Uganda: the precolonial phase." *Ethnohistory* (1989): 19-43, p.20

[93] Charles Ociti (resurgence of Acholi Customary authority), interviewed by Caroline Lamunu, July 2023, Kitgum District.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Amone, Charles, and Okullu Muura. "British colonialism and the creation of Acholi ethnic identity in Uganda, 1894 to 1962." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 2 (2014): 239-257,p.243.

[96] Atkinson, Ronald R. "The evolution of ethnicity among the Acholi of Uganda: the precolonial phase." *Ethnohistory* (1989): 19-43, p.20.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Girling, Frank. The Acholi of Uganda. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Offices (1960), p.100.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Girling, Frank. The Acholi of Uganda. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Offices (1960), p.104.

[102] Okot Billy (Ker Kwaro Acholi), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 2023, Gulu City.

[103] Ibid.

his study of the 'post- Cold War moment' in Togo[104], Paul Nugent[105], and J. Obario.[106] The Paramount Chief's despotic and undemocratic tendencies are evident in his consistent refusal to establish a constitution, a legal document to guide management and administration at KKA, despite being in power for over 20 years, suggesting a lack of willingness to empower other chiefs and promote democratic governance. A former employee of KKA Secretariat revealed that: "we had come up with a constitution for consideration but there was no will by the Paramount Chief and his prime Minister, Kenneth Oketta to accommodate it"[107]. According to Prime Minister of KKA, introducing legal rights to chiefs would lead to rivalries and create opportunities for manipulation, as most chiefs would not be able to understand and utilize them to their advantage. He further argued that lack of a formal constitution is one of the ways of maintaining independence from state interference, with some elders and leaders resisting any attempts at accountability and restrictions on their power. To him, a formal institution would lead to registration as a nationally recognized cultural institution or NGO, making it similar to other cultural organizations like in Lango and Teso. He argued that a constitution would subject Ker Kwaro Acholi to external regulation, including audits, which Oketta saw as a threat to the institution's autonomy, noting that:

> They will cancel your certificate. Now they cannot cancel our certificate. That is how you see Buganda is having problems with the Government...so we are also trying to reinvent ourselves in that aspect, so we remain relevant without conflicting with other government organs, like local government and central government. So, being relevant is like having something like these Strategic Plans and declaring them[108] .

On the other hand, chiefs demanding a constitution, view this narrative as maneuvers for the Paramount Chief to maintain unlimited power and evade accountability despite allegations of corruption by KKA leadership including lack of transparency and accountability. Many chiefs believed that establishing a constitution and set of policies for Ker Kwaro Acholi would help clarify roles and responsibilities, thereby allowing them to effectively exercise authority. They saw a constitution as a means to improve their ability to carry out their work in the community, particularly in matters of justice and reconciliation. Some chiefs even hoped that a constitution would enable their push to legitimize demand for compensation payments by the state[109]. This lack of constitution led to an abuse of authority, with the paramount chief assuming a monarch-like status similar to those in centralized kingdoms like Buganda and Bunyoro. This has caused resentment among some elders, who feel that he is making decisions unilaterally, disregarding the opinions of other chiefs and the council of chiefs, which is seen as undermining the traditional egalitarian structure of the Acholi society. For example, one elder lamented that " Rwot Acana has assumed a status of king forgetting that in Acholi, no chief is above others… because of this false authority, he has been making sole decisions on matters regarding KKA, sidelining the council of chiefs including those in the executive"[110]. To many chiefs, the Paramount Chief should serve as a spokesperson for the community, conveying the agreed-upon decisions and opinions of the Acholi people, rather than making decisions himself. This way, the Paramount Chief's role would be to simply relay the collective voice of the community, rather than having his own opinions and biases influence the decision-making process. It is important to emphasize that the question of the constitution became one of key reasons given by rivaling faction that denounced Rwot Onen David Acana as the paramount chief on 20th June 2024. Meanwhile, Kenneth Oketa was earlier sacked in 2013, by Rwot George William Lugai, the 1st Vice Paramount Chief and the chairman of the Executive Committee of Chiefs, when he was acting as the Paramount Chief while Rwot Acana was abroad on studies. Kenneth Oketta was involved in corruption scandals under the protection of the Paramount Chief.

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[104] Piot, Charles. "Nostalgia for the Future." In *Nostalgia for the Future*. University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 7.
[105] Nugent, Paul. "An abandoned project? The nuances of chieftaincy, development and history in Ghana's Volta region." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 28, no. 37-38 (1996): 203-225, p.222.
[106] Obarrio, J. "Third contact: Invisibility and recognition of the customary in northern Mozambique." *The politics of custom: Chiefship, capital, and the state in contemporary Africa* (2018): 305-335, p.315.
[107] Rwot John Lugai (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.
[108] Ibid
[109] Rwot John Lugai (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.
[110] Rwot Ogenga John Baptist (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Lamunu Caroline, May 14th 2023, Kitgum District.

## b). External limitations on KKA

*The end of armed conflict:* The prominent external factor is the end of the armed conflict which has led to the withdrawal of donor support for KKA activities. Due to constitutional restrictions on their ability to collect taxes or tribute, chiefs in northern Uganda have been left impoverished and are reliant on external support from the government and international donors to sustain their traditional activities. As a result, they have had to rely on their subjects to provide facilitation, such as paying for services like land dispute resolution meetings, cleansing rituals, and blood compensation, that were previously supported by international NGOs. In this regard, one elder noted that:

> It has become very expensive to invite chiefs to resolve conflicts and issues of concern to the people at the grassroot because they demand for a lot of money for transport, sitting allowances and meals. Besides, most of them do not reside within their chiefdoms and we have to hire vehicle to transport"[111].

As the conflict has ended, the discourse of conflict resolution that was previously used to secure recognition and financial support from the state and international organizations is no longer viable for the KKA. In response, chiefs have been adapting and repositioning themselves to obtain support from the state and international organizations by employing new discourses focused on community development and human rights, while also continuing to maintain their connections with their traditional grassroots supporters. The KKA has transformed into a platform for submitting project proposals to secure funding for activities that can easily attract funding, regardless of whether they align with or contradict the customs and traditions of the Acholi people[112]. During the interview, I was shown several copies of project proposals by an official of the KKA Secretariat including business related ones. In the same period, the prime minister of KKA, Olaa Ambrose was fired for his failure to attract funding from external donors because he had been blacklisted by many NGOs over embezzlement of projects funds before joining KKA[113]. In brief, the end of the war has significantly diminished the KKA's activities and influence, prompting its leadership to employ various strategies to regain relevance. However, some of these efforts have had unintended consequences, causing conflict among chiefs as they vie for power and resources. As discussed in paper 4, the constitutional restrictions on customary authority's ability to collect taxes deprived chiefs of their traditional sources of income, forcing them to rely on external funding, which has become unsustainable following the withdrawal of donor support in northern Uganda.

*Internal division among chiefs:* The decline of the KKA is also attributed to internal divisions within the institution, which has led to a split into two factions, further exacerbating the mistrust and instability in the customary authority. One faction is led by Rwot Apire Santo, the chief of Atiak chiefdom, who was elected recently as the new Paramount Chief by a section of chiefs on 14th June 2024. In opposition, another faction is led by Rwot Onen David Acana, the embattled Paramount Chief, who refuses to relinquish power and accuses his opponents of being rebels with no legitimate claim to authority. On 20th June 2023, in the middle of the field work, a group of chiefs, led by Rwot Apire Richard Santo of Atiak chiefdom, Rwot Peko Lugai II of Pajule Palwo chiefdom, Rwot Binyi Justine of Pagak chiefdom, Rwot Michael Ojok Aginya of Bwobo chiefdom, Rwot Jimmy Ochan Luwala of Puranga chiefdom, Rwot Ogenga John Otika of Labonga Amida chiefdom and Rwot Collins Muttu Atiku of Patiko chiefdom, held a press conference in Gulu City where they denounced Rwot Onen David Acana II, the sitting paramount chief ('Lawirwodi'-head of chiefs) of Acholi Cultural Institution . The paramount chief was accused of selling the institution's land located in Gulu city, a donation from the NRM government. He was also accused of failing to account for UGX 100 million given by president Yoweri Museveni in 2022 and embezzling UGX 230 million given by the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), Civil Society Organization way back in 2012 for project activities[114].The paramount chief was further accused of being a dictator, citing his maneuvers to centralize power by making unilateral decisions concerning KKA affairs. This follows his action of blocking some chiefs from accessing *'Gang Kal Madit'* loosely translated as

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[111] Peter Otim, (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Nwoya District.

[112] Olaa Ambrose . Interview. By Ladit Bernard. *Tara online Paluo TV*. July 7, 2023.

[113] Charles Ocitti, (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, 29 July 2023, Gulu City

[114] Rwot Ogenga John Otika ( Corruption and Abuse of office at KKA) interviewed by Lamunu Caroline, June 10, 2023, Kitgum Municipality.

palace of the paramount chief to discuss the land matter. The aggrieved chiefs, argued that the paramount chief was elected to be a spokesperson for the institution but not the overall leader or head of chiefs. To these chiefs, the sole purpose of instituting KKA was to have one voice or position when dealing with issues of concern to the people of Acholi but not centralizing power and making decisions on their behalf[115]. Underpinning this claim is the notion that all chiefs in Acholi have equal status and each chiefdom has its own jurisdiction over its own affairs[116]. Customary power in Acholi is diffused with multiple centers. Therefore, the attempt by the paramount chief to imagine himself above other chiefs was viewed as illegitimate and interference in Acholi traditional polity.

The paramount chief, Rwot Onen David Acana II, was also accused of failing to formulate a constitution for KKA after 20 years in power, which was perceived by the rival chiefs as maneuvers to remain in power for life despite the position not being hereditary. The rival chiefs cited precedence by Rwot Lamot Mateo of Adilang chiefdom and Rwot Philipo Adonga of Pajule chiefdom who served as paramount chiefs on a rotational basis. They also accused the paramount chief of ascending to the position illegitimately. According to them, the election of the paramount chief was influenced and manipulated by outsiders (state officials) and international agencies (NGOS), particularly Action for Cooperation, Research and Development (ACORD)[117]. State officials were accused of bribing chiefs to elect Rwot David Onen Acana II in absentia while ACORD was accused of funding and facilitating anointment/installation of illegitimate chiefs. It is noteworthy that the accusations labelled against the paramount chief resonate with the study findings obtained through archival, oral, documented, and participant observation. On the other hand, the faction of chiefs loyal to the paramount chief, Rwot David Onen Acana II led by the deputy paramount chief, Rwot Otinga Atuka Yai from Lamogi chiefdom, disassociated themselves from the decision to denounce Rwot Onen David Acana II and branded the rival group as self-seekers bent at causing instability in KKA. Rwot Santo Apire of Atiak chiefdom was publicly accused by the Paramount Chief of hijacking the throne of Atiak chiefdom from his nephew one Mandela. Later, Mandela's recorded message was trending on social media demanding Rwot Apire Santo to relinquish his throne[118]. All in all, the top contenders for the position of paramount chief are accused of illegitimately occupying their chiefly authority.

Despite efforts by various stakeholders, including religious and political leaders, as well as a group of Acholi elders, to mediate the conflict within KKA, these attempts have failed, leading to the formation of two parallel leadership structures. This failure has discredited the chiefs' claim to be the custodians of Acholi reconciliation and transitional justice system of *Mato Oput,* which is supposed to be a means of resolving conflicts amicably. Instead, it appears that the chiefs are using this discourse to serve their own interests rather than those of the people of Acholi. The chiefs should have set an example by resolving their own conflicts peacefully and amicably, demonstrating the effectiveness of the *Mato Oput* system they claim to uphold. Instead, their own infighting has undermined their credibility and trust among the people, making it challenging to promote reconciliation and transitional justice in the region.

In summary, the decline of KKA is attributed to the end of the war and the subsequent withdrawal of support by NGO and donor agencies; the negative influence of the Ugandan state; and unresolved internal divisions among KKA chiefs, splitting the institution into two factions. Like in other parts of Uganda, the resurgence of customary authorities in Acholi came with contradictions over the process and outcome of reconfiguration of customary power leading to resistance and contestation within KKA and from below. The resistance has culminated into the split of KKA into two antagonistic factions, one loyal to the embattled Paramount chief, Rwot Onen David Acana and that of Rwot Apire Santo Richard the chief of Atiak chiefdom who was recently elected as the new Paramount chief with parallel office. The resistance and contestations are attributed to; tenure of office of the Paramount chief; despotic and undemocratic behavior of some chiefs, corruption and abuse of office; marginalization of some chiefs; contested legitimacy of KKA and chiefs; undermining of traditional values;

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[115] Rwot Justine Binyi( revival of Acholi customary authority) by Tony Apecu , November 5, 2023, Gulu City.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Rwot Casemiro Ongom ( Corruption and Abuse of office at KKA) interviewed by Lamunu Caroline, June 13, 2023, Pader District.

[118] Rwot Richard Bongowat Mandela, ( Corruption and Abuse of office at KKA) interviewed by Apecu Tony, June 13, 2023, Amuru District.

historical differences among chiefdoms; external interference in the activities of KKA and exclusion of lower customary power holders. In Acholi the contestations and resistance is located at two levels; within KKA itself that has resulted into split of KKA into two factions and resistance from below against the entire KKA system as analysed below.

## c). Resistance from below

KKA has experienced moments of resistance from below arising from various issues:

*Corruption scandals and abuse of office in KKA:* The corruption scandal involving KKA's top leadership is a widely debated topic in public fora in Acholi, with the illegal sale of state-given land being a prominent case. This has led to some chiefs denouncing Rwot Onen David Acana as their leader, while most international NGOs have withdrawn funding due to lack of accountability for project funds. A former KKA employee revealed that project officers were coerced into manipulating accountability reports to conceal funds misappropriated by KKA leadership.  He revealed that " any effort to make the Paramount  Chief, Onen David Acana and the Prime Minister, Kenneth Oketta to account for their  expenditures was considered as lack of respect to culture because the chief is not accountable to anybody, showing how culture is being used as a cover for corruption[119]. The Paramount Chief and his team would sign off on funding for cultural projects, but instead of actively monitoring and implementing them, they would often simply falsify reports and claim to have completed the projects, resulting in a lack of accountability and the eventual failure of donor sponsored projects of preservation of cultural sites in Acholi"[120]. The KKA Secretariat is accused of embezzling funds received from the state and other non-state actors, as well as creating "ghost" projects for personal gains, allegedly using the name of the institution to perpetuate these corrupt practices[121]. In this connection, the Prime Minister of Pajule Palwo stated that " the team at the  KKA Secretariat was involved in inflating numbers of cattle by war debt claimants that were submitted to government for compensation. "I personally submitted a list of cows that  my chief was demanding compensation for but later realized the number was increased substantially. Even young chiefs who had no cattle during the insurgency were captured as claimants"[122].

The chiefs contested the KKA and its secretariat, viewing it as a means for personal enrichment rather than a structure meant to support their empowerment, while also feeling disconnected and unaware of its inner workings due to lack of transparency and financial assistance not being distributed fairly, leaving them feeling isolated and neglected[123]. The majority of chiefs interviewed expressed frustration that KKA is not only mismanaging funds, but also not providing adequate support to the chiefs themselves, leaving them unable to assist their people who come seeking help, resulting in a sense of disconnection from their own institution under the leadership of Rwot Acana[124]. The corruption scandals are not only limited to KKA Secretariat but extended into the community where chiefs have been conniving with the state and private entities to grab communal land instead of protecting it. One clan leader noted that: " the contemporary chiefs are corrupted and cannot be trusted any more due to greed for money…We no longer take land matters to them because they will side with people who have money because of greed"[125].There is high suspicion among community members that their 'leaders' only serve their own interest, and thus feel further abandoned. Corruption also implies that the foreign and state sponsorship of traditional authority has enabled the "supposed chiefs" to exploit their positions for personal gain, grabbing land and enriching themselves under the guise of KKA[126]

*Contestations over legitimacy:* The issue of legitimacy has been at the center of debates on the resurgence of customary authority in Acholi. The legitimacy of KKA as a 'cultural' institution and of some chiefs are under

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[119] Sarah Achiro ( Management at KKA) interviewed by Apecu Tony, May 17, 2010, Gulu Municipality.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Okot Phillip Ongom (Corruption and Abuse of Office at KKA),  interview by Maktunu, Press Conference, June 16, 2024, on Acholi eVO TV.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Rwot Justine Binyi( revival of Acholi customary authority) by Tony Apecu , November 5, 2023, Gulu City.

[124] Rwot Apwaa Orik (Crisis at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 14th 2023, Pader District.

[125] Lengo Daniel (Resurgence of  Acholi Customary authority). Interviewed by Apecu Tony, May 14, 2023 , Koch Goma Trading Center, Nwoya District.

[126] Branch, Adam. "The violence of peace: ethnojustice in northern Uganda." *Transition and Justice: Negotiating the Terms of New Beginnings in Africa* (2015): 219-240, p.612.

disrepute from within KKA itself and from below. While discussing resurgence of customary authority, Lund posits that: "the exercise of authority is intimately linked to the legitimacy of the particular institution… and claim to the legitimacy"[127]. Building on the work of Lentz, Komujuni argues that legitimacy should be considered as " the capacity to tactically and dynamically appeal to different norms, expectations, beliefs and values prevalent in a given society through material and symbolic practices"[128]. In the post -war Acholi, Komujuni shows how chiefs were trying to position and reposition themselves to sustain dual legitimacy from the society on one hand and international donor agencies and the state on the other for purposes of maintaining relevance[129]. Lentz further adds that legitimacy is "conflict-ridden and open process" characterized by interventions of different actors both powerful and less powerful[130]. Mershon and Shvetsova argue that legitimacy is drawn from both traditional root and the external (state and international agencies)[131]. The legitimacy of KKA is contested by sections of Acholi because of its centralized nature and roles which contradict the pre-colonial practices. In this respect, KKA is treated as 'foreign' thing that has been created to undermine Acholi culture in favour of state and international bodies. Rosalba, a respected for her efforts to restore customary authority in Acholi has also disagreed with centralization and exclusion of the lower customary actors from KKA which according to her is an amorphous thing not relevant to the need of the Acholi community. She noted that: " It was not in our interest as advocates for the revival of Acholi customary authority to import foreign tradition from central Uganda that our people do not understand and appreciate… We Acholi people are unique in our own way"[132]. Other people in Acholi considered KKA as an NGO but not as a cultural institution because of its heavy involvement in the implementation of NGO activities at the expense of their cultural roles. Besides, Action for Development and Research (ACORD) has been faulted for not following traditional procedure in identifying and installing would be chiefs. The process had loopholes that were exploited by politicians who were working with ACORD to infiltrate KKA with illegitimate chiefs (appointed and self-style chiefs). It paved way for many illegitimate individuals including clan elders to declare themselves as chiefs[133].

In this connection, Paine has described in detail how the identification process caused debates and contestation between clans, of which some are still being felt today[134]. She further observes the political character of this identification process, where, for example rightful chiefs were not found 'worthy' of heading the chiefdom and how politicians tried to influence the process over time. Besides *Rwodi kalam* (appointed) and *Rwodi moo* (hereditary chiefs) and *Ludito kaka* ( lineage heads) also came to occupy, *'Rwotship'* position, through the turbulent post-colonial political regimes as described above. This situation was compounded by claims by the various chiefs that they lost their royal regalia that would be used as evidence of being legitimate chiefs[135]. The outcome of the ACORD process was the installation of chiefs of 'all kinds' including 'self-proclaimed' chiefs which has become a site of resistance and conflict. In an interview with the Prime Minister of Lamogi chiefdom he observed that:

> majority of the ACORD chiefs were wrongly installed. The ritual ceremonies took places in wrong sites such as under trees instead of designated sites for installation particularly before the Abila (Shrines)… some chiefs avoided being anointed with sacred anointing oil for fear of being punished by the ancestral spirit.[136]

It is a belief in Acholi tradition that no one makes a false oath before the shrines (*Abila)* and as a result, chiefs are reported to have evaded undergoing traditional installation shrines making them illegitimate in the eye of the

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[127] Lund, Christian. "Twilight institutions: public authority and local politics in Africa." *Development and change* 37, no. 4 (2006): 685-705, p.668-704.

[128] Komujuni, Sophie. "To be a chief and to remain a chief: the production of customary authority in post-post conflict Northern Uganda." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019, p.8

[129] Ibid.

[130] Lentz, Carola. "The chief, the mine captain and the politician: legitimating power in northern Ghana." *Africa* 68, no. 1 (1998): 46-67, p.47.

[131] Mershon, Carol, and Olga Shvetsova. "Traditional authority and bargaining for legitimacy in dual legitimacy systems." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019): 273-296.

[132] Rosalba Aywaa. Interview. By Ladit Bernard. *Tara online Paluo TV*. July 8, 2023.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p. 2.

[135] Rwot Joseph Oywak Ywaigamoi (conflict at KKA). Interviewed by Caroline Lamunu, June 18, 2024, Kitgum District.

[136] Lapat Santo (resurgence of Acholi customary authority ), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 10 2023, Gulu City.

public[137]. The dispute over legitimacy is also caused by politicization of the resurgence process by the Acholi political elite. It is important to emphasize that local politicians in Acholi working with ACORD were covertly involved in identifying hereditary chiefs in the resurgence process. The notable politicians cited during the interviews include; the late Col. Ochora Walter, the then Resident District Commissioner (RDC) of Gulu; the late Mr. Oryem Bosco, the then Kitgum District Council Chairman (LC5). For example, Oryem Bosco was responsible for recognition of Rwot Lugwar, who appointed himself and created a clan in the 1990s, and was later recognized as a *Rwot* because of political involvement. Oryem was accused of using intimidation to install chiefs in Pader who were loyal to him, rather than those with authentic claims to the title, which was motivated by politics. Col. Ochora was particularly responsible for the return, recognition and installation of Rwot David Onen Acana as the Paramount Chief. Col. Ochora was not only a close family friend of Acana's family but also they came from the same Payira chiefdom. Many respondents recounted that by the time his father (Rwot Godfrey Acana) died, Onen David Acana was in Rwanda where he fled eluding arrest over criminal issues. The respondents were not explicit about the nature of crime that he had committed. Other politicians and state officials cited by respondents included; RDC Kitgum District Lt. Okot Santos Lapolo, MP Owiny Dollo, LCV Kitgum Nahaman Ojwe, and RDC Gulu Peter Odok who were enthusiastic about reviving customary authority and recognizing Rwot Acana II as the senior *Rwot* of Acholi[138]. As a result, the number of chiefs under KKA rose from 28 in 2000 to 58 in 2024 as a consequent of political maneuvers. The motivation for recognition was attributed to quest by politicians to build their political capital and the anticipation of material benefits from the state and international organizations.

Besides the politicians, leaders within KKA, including the Paramount Chief, his 1st Vice Rwot William Lugai, and Rwot Otinga Atuka Yai, have been accused of exerting undue influence over selection of chiefs, admitting them to KKA without the consent of the council of chiefs. Specifically, Rwot Acana and Lugai were accused of bringing in minor chiefdoms with historical ties to their own chiefdoms of Payira and Pajule Palwo respectively, aiming to gain numerical strength over potential contenders for key positions in KKA[139]. The political manipulations by KKA leaders, including the recognition of illegitimate chiefs and clan heads, have created significant challenges, resulting in tension and resistance in the affected areas. Specifically, the people of Padibe chiefdom resisted Rwot Otinga's attempt to impose a leader on them while he was acting as the Paramount Chief, demonstrating the depth of discontent and opposition to these manipulative actions[140]. According to Humphrey Ojok, a former project officer at KKA, the internal conflicts and power struggles within the institution have existed from its inception, but were previously suppressed and hidden by the chiefs who instead presented a united front to the public and donors for fear of losing funding[141]. However, with the withdrawal of major donor support, the underlying tensions and conflicts are now surfacing and coming to light.

The discussion on legitimacy in peacebuilding echoes earlier debates on the pros and cons of local ownership, highlighting the challenges faced by traditional leaders who must navigate between maintaining their connections with their community and adapting to international influences. As Pouligny noted, this transformation can lead to a sense of disconnection from their "base" and a loss of autonomy[142]. In Northern Uganda, some traditional leaders traded local support for external support, resulting into changes to their entourage and daily functions, with KKA colleagues or NGO staff sometimes replacing clan elders as their closest advisors. Generally, the influence of external factors, international organisations, human rights groups and the state agents have introduced alternative management skills and norms that contradict traditional norms and customs to the dissatisfaction of the Acholi masses. In this respect, chiefs are referred to as Museveni's and ACORD's chiefs because of their close associations with the state and international organisations. The opponents of Rwot Onen David Acana, accuse him of compromising Acholi cultural values by prioritizing Western values

[137] Ibid.

[138] Paine, Clare. "Ker Kwaro Acholi." *A Re-Invention of Traditional Authority in Northern* (2014), p. 2.

[139] Rwot Atiku Collin, ( Conflict at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 10 2023, Gulu City.

[140] Mawa Moro ( Conflict at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 18, 2023, Gulu City.

[141] Ojok Humphrey (Conflict at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 14 2023, Gulu City.

[142] Pouligny, Béatrice. "Civil society and post-conflict peacebuilding: Ambiguities of international programmes aimed at building 'new' societies." *Security dialogue* 36, no. 4 (2005): 495-510, p.504.

and engaging in the sale of sacred cultural sites to the government and private entities, leading to a perceived erosion of the community's cultural heritage and identity[143].

*Historical conflicts and clan rivalries:* The current rivalries among chiefs in KKA have antecedents in the pre-colonial and colonial past. It is noteworthy that the colonial authority in Acholi was not highly centralized customary power to the level of Buganda Kingdom[144]. This was partly attributed to growing rivalries among different chiefdoms and clans which had resurfaced in the district council[145]. Analysis of the leading chiefs against the Paramount Chief, Rwot Acana II shows that historically their chiefdoms were in conflict with Payira where the paramount chiefs belong. For example, in the pre-colonial period, Payira chiefdom was in violent conflicts with Padibe and Adilang chiefdoms whose current chiefs are now among key leaders in the move to dispose off the Paramount Chief[146]. Other chiefs from chiefdoms that have historically been allies of Payira such as the Ariya, Koch and Alero have tended to be moderate or support the embattled paramount chief and did not participate in the election of Rwot Apire as the new paramount chief. It should also be remembered that resistance to state invented chiefs in Acholi is rooted in the colonial history of the region. Colonial appointed chiefs, late Okello Mwaka and Eriya Aliker were rejected by the people of Puranga and Labongo chiefdoms respectively. Okello Mwaka was later killed by the people of Puranga for enforcing colonial policies that were unpopular to the people[147].

## d). Nature of Resistance

The resistance to KKA from within and above has generally been non-violent and ambivalence in nature. The notable forms of resistance deployed from within and KKA and below include; formation of alternative governing structures, Artistic and cultural expressions and ambivalent responses.

*Formation of alternative governing structures:* The KKA's exclusion of lower-level customary actors has led to a resistance movement, where clan elders have taken a parallel move and established themselves as leaders at various clan levels, bypassing the traditional chiefs. Many chiefdoms have developed their own constitutions and work plans, focusing on clan development rather than relying on the chiefs who have been co-opted by NGOs and distanced from the rural community. Respondents expressed respect for their clan leaders, but criticized the current chiefs, referred to as "ACORD chiefs" or "Museveni's chiefs," for their perceived corruption, incompetence, and disregard for Acholi customs. This formation of parallel power structures has been emulated by the faction of chiefs led by Rwot Apire Santo. The group has vowed to operate parallel to the group of Rwot Acana who has refused to concede and vacate KKA premises. Interestingly, the faction of Apire is being invited to preside or participate in traditional ceremonies and government functions, confirming its recognition from below. This suggests that despite protest from the Paramount chief, Onen David Acana, the group has been recognized by a section of Acholi community as legitimate. Prior to the split, some chiefdoms had begun to build their capacities independently when they realised that KKA support was not forthcoming[148].

*Artistic and cultural expressions and digital activism:* In addition to formation of alternative power structures, artistic and cultural expressions have emerged as strong forms of resistance in Acholi, with local artists composing songs that discredit and expose the weaknesses of KKA's leadership, with artists such as Otim Bosmic, Rwot Alo, Daniel Soca, and KD Christo, portraying the Paramount Chief as illegitimate, culturally naïve corrupt, and a puppet of President Museveni. Additionally, digital and online activism has also emerged, with Acholi community members using online platforms to expose the rot in KKA, hence increasing opposition to the current leadership. The controversy surrounding the split of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) has taken center stage online, with experts and panelists from various fields weighing in on the issue. Despite the Paramount Chief's efforts to correct some misinformation and defend his position, the online discussions surrounding the

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[143] Mawa Moro ( Conflict at KKA), interviewed by Tony Apecu, May 18, 2023, Gulu City.

[144] Bere, Rennie M. "An outline of Acholi history." *Uganda Journal* 11, no. 1 (1947): 1-8, p. 65.

[145] Ibid.

[146] National Arcives.A46/808 Secretary Minute Paper, no.2134. Northern province. Annual, Report, 1914-15.

[147] National Arcives.A46/808 Secretary Minute Paper, no.2135. Northern province. Annual, Report, 1914-15.

[148] Rwot Apire Santo ( revival of Acholi customary authority) by Ladit Bernard. *Tara online Paluo TV*. August 12, 2023.

KKA split have largely continued unabated, with many people still weighing in and sharing their opinions on the matter.

*Ambivalent response:* During the interviews, a number of respondents were ambivalent about the question of KKA, expressing little interest in the matter. The young generation, especially, sees no relevance of the institution to their daily lives. The situation is compounded by the centralization of power in the hands of the Paramount Chief which is regarded as foreign to Acholi. Besides, the resurgence came under the NRM regime which the people view as an enemy to them following the toppling of their son, Gen. Tito Okello from power in 1986[149]. As a result, the resurgent chiefs are associated with the unpopular NRM regime in northern Uganda, making it difficult for them to gain the trust and respect of the people. The situation was further complicated by the devastating consequences of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebellion, which forced many people into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, leaving a deep-seated sense of trauma and dislocation[150]. This, combined with the perceived disinterest of the current generation of Acholi in their traditional values and customs, has led to a lack of respect for traditional leaders among the youth, making it challenging for chiefs to regain the respect and authority they once held in the community[151].

## IMPLICATIONS OF RESISTANCE TO KKA

*Re-decentralization and instability:* The ongoing resistance to the KKA and the Paramount Chief is leading to a re-decentralization and instability in Acholi customary authority, as various chiefdoms and clans seek to break away from KKA and establish their own systems[152]. This is partly driven by a desire for self-sufficiency and funding to develop their own communities, as they feel marginalized and mistrustful of the centralized authority. Notably, the Atiak Chiefdom has already demonstrated its ability to thrive independently, with Rwot Apire's leadership resulting in the construction of a modern hospital and provision of bursaries for children to attend good schools[153]. The attempt to re-decentralize power in Acholi customary authority has led to a shift in the selection process of chiefs, with some chiefdoms opting to appoint educated, wealthy, and influential individuals over hereditary chiefs who may be less educated and poorer. A notable example is the Atiak chiefdom, where Richard Apire Santo, a rich and educated individual, was appointed chief by the elders, bypassing the hereditary chief Richard Bongowat Acero Mandela. As expected, Rwot Apire, a former banker, has used his resources to construct a modern hospital and provide bursaries to children from his chiefdom, demonstrating the potential benefits of this new approach[154]. However, it is noteworthy that the achievements have come with a cost of instability in Atiak chiefdom as Richard Bongowat with the support of sections of Atiak elders has come up to agitate for his rights as the hereditary chief. Similarly, in Pagak chiefdom the elders appointed Justine Binyi as the chief, sidelining the hereditary chief. Justine Binyi is a retired lecturer, with a network of supporters in the diaspora where he spent a long time. Rwot Binyi has used his connection locally and abroad to bring development in the chiefdom including formation of a cooperative society and micro-finance saving scheme for women[155].

It is important to note that whereas, the appointment of non-hereditary leaders in the contemporary moment was aimed at addressing marginalization by KKA and restoring the independence of individual chiefdoms from KKA, it has led to growing conflict and instability not only within respective affected chiefdoms but also at the KKA level. At KKA level, the resistance has led to splitting the institutions into two factions, one led by Rwot Apire who was elected on 14th June 2024 by thirty-seven chiefs as the alternative Paramount chief against Rwot Onen David Acana, who with the backing of some chiefs has refused to relinquish the seat. Since 2023, each side has been working to undermine the other. This borders towards a derivative action given that the appointment did not only follow the colonial logic but also produced instability and disunity in Acholi customary authority due to personal interest of chiefs under KKA.

*Growing mistrust of chiefly authority in Acholi:* The contestations among chiefs under the KKA have created a sense of mistrust among both the elite and masses in Acholi, as chiefs have lost respect in the eyes of the people

[149] Okidi Ladwar (Resurgence of Acholi Customary Authority), interviewed by Tony Apecu, July 20, 2023, Gulu City.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Branch, Adam. *Displacing human rights: War and intervention in northern Uganda.* Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 163.

[152] Olaa Ambrose . Interview. By Ladit Bernard. *Tara online Paluo TV*. July 7, 2023.

[153] Rwot Apire Santo ( Revival of Acholi Customary Authority) by Ladit Bernard. *Tara online Paluo TV*. August 12, 2023.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Rwot Justine Binyi( revival of Acholi customary authority) by Tony Apecu , November 5, 2023, Gulu City.

due to their inability to resolve conflicts amicably and their failure to address the needs and concerns of their communities. Resistance has exposed chiefs in many ways; including a lack of cultural awareness and understanding of their role in the Acholi society, the difficulty in distinguishing them from others due to a lack of distinctive paraphernalia, and the limited capacity and resources to assist their subjects, which ultimately undermines their legitimacy as chiefs; corruption among others. Unlike in the pre-colonial and colonial period, decisions of chiefs are no longer respected. All chiefs interviewed decried lack of respect from their subjects, especially from the young generations. Comparatively, clan heads are becoming more respected than their chiefs and they are being empowered by their clan members as an alternative to chiefs who have distanced themselves from their community members. One of the youths stated that: "these days clan heads have become more powerful than the chiefs…we fear clan heads more than chiefs because they have direct authority to punish any errant member of the clan including government minister"[156]. It is important to emphasize that the perceived lack of respect towards some contemporary chiefs stems from the widespread perception that they are not genuinely or legitimately holding their offices, which has led to a crisis of legitimacy and trust in the institution of chiefship in the Acholi region. The perceived lack of power to curse or exert punishment on those who disrespect them has also contributed to the erosion of respect for some chiefs, as people no longer fear their authority or believe that they can effectively enforce traditional norms and customs.

While KKA was initially touted as an institution dedicated to promotion of unity, cultural preservation and conflict resolution, it ultimately devolved into a lucrative venture for a select group of chiefs and technical teams, driven by self-interest rather than its original purpose. This hidden agenda and lack of capacity were exposed as the war came to an end and international NGOs and donor agencies withdrew their support since about 2008. This has led to resistance both from within KKA and below with attendant consequences on the stability of Acholi customary authority.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this paper by identifying a critical implication of the foregoing analysis on political practice and theory. My discussion implicates the challenges facing popular political demands to destabilize and unsettle the structural articulations of political subjectivity. As noted above, due to the continuing relevance of Mahmood Mamdani's theory of the postcolonial state in making sense of contemporary forms of political practice, the continuation of refined decentralized despotism shows that populist forms of democratic theory at the local level continue to struggle in their attempt to provide an alternative analytical lens through which we can evaluate state-society relations. At first glance, the social basis of demands for customary chiefly power in Acholi presents an opportunity to articulate a theory of democracy conceived from and articulated from below. Yet the role of the state in instrumentalizing this popular demand to entrench itself through different interventions means that popular theories of democratization unravel and become fused with the political interest of the state in social organization, management and governance. At such a juncture, social agency is not only weakened by the imposing and overarching apparatus of the state, but social actors themselves become pliable and fall at the mercy of statist interests. In this way, the communal ways of knowing, mobilizing, and acting become pegged to existing state interests, both in the strategic and tactical sense, to the extent that popular social democratic theorization begins to resemble social activism.

Conceptually, he theory of the postcolonial African state as advanced by Mahmood Mamdani continues to make analytical sense when deployed to interpret the existing concrete realities of the Acholi chiefly authority in northern Uganda. Looking at how the postcolonial moment in Uganda presented an opportunity for change, the fact that postcolonial regimes utilized the British model of bifurcated governance to manage and subject society shows the enduring legacy of this analytical lens.

## APPENDIX: NOTE ON RESEARCH APPROACHES.

This article is the outcome of a mixed methods research approach. Field work, involving interviews, focused group discussions, participant observation, visits to archives and other libraries, was conducted between January

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[156] Lengo Daniel (Resurgence of Acholi Customary authority). Interviewed by Apecu Tony, May 14, 2023 , Koch Goma Trading Center, Nwoya District.

to December 2023. Archival visits were done at the District and missionary archives located in Gulu city. In Kampala, I visited the archive of Makerere University (Africana section) and the National archive in Wandegeya. This archival research was intended to highlight the logic that informed historical constructions of customary power and authority in Acholi. The reports on the communications between colonial officials and the customary chiefs revealed rich insights into the nature and character of the relationship between both domains. Missionary archives also proved useful in highlighting how first European contacts imagined Luo communities. Local government archives in Gulu city and in Kampala archives proved critical in revealing the internal discussions about the formation of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) as a cultural institution of the Acholi people and their subsequent relationships with the local government structures and other humanitarian agencies and NGOs operating in Acholiland.

Interviews conducted in the course of the year 2023 amounted to forty-five (45). Discussions with respondents purposely chosen from different categories of people whose work had a close relationship with the chiefly authorities in the eight (8) districts constituting Acholiland. Interviews were conducted with chiefs representing the chiefdoms of Pagak, Lamogi, Pabbo, Parabongo, Paibona, Patiko Pageya, Aria, Alero and Koch Goma in western Acholi and chiefdoms of Agoro Tee Got, Ogole, Labongo Amida , Koyo, Adilang and Pajule chiefdoms in eastern Acholi. The inclusion of various chiefs from different chiefdoms was intended to provide a rich understanding of the historical migration patterns into Acholi region and to also ensure an inclusive interpretation of the internal differentiations in customs and traditional practices. The interviews was organized to target both those chiefs involved with Ker Kwaro Acholi and those who contest the institution; only this inclusion would provide alternative opinions about the true perceptions surrounding the institution. Other interviews were conducted with civil servants, politicians, elders councils, media talk show hosts, NGO representatives, officials from the ministry of gender, academicians, and some leaders of social civil society organizations.

Focused group discussions were also conducted with different categories of people including: clan heads, women, rwodi Kweri, and youth groups. Respondents in the FGD were sampled using the snowball approach and participants identified purposefully. Participant observation was also important during the field work exercise. Important observations were made when I participated in two events to bury two chiefs who passed away. During this occasion, I observed some changes in the Acholi burial practices and the politicization of customary practices, as manifested in the speech ceremonies. I also attended four press conferences called by the two factions of Ker Kwaro Acholi following leadership wrangles which emerged during the research and I closely followed the unfolding events in the media. These pressers enabled me to discover the invisible discourses being appropriated by the paramount chief, council of chiefs and officials of Ker Kwaro Acholi to legitimate their positions and personal interests. The contestations between the two conflicting factions of chiefs helped to reveal information that had been hidden from the researcher and also not known in the public domain.

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3. Interview with Sarah Achiro ( Management at KKA) interviewed by Apecu Tony, May 17, 2010, Gulu Municipality.
4. Interview with Rwot Atiku Collin,  July 10th, 2023, Gulu City.
5. Interview with Mawa Moro, May 18th, 2023, Gulu City.
6. Interview with Ojok Humphrey, July 14th 2023, Gulu City.
7. Interview with Lengo Daniel, May 14th, 2023 , Koch Goma Trading Center, Nwoya District.
8. Interview with Ladit Okidi Ladwar, Gulu City, 28th July 2023. Ladwar is a respected legal expert and a consultant on Acholi customary law.
9. Interview with Rosalba Aywaa, (interviewed by Bernard Onen of Lakwed online TV,  Gulu City, on 4th August 2023.
10. Interview with Rwot John Lugai, May 14th 2023, Pader District.
11. Interview with Rwot Apwaa Orik,  May 14th 2023, Pader District.
12. Interview with Okot Billy (Ker Kwaro Acholi), July  10th  2023, Gulu City.
13. Interview with Okidi Ladwar, July 20th, 2023, Gulu City.
14. Interview with Rwot Yusuf Adek, (interviewed by Ladit Deben), Lakwed TV, 16 June 2023, Gulu City.
15. Interview with Rwot Solomon, 18th May 2023, Nwoya District.
16. Interview with Charles Ocitti, July 29th 2023, Gulu City.
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18. Interview with Lapat Santo (resurgence of Acholi customary authority ), July  10 2023, Gulu City.
19. Interview with Okot Phillip Ongom, (interviewed by Maktunu, Press Conference, June 16th, 2024, on Acholi eVO TV.
20. Interview with Peter Otim, May 14th 2023, Nwoya District.
21. Interview with Rwot Ogenga John Otika (interviewed by Lamunu Caroline), June 10th, 2023, Kitgum Municipality.
22. Interview with Rwot Justine Binyi, November 5th, 2023, Gulu City.
23. Interview with Rwot Casemiro Ongom (interviewed by Lamunu Caroline), June 13th, 2023, Pader District.
24. Interview with Rwot Richard Bongowat Mandela, June 13th, 2023, Amuru District.
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