

Forgotten Voices of the Transition: Precolonial Intellectuals and the Colonial State in Northern
Uganda, 1850-1950

By

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Dedication

Dedicated to Denis, Julius, Simon, Genevieve, Simon, Cissy, Alfred, Adrian and Judith

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This dissertation examines one of the most often overlooked groups of historical actors in Acholiland, a region located in present-day northern Uganda. The study covers the period between 1850 and 1950. It focuses on a unique group of Acholi leaders, mostly men, who were all born and raised in the precolonial era, and acquired different leadership roles, becoming war leaders, royal messengers and healers in their chiefdoms before they transitioned to the colonial era and joined the service of either the Church Missionaries Society (CMS) or the colonial state. Specifically, it examines the contributions of these overlooked Acholi historical actors in entrenching both the CMS and the colonial state projects in Acholiland.

Literature on the Acholi political system is both fairly large and of a high quality, but it tends to focus exclusively on chiefs. This study shifts the focus away from chiefs to other Acholi leaders, who were equally significant in the functioning of the chiefdom and bridged the precolonial-colonial divide. This shift is crucial because it introduces a discussion about the contributions of other leaders to the transition from the precolonial era to the colonial state and to the entrenchment of European colonial projects in Acholiland. The study, therefore, delves into the precolonial era and identifies the unique values, perceptions, capabilities and experiences that these individuals mobilized in the service of European institutions.

In the last two decades or so, most works on Acholiland have focused almost entirely on the much publicized war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. By shifting the focus away from this war to the precolonial and the early colonial eras, this dissertation fills a large void in the historiography of northern Uganda. Moreover, it makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on African colonial employees and African intellectual history by demonstrating the kinds of knowledge and skills that these forgotten leaders—war leaders, royal messengers and healers—brought to the colonial era, and how they helped in entrenching both the CMS and the colonial state projects in Acholiland.

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of July 5, 1970, Ronald R. Atkinson, an American graduate student in African History at Northwestern University, and a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Uganda, arrived in Aworanga, a village ten miles from Gulu Town in northern Uganda, to interview a man only referred to as Lacito Okech. Atkinson and his assistant, J.B. Olum, arrived in Okech's compound at 9:30am and found him seated on the porch. Okech "looked up coolly" and welcomed them, but told them that he was "very busy." This prompted Atkinson to assure Okech that "there would be only a few questions." Okech, however, rejected Atkinson's assurance, and calmly advised them to go back and "read my book." Atkinson insisted further: "Could you at least give me the names of the clans of Koc?" Okech responded, "Read my book." Undeterred, Atkinson made one last attempt: "Since you are from Koc, could you tell me the names of leaders that know much history?" Okech's response was the same: "Go read my book." Defeated and, I imagine, dejected, Atkinson and Olum "got up and left"¹

Who was Lacito Okech? And why did he insist that Atkinson should read his book? On the surface, this may seem like a normal disagreement between a potential interviewer and a prospective interviewee; however, it reveals a special encounter between two intellectuals from very different backgrounds. Okech represents figures that I call precolonial intellectuals, men who, before colonization, were identified under different circumstances, went through specific training processes and apprenticeship, and acquired various leadership positions. It was these figures that performed what Steven Feierman, in his influential study of peasant intellectuals in northeastern Tanzania, called "a function that [was] organizational, directive, educative, or

¹ See interview 248 by Ronald R. Atkinson, "Interviews of Ronald Atkinson in Acholi, 1970-1971," archived at Northwestern University, Evanston.

expressive.”² It is these men who bridged the deep chasm between the precolonial dispensation and the colonial era.

Let me illustrate. Okech was born in Koc Chiefdom in either the late 1870s or early 1880s. As a young man, he was identified, groomed, and appointed a *la or pa rwot (la or bot rwodi)*, literally translated as a royal messenger.³ This was an important position in precolonial and preliterate Acholiland. Unlike royal messengers in literate societies, who conveyed letters and did not have to know the content of the message they carried, precolonial and preliterate royal messengers in Acholiland conveyed oral messages. They had to memorize the message and couch it in the most appropriate manner depending on the receiver. This task called for memory and outstanding oratory skills. The role, then, was offered only to persons with the intellectual ability both to internalize and memorize a message and to communicate (excellence in speech) and deliver it as fast and as effectively as possible. In many cases, royal messengers were required to run, leading European agents to refer to them using the oversimplified term “runners.”⁴

Besides royal messengers’ ability to memorize, communicate and deliver messages as fast and as effectively as possible, they were also required to be fluent in many languages to effectively mediate between their chiefs and other leaders, including foreign ones. Okech, for example, spoke several languages: Acholi, Lango, Alur, Jonam, Madi, Lunyoro, and Labwor. Finally, to carry out their roles of traversing the region effectively, these figures learned ways of interpreting omens, or what I call simple divination, to enable them interpret different signs and

² Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 17-18.

³ Lacito Okech, *Tekwaro Ki Ker Lobo Acholi* (Kampala: The Eagle Press, 1953), v.

⁴ See, for example, J.R.P. Postlethwaite, *I Look back* (London: Boardman and Co., 1947), 68-69.

travel safely across the region. Thus, before formal colonial rule in 1910, Okech was already an accomplished professional. He possessed different types of knowledge and skills, and it is these attributes that made him a legitimate leader in his community.

In 1904, when the Church Missionary Society (CMS) established the first school in Acholiland, some of these precolonial intellectuals, along with sons of chiefs, joined the CMS school. While the CMS saw these men as community leaders and potential converts, many of them had different interests. They wanted to enter into an alliance with Europeans and manipulate missionaries to their own advantage. Perhaps because his chief did not permit him, or perhaps because of the CMS's temporary evacuation of Acholiland in 1908, Okech did not join the CMS school until 1913. From the CMS school, Okech and other figures learned about Christian precepts and, as a result, they began to mute some aspects of their lives that they thought would bring them into conflict with Europeans. They then became both Christian converts and literates.

To the arsenal of languages he already spoke before joining the CMS school and later the colonial state, Okech added English, Swahili, and Luganda. Thus, although the school enhanced his possibilities by making him literate, Okech did not owe his prominence exclusively to his missionary education. His multilingualism, combined with the diplomatic expertise he acquired as a royal messenger, made him an ideal candidate for colonial service. He served in multiple positions, beginning as a colonial clerk in 1914 and becoming a chief, before retiring as a financial assistant, the highest possible position for a native at the time. In 1953, Okech published his pioneering study of Acholi history, *Tekwaro ki Lobo Acholi* (Acholi History), a book he claimed he began compiling after becoming literate. This book became the first history of the Acholi written by an Acholi.

I discovered Lacito Okech at the University of Wisconsin-Madison when I was combing the Memorial Library for primary sources on Acholiland. Despite coming from Acholiland (and my mother coming from Koc Chiefdom), I had never heard about Okech. I found *Tekwaro* on the seventh floor, somewhat dusty, perhaps because few, if any, readers had touched it. As I began reading the book, I discovered that Okech wrote both about himself and other prominent precolonial Acholi professionals who transitioned from the precolonial to the colonial eras and became prominent colonial employees. Perhaps the most well-known person he wrote about – a person who also features in the colonial records—is Okello Mwoka Lengomoi. According to Okech, before joining the colonial state, Okello was an *oteka* (war leader or general) of Puranga Chiefdom. Because of his military prowess, Okello was given the name Lengomoi. In Acholiland, the names ending with suffix-moi denote military excellence. Okello joined the colonial state in 1899 and helped the British during the pacification of Acholiland before becoming the first formal colonial interpreter in 1901.⁵

At first glance, these titles that Okech wrote about—*la or pa rwot* (or *la or bot rwodi*) and *oteka*—did not occur to me as important. Far removed from the context, I could not make sense of these titles, or of their significance. But in the summer of 2012, when I returned to Acholiland to begin my pre-dissertation research, I began to learn more about the Acholi political system. Two words consistently emerged to describe these figures that I wanted to learn more about: *ryeko* and *diro*. *Ryeko* simply means intellect or knowledge and *diro* translates as skill. All my elderly informants were in agreement that intellect and skill played a key role in the rise of these figures. I was introduced to several intricate ways in which some of these figures emerged, and to their training trajectories. When I asked my informants if they knew people who

⁵ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 37, 56-61.

had been royal messengers or war leaders before becoming colonial servants, they cited many figures that I then proceeded to trace in the colonial records. Perhaps even more interesting, I learned that royal messengers and war leaders were not the only categories of Acholi who had joined the colonial state and the CMS. Some healers, too, became colonial employees and local evangelists. For example, I was told that Bartolomeo Kalokwera and Muca Ali, who became CMS pastors, and Ojok Adonyi, who became a prominent colonial chief, had been healers of different grades in the precolonial era.⁶ In the end, the insights offered by Okech's *Tekwaro* and my fieldwork interviews provided unique perspectives on the first group of Acholi colonial employees and evangelists. I quickly realized how little scholars knew about the complexity of the lives of this generation of Acholi.

Thereafter, as I began to dig deeper into these men, I began to see a cohort of figures whose diverse career trajectories and experiences spanned the precolonial and the colonial periods. They were all born and raised in the precolonial era; they were trained for different roles; they worked in various prominent positions in the precolonial era; they witnessed the extension of British rule over Acholiland; they saw, and benefited from, the beginning of missionary activities; they were part of the transition from a preliterate to a literate society; and they excelled both in the precolonial era and in the new colonial setup. But once they became either colonial or missionary employees, they muted some aspects of their lives in order not to jeopardize their allegiance to the Europeans. In doing so, they negotiated the colonial and

⁶This claim appears to match what Louise Pirouet and J.K. Russell, a CMS Bishop in Northern Uganda suggested about Muca Ali. These two tell us that upon his conversion, Ali destroyed a shrine and according to Pirouet, the community beat him up for his act, which might have been Ali's attempt to demonstrate his conversion to the CMS. See Louise Pirouet "The Expansion of the Church of Uganda, from Buganda into Northern and Western Uganda Between 1891 and 1914, with Special Reference to the work of African Teachers and Evangelists" (PhD Diss., University of East Africa, 1968), 370; J.K. Russell, *Men without God? A study of the Impact of the Christian Message in the North of Uganda* (London, Highway P., 1966), 28; see also 14, for discussion between shrine and healers.

missionary bureaucracies while still serving as healers, royal messengers or war leaders in the eyes of their own people. It was these roles, and their attendant leadership abilities which were highly valued (and sometimes feared) by the people, that continued to give them influence in Acholiland. If these men were already professionals, the central questions I am asking are: what did they bring with them from the precolonial era to the colonial dispensation? What roles did they play after they became colonial servants or evangelists?

This dissertation advances one central argument. It argues that while extreme and continual British colonial violence, such as public executions of rebellious Africans, and political manipulation of Africans through the policy of “divide and rule,” might have been critical features of the colonial state that caused fear and weakness among the Acholi, violence and manipulation alone do not adequately explain the institutionalization of the European colonial enterprise in Acholiland.⁷ The Acholi precolonial intellectuals who became colonial employees brought with them significant knowledge, skills, ideas, political practices and societal norms and a sense of legitimacy, all of which contributed significantly to the transition to colonial rule and to the functioning of colonial administration. By and large, the Acholi perceived these precolonial figures, even after they had become colonial servants, as the right people to govern. Their interactions within different chiefdoms during the old order, and their marriage relations with different clans, gave them considerable leverage across the region. I contend that wherever the colonial regime posted these men, they were accepted not simply because they were colonial servants, but largely because they embodied the qualities of leadership that the Acholi recognized as legitimate, qualities they had acquired in the precolonial order.

⁷ For colonial violence see A.B. Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” *The Uganda Journal* 18, 2(1954): 166-77.

In the early years of colonial rule, the British met stiff resistance in some chiefdoms, and deposed sitting chiefs, replacing them with missionary-educated figures.⁸ Scholars of early missionary education agree that this schooling was not meant to train Africans to govern at the highest level: it was intended to turn Africans into lowly functionaries of colonial institutions. But some of these CMS-trained colonial employees flourished in the colonial world. Who were the employees who succeeded? Why did they succeed? And why did others fail? European documents do not provide adequate answers to these questions. They do not capture the internal histories, especially the precolonial experiences, of these earlier colonial servants. However, a careful reading of these documents does reveal that the Europeans noticed the contributions of some of their African employees, but such revelations are made only in passing.

This dissertation, therefore, examines the roles of these leaders, whom I call precolonial intellectuals, in the missionary and colonial state projects in Acholiland. The study shifts the focus away from the chiefs who have dominated scholarship on Acholiland to a different group of Acholi leaders, but it will focus mostly on men.⁹ Some of these men worked as subordinates to their chiefs while others, such as healers, were independent experts in their communities. This shift of focus is crucial because it introduces “voices that chiefs cannot express.”¹⁰ More specifically, figures such as Okech, Okello, Kalokwera and Adonyi allow us to explore the ideas, knowledge and skills, or, what David Shoenbrun calls, “durable bundles of meaning and practice” that they brought from the precolonial era to the colonial dispensation, and their

⁸ See, for example, some of the chiefs deposed here: Reuben S. Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” *The Uganda Journal* 12, 1(1948): 72-81.

⁹ This focus on men is in large because of the nature of sources available to me. They tell me more about men.

¹⁰ Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 7.

contributions to both the colonial and CMS projects.¹¹ The study seeks to delve into the precolonial era and identify the unique values, perceptions, capabilities and experiences that these individuals mobilized in the service of European institutions. Moreover, these figures also allow us to examine the debates and struggles within African societies that resulted from the implementation of colonial rule as some of the precolonial intellectuals became colonial employees or evangelists. These are the sorts of debates and struggles that rarely feature in European documents. The history of precolonial intellectuals in Acholiland will then make a significant contribution to the literature on African colonial employees and to the growing body of work on African intellectual history, and present an alternative explanation for the institutionalization of colonial rule—one that challenges the military heroics of the state and emphasizes the role of Acholi leaders. In emphasizing the role of the Acholi leaders in institutionalizing the colonial rule, I do not want this work to be read as an attempt to belittle the magnitude or significance of colonial violence on the Acholi. Rather, I want to emphasize the importance of Acholi intellectuals in the forging of a colonial world that was rife with contradictions, often generated by the ideas and input of Acholiland's most eminent thinkers.

The Acholi Old Order and the Precolonial Intellectuals

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the British annexed Acholiland, which then became part of the Uganda protectorate. Many chiefs signed treaties of submission to the colonial state, although a few others rejected the treaties. The colonial state found Acholiland composed of over

¹¹ David Schoenbrun, "Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing Between the Great Lakes of East Africa," *American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006): 1403.

60 similarly organized chiefdoms of varying sizes and power.¹² The chiefdom was the largest political and social unit. Each polity, as Ronald R. Atkinson reminds us, “whatever its size, had its hereditary ruler or *rwot* (plural *rwodi*),” and was independent.¹³ The chief “was the head of the domain and his role was mainly that of a mediator who settled disputes but could never really enforce his decision.”¹⁴ Below the chief, there were a number of “subordinate officials,” who helped the chief in the administration of the chiefdom.¹⁵ Unfortunately, European documents offer only sparing details about these leaders. To be sure, the categories of these officials are difficult to determine. Estimates in personal recollections and chiefly traditions vary from one chiefdom to another. But, some categories of officials, because of their significance to both chiefs and commoners, or in the running of the chiefdom, must have existed in most, if not all, chiefdoms. This is not to say that all the offices that existed were filled all the time: sometimes, some offices were vacant.

One important category of subordinate officials crucial in any chiefdom were priests and priestesses who, according to Okot p’Bitek, were healers referred to as *la(lu)tum piny*.¹⁶ In Acholi, the noun prefix *la-* (plural *lu-*) is a definite article. The root *-tum* is derived from the verb *tumo*. In the first Acholi dictionary published by Kitching in 1909, he defined *tumo* as “to cut off,

¹² See, for example, Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and. Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (Durham: Duke University. Press, 2008), 42.

¹³ Ronald R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1994), 78.

¹⁴ Balam Nyeko, “The Acholi of Northern Uganda during the Nineteenth Century,” Seminar Paper, Department of History, Makerere University, 1971; see also Atkinson, *The Roots*, 78.

¹⁵ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1960), 97.

¹⁶ Okot p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), 60.

kill sacrificially.”¹⁷ *Tumo* described the act of killing an animal for ritual purposes. Thus, priests are people who cut or kill animals for sacrificial purposes. In a nutshell, they were among the ritual specialists, and they performed a specialized role during the annual feasts.¹⁸ Unlike chiefs, who came from royal clans, priests and priestesses were all from commoners’ clans.¹⁹ After the annual feast, according to p’Bitek, they provided other healing services, including divination.²⁰

Besides priests and priestesses, another prominent healer in the Acholi political system was the *ajwaka ker*, or what some early Europeans called the royal diviner. Royal diviners, like priests and priestesses, were also from commoners’ clans, but unlike priests and priestesses, the royal diviner was usually a man. Royal diviners exercised more powers over their respective chiefdoms than priests did. As one Acholi mission-trained historian observed, they exercised “unquestionable religious powers over all people, including the *Rwot Madit* (Chief).”²¹ Their roles, according to F.K. Girling, were visible during the time of “planting crops, hunting, sickness, and other matters.”²² In other words, royal diviners performed crucial rituals prior to planting and hunting, two major sources of livelihood.

In addition to these ritual specialists, another important subordinate official was the chief’s mother, whose roles included performing important war rituals (I discuss this at length in Chapter 3). Apart from the chief’s mother, there was another powerful woman, the *dako ker*, or

¹⁷ A.L. Kitching, *An Outline Grammar of the Acholi Language* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932), 62; see also *An Outline Grammar of the Gang Language* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1907), 68.

¹⁸ Matteo Otema, interview, 15 October 2013. For on *luted jok* see also Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo: The Lwoo Tradition* (Verona: Editrice Nigrizia, 1951), 228-9.

¹⁹ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 60.

²⁰ See, for example, p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 83.

²¹ Onyango Odongo, “The Luo Philosophy” (Gulu: Unpublished manuscript, 1979), 64.

²² Girling, *The Acholi*, 97.

dak ker. While the chief was allowed to have an endless number of wives, the *dako ker*, or *dak ker* was his only ritual wife, “picked to be installed with him [chief].” She played an important “role in the ceremonies, second only to the new *rwot* himself (she was frequently a formidable figure afterwards as well, especially where she was the caretaker of royal regalia.”²³

Other than ritual specialists, chiefdoms also had non-ritualistic subordinate officials. Among them was the war leader (or military general), *oyita lweny*, also known as *oteka lweny* or, according to Anthropologist F.K. Girling, “*oteka lawii mony*.” This was one of the most significant figures in the chiefdom.²⁴ He led all war expeditions. Although the chief had “the authority to declare war in the interest of the chiefdom or clan...he never took part in the battle himself.”²⁵ As an informant narrated to Girling, at the outbreak of a war, the first task of any Acholi was to hide “their *Rwot* in a place of safety,” because “[t]he prosperity of the domain [chiefdom] and the personal safety of the ruler were too closely associated...for him to risk injury in fighting.”²⁶ Like priests and priestesses, war leaders possessed specialized knowledge of warfare, and chiefdoms could have as many war leaders as they wished or needed.

The second category of non-ritualistic subordinate officials were royal messengers, locally known as *la or pa rwot* (*la or bot rwodi*). Like the other subordinate officials, the *la-or pa rwot* were from the commoners’ clans. The prefix *la-*, as already pointed out, is the singular definite article (*lu-*plural). *Or* is a noun which means “message”. *Pa* is a possessive pronoun, and it literally means “of”. Thus *pa rwot*, means “of the chief”. Therefore, *la-or pa rwot* simply

²³ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 90.

²⁴ Girling, *The Acholi*, 102.

²⁵ Jim Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi* (South Bend: Sahel Books Inc., 2010), 42.

²⁶ Girling, *The Acholi*, 102.

means “the messenger of the chief.”²⁷ Like the other categories of subordinate officials, the royal messenger was a commoner, but he had to possess the attributes necessary for him to mediate between the center and periphery of his chiefdom, and between the chiefdom and other polities, which I have already highlighted.

Below the chief and his subordinate officials, there were different leaders at the levels of the lineage and the family. These figures provided leadership within their respective lineages or extended families, and coordinated the periphery with the center; they collected food and mobilized labor and other requirements on behalf of the chief. But outside the chiefdom structure, there were other equally important people, like independent healers, poet-musicians and artisans, who were also basically commoners and lay outside the political system of the chiefdom. They did not have frequent roles or activities in the chiefdom, but there were occasions when they played important roles in the chiefdom. For example, artisans provided chiefs with prestige objects, like knives and hoes. Healers played important roles on occasions such as the death of a chief, and the installation of a chief. Poet-musicians entertained their people during planting and hunting ceremonies. All these people fall within the class of people I call precolonial intellectuals, but it is a category about which we have very limited sources, especially regarding their formative processes and roles.

The last group of people in the traditional Acholi socio-political system was that of the commoners, the rank-and-file. They, for example, provided labor and other forms of tribute for their chiefs, including military service in times of war. In exchange for their loyalty and service to their chiefdoms, commoners expected, and often demanded, from their chiefs a range of

²⁷ Sometimes a *la or pa rwot (la or bot rwodi)* is referred to as *Lakwena*. *Lakwena* is derived from the noun, *kwena*, which means “message”. In the first Acholi dictionary, Kitching defined *lakwena* as, “messenger, envoy, [and] apostle.” See, Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 50.

services necessary for their livelihood such as rain, soil fertility, abundant crop harvests, fertility of their women, and health of children. In short, commoners had a voice in the affairs of the chiefdom; and when their expectations and demands were not met, they had the right to leave and join another chiefdom. As we shall see later, planting and hunting ceremonies at the chiefdom's shrine were occasions when commoners addressed their concerns to the chief and other authorities. In return, chiefs and other authorities negotiated with the commoners. Therefore, commoners were not passive victims of autocratic chiefs: they were active and significant socio-political actors in their own right.²⁸ Indeed, it was their subtle power and freedom to transfer their allegiance to a chiefdom of their preference that obliged chiefs to co-opt competent subordinate officials, such as healers and royal messengers, into the leadership structure of the chiefdom.

In the end, different types of leaders emerged from these layers of the Acholi chiefdom. These leaders also had their own followings. Those who needed political protection and those who belonged to lineages of war leaders would ally closely with war leaders; and those who sought food security might seek the patronage of priests and priestesses or royal diviners. Both the "chief mother" and other wives of the chief possessed their own followings. In short, although subordinate officials were under the chief, they also wielded power and influence, and attracted followers on the basis of their knowledge, skills or reputation in a particular field; and each official tried to protect and promote the interests of his own followers. Thus, in any chiefdom, there was as much unity as there was disunity because of the factionalism engendered by the different leaders and their respective group interests.

²⁸ See more of these discussions in David Lee Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th century* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998), 256.

Upon the establishment of colonial rule, the colonial state believed chiefs were the most powerful persons and co-opted only them, ignoring the subordinate officials who were similarly powerful and, in some cases, subtly more powerful than the chiefs. The policy of co-opting only chiefs had an important impact on the subordinate leaders. It swept them under the carpet, so to speak. But more ambitious subordinate figures began to find ways to join the colonial state and the CMS. They went to the CMS school, learned about Christian precepts and started muting certain aspects of their lives that would bring them trouble with Europeans. They converted to Christianity, at least nominally for many of them, acquired Christian names, became literate and learned English on top of their precolonial knowledge and skills. They then joined the church or the state as evangelists or colonial employees respectively, acquiring new colonial titles such as “reverend,” “clerk” and “chief.” This completed the “Europeanization” of the precolonial intellectuals.

These men then went on to play important roles in facilitating colonial rule and evangelization in Acholiland. Although the CMS schooling shaped their careers in colonial Acholiland, these people were by no means strictly products of their missionary education. Before colonization, they had undergone different forms of training. Their training placed them in different roles, resulting in different statuses and positions of legitimacy in their communities. It was their old forms of knowledge, skills and socio-political legitimacy that were highly regarded by their people, and once they became evangelists or colonial employees, they contributed significantly to European projects in ways that the missionaries and colonial state did not fully understand because of their ignorance of how power and authority functioned in Acholiland.²⁹ Yet, for all their contributions to the colonial state and CMS projects, these

²⁹ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 120.

leaders remain among the least understood figures in Acholi history. This dissertation, therefore, explores the roles of these forgotten figures in European projects in Acholiland, and examines the debates, struggles and violence that emerged in Acholiland as a result of colonization.

Placing Precolonial Intellectuals in Historiography

The main argument of this dissertation is that the people who became the first group of Acholi colonial employees and local evangelists were not random young men and literate converts. Rather, they were men who had previously held titled positions in their chiefdoms. It was their previous positions that enabled them to come nearer to Europeans, attempting to manipulate them to their own advantage. In this work, I focus on these important, yet marginalized, men.

There is, however, nothing new about focusing on marginalized people in African history. Scholars have long been concerned with marginal historical actors. Over several decades, Africanists have “committed considerable energy toward examining how the actions of previously overlooked historical actors—women, migrant workers, and especially peasants—experienced, resisted, complied with, and shaped the outcome of the colonial project.” These studies have shown that these marginal actors “played a crucial role in determining the character of colonial and postcolonial rule as well as the development of globally integrated economic systems,” and this “emphasis on marginal historical actors...has long been a consideration for scholars of the colonial period.”³⁰

The figures under consideration here were precolonial leaders before they became colonial figures. They straddled the precolonial and the colonial eras, playing crucial roles in

³⁰ Neil Kodesh, “Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Collective Well-Being in Buganda” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2004), 7-8.

both worlds. The historiography of these leaders began effectively in the 1950s, when F.K. Girling, after nine months of field research in Acholiland, discovered that chiefs were not the only important figures in running the affairs of the chiefdom. He therefore highlighted royal messengers, war leader and healers in his dissertation, and subsequently in his 1960 monograph.³¹ He also called for further studies on these leaders. However, scholars in the post-independence period did not heed this call. They continued to focus exclusively on chiefs. The most prominent scholars of the Acholi mentioned them cursorily in their works, and simply referred to them broadly as elders, a designation that conceals the uniqueness of these leaders.

In the last three decades or so, attention to chiefs has continued and increased. This increasing attention is a result of two main factors. First, the revival of traditional authorities in 1993, after their abolition in 1966, led to the installation of a number of chiefs. Secondly, the growing roles of Acholi chiefs in efforts to resolve the conflict between the government of Uganda and the LRA, has also renewed interest in chiefs. To be sure, the literature on the roles of chiefs is both voluminous and of high quality; but it is astonishing that this body of work has paid little attention to the subordinate figures. Scholars have continued to portray chiefs as the only figures responsible for the running of the chiefdom. Because of the failure to take subordinate figures seriously, this study attempts to fill the large void created since the 1950s, by focusing on different subordinate figures and their roles in the colonial state and the CMS project.

This work hopes to contribute to the literature on African intellectual history and colonial studies. In the last two decades or so, there has been a growing body of work in intellectual history. But the way in which the field had earlier been defined had a direct impact on the kind of

³¹ F.K. Girling, "The Traditional, Social and Political Order of the Acholi of Uganda" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1952), 185-187; see also Girling, *The Acholi*, 96-7.

works that emerged. The most dominant works in the field have focused largely on nationalist figures, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Sedar Senghor, who led independence movements in the 1960s. These figures, because of their western education and the vast amount of published works they produced, became easy targets for scholars interested in African intellectuals.

This focus, however, is beginning to change. “In recent years,” as the historian Dan Magaziner argues, “Africanist historian, anthropologists, religious studies, and others have begun to challenge the meaning of and approaches to intellectual history.” As a result, today the field has been widened to include Africans that might not have attained western education. For example, scholars “have reconstructed the role of African healers, clerics, rainmakers, chiefs, and slaves in the diaspora in creating modes of thought that formed the basis of medical systems, durable political consciousness, and normative quasi-legal regimes across a variety of landscapes and experiences.”³²

This dissertation is part of this growing body of work that brings to the fore figures that have long been ignored by scholars. More specifically, it introduces new figures, such as royal messengers and war leaders, into the conversation, and builds on the existing works on healers (who have usually been portrayed with a powerful subtext as resisting colonial rule and evangelization) to demonstrate their role in the CMS and colonial state projects. This shift of focus is crucial because it introduces a discussion about the contributions of African ideas or, more broadly, political culture to the transition from the precolonial era to the colonial state.

³² Dan Magaziner, “CFP: African Intellectual History Workshop, New Haven, CT, USA ,arch 30-April 2, 2016,” last modified on July 8, 2015, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28765/discussions/74640/cfp-african-intellectual-history-workshop-new-haven-ct-usa-march-30>.

Moreover, this work also hopes to contribute to the discussion in colonial studies in other ways. First, this work is an exploration of the role of the first generation of Acholi colonial employees in the colonial state. In the last several decades or so, numerous scholars have demonstrated the role of Africans in the institutionalization of European rule and entrenching missionary projects. This existing body of work, for example, highlights the role of chiefs, soldiers, teachers, nurses and local evangelists in translating European forms of knowledge to Africans, in the entrenchment and functioning of colonial rule and Christianity, and in challenging the colonial state and European missionaries.³³

In 2006, Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn and Richard Roberts renewed interest in African colonial employees.³⁴ This is in large part because “little of” the previous work “has focused on African colonial employees.”³⁵ Like the past body of work, these most recent works are commendable for the many valuable contributions they make to our understanding of colonialism, illustrating the various positions and roles of Africans in the functioning of the colonial state and in the conflicts that emerged during the colonial era, especially between the Africans and the European administrators.³⁶

Though useful in many respects, this body of work is also problematic. The literature focuses almost exclusively on African employees who worked during the later decades of

³³ For an excellent review of the role of Africans to Europeans see Thomas Spear “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 44, 1(2003: 3-27; see also Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Emily Lynn Osborn. “‘Circle of Iron’: African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 44, 1 (2003): 29-50; Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University, 1999).

³⁴Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, *Intermediaries*, 2006; Osborn. “‘Circle of Iron’,” 2003.

³⁵ Osborn. “‘Circle of Iron’,” 33.

³⁶See, Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, *Intermediaries*, 2006; Osborn, “Circle of Iron,” 2003.

colonialism (1920s-1960s), overlooking the first group who straddled the transition and bridged the precolonial-colonial divide. Those who have attempted to study transitional figures have often portrayed them as monolithic figures; yet they came from different social backgrounds in their communities.

This portrayal of colonial employees as monolithic figures is a result of three main factors: limited sources, the overwhelming emphasis on twentieth century history, and failure on the part of scholars to use fragments of evidence, such as the titles of the various subordinate officials, which have often been loosely translated into English as “prime minister,” “chief priest” and “secretary,” among others.³⁷ The existing works on African colonial employees are exclusively in, or based on, colonial and missionary archives. In missionary and colonial documents, the first generation of Acholi colonial employees have been wrongly portrayed as products of European ventures. In missionary records, they all possess Christian names. In colonial reports, they are referred to using colonial titles such as “Chief Andrew.” Their precolonial experiences have largely been overlooked. Yet, some of them were healers and colonial employees or healers and local evangelists at the same time. The European archives rarely, if ever, tell us about this duality.

Therefore, earlier scholarly reliance on colonial and missionary archives, or on sources that are exclusively European, has left an enduring legacy on later scholarship on colonial employees. For example, it has almost become standard practice for historians to begin their analyses of African colonial employees from the time the latter joined a colonial or missionary

³⁷ See, for example, Girling, *The Acholi*, 96-7; see also Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo: The Lwoo Tradition*, 228-9.

school.³⁸ This is because it was then that their easily accessible record began. To use David Schoenbrun's words, many scholars "condense" the pre-colonial era "in the moment just before Europeans arrived." Partly as a result of this, the "precolonial historical trajectories play an inconsistent role in their analysis" of the early colonial period.³⁹ This has had the effect of foreclosing important precolonial histories. Moreover, because of the emphasis on the colonial period, Africans are largely portrayed as constantly appropriating European forms of knowledge, which they then used to facilitate colonial rule. To suggest that the European forms of knowledge, primarily acquired from the CMS school at the beginning of colonial rule in Acholiland, equipped the first group of Acholi to govern their communities is not only to overstate the impact of the school but also to ignore the prior existence of precolonial African institutions that produced their own versions of intellectuals, and bestowed socio-political status and legitimacy.

The emphasis on twentieth-century history and the reliance on European archives has therefore created a stark but false distinction between the pre-colonial and colonial eras, ignoring the link between the precolonial positions and roles of the first generation of Acholi colonial servants on one hand and the prominence of the same people in the colonial state on the other. Scholars have therefore overemphasized the role of European "civilizing" institutions at the expense of African institutions. This portrayal has divorced the transitional Acholi figures from their precolonial roots, and obscured the contribution of African institutions and ideas to the

³⁸ See some exceptions, David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000); Femi J. Kolapo and Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, *African Agency and European Colonialism: Latitudes of Negotiations and Containment* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007).

³⁹ Schoenbrun, "Conjuring the Modern," 1404. Another prominent scholar to lament the way the field of African history has evolved is Steven Feierman, see "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 182-216.

implementation of colonial rule in Africa. For all their good intentions, many of the works offer only fragments of the very rich history of the contribution of Africans to the colonial state, especially by those Africans who transitioned from the precolonial era to the colonial state. This approach has made it difficult for most scholars to demonstrate continuity or transformation of ideas and political culture during the colonial period.

This dissertation uses precolonial leaders, such as royal messenger, war leaders and different types of healers, who later became CMS and colonial state employees, to explore their contributions to the Europeans projects in Acholiland. Unlike earlier works that focus predominantly on the colonial era at the expense of the precolonial period, this work gives equal attention to both periods. Their stories illustrate that the first generation of Acholi evangelists and colonial employees were much more complex figures than had been previously realized. They drew on their variegated precolonial knowledge, skills, followers and regional networks to facilitate or entrench both the CMS missionary project and colonial rule in the region. This exploration is important because it introduces new insights to the current body of work on colonial employees by demonstrating the forms of knowledge, skills and other attributes that these people possessed prior to colonial rule and exploited in the colonial era. This will enable us to gain valuable insights into the more subtle and profound ways in which Africans contributed to colonial projects.

Moreover, this work is also likely to change our perception of the first generation of Acholi colonial employees and, more broadly, contribute significantly to the literature on colonial “middle figures” in interesting ways.⁴⁰ Rather than seeing the first generation of colonial employees merely as opportunistic appropriators and consumers of European forms of

⁴⁰ Nancy R. Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, 1999), 7.

knowledge, because of the overwhelming scholarly focus on the colonial era, this work hopes to demonstrate the precolonial expertise they wielded in the service of the colonial state. Additionally, while conflicts in the colonial period have been largely portrayed as pitting the colonizer against the colonized, this work will unearth tensions and struggles that emerged within Acholi societies as a result of the implementation of colonial rule, especially as some precolonial intellectuals were integrated into the colonial state while some of their chiefs were ignored or “deposed.” Finally, this dissertation presents an alternative explanation for the institutionalization of colonial rule in Acholiland. It is an explanation that challenges the European military heroics and violence that have so far dominated Acholi historiography, and emphasizes the role of the Acholi leaders in the institutionalization of colonial rule.

The Challenge of Recovering the Roles of Precolonial Intellectuals

This dissertation relies on two main sets of sources: documentary and oral. My documentary sources are in different archives and libraries in Uganda and England. The Uganda National Archives (UNA) in Entebbe contains documentation on colonial rule in Acholiland, beginning with the annexation of the region to the establishment of the Uganda Protectorate, through the pacification of the region to the monthly and annual colonial reports from 1910 to the 1950s. These documents provide insights into the process of colonial state formation, the people who joined and worked for the state during the first three decades of colonial rule, and the challenges that the state faced.

The National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK), housed in Kew, Richmond, also proved valuable. These archives are a repository for all colonial documents, including correspondences between London and Uganda. Perhaps the most important contribution of these

archives to this work is that they gave me access to additional monthly and annual reports which I could not find in Uganda because they were lost, not properly archived or damaged. Moreover, the NAUK also contain a few papers of F.K. Girling, the anthropologist who worked in Acholiland in the late 1940s. These archives provided bits and pieces of information that proved useful in this work.

In addition to these two archives—UNA and NAUK, some libraries also proved extremely useful. The Bodleian Library at Oxford University holds an important collection of private papers of two important colonial agents: J.R.P. Postlethwaite (1910-1917) and R. M. Bere (1930-1960). These papers provide independent views of the colonial officials in Acholiland, especially on their activities and roles in the region, and on the internal working of the colonial state from the perspective of the colonial officials. These views complemented the information in the monthly and annual colonial government reports.

However, these archives and libraries did not provide all the information I needed. Moreover, given that this project sought to recover Acholi agency (Acholi voices and contributions to the colonial state), the records in these archives and libraries pose serious challenges for the reconstruction of the history of the precolonial intellectuals. For the most part, colonial administrators rarely, if ever, recorded opinions of the colonized, including important leaders they worked closely with. Put simply, they ignored recording opinions of the Acholi. As a result, most relevant records in the archives and libraries reflect the opinions of male White colonial figures, making it difficult to hear Acholi voices in the numerous colonial documents.

There are two main reasons for the lack of Acholi voices in these documents. One of the reasons is that the reporting format that individual colonial agents had to use for their monthly and annual reports made it difficult, if not impossible, for African voices to be reported or heard.

The reporting format required that the reporting officer enter specific information on such items as the general condition and peace of their area, the health of Europeans at the station, tax collection records, and work plans and anticipated problems. In such a format, the reporting officer could make only passing references to Acholi leaders or colonial servants who were at the center of implementing colonial policies.

Moreover, the colonial state destroyed some documents. For example, at NAUK, where I had hoped to find documents relating to the Lamogi Rebellion so as to learn about African sentiments toward the state shortly before and during the rebellion, I soon found the relevant record titles marked “this document was destroyed.” Most likely such documents were destroyed to cover up the violence meted out to the civilians. But, combining the passing references in the colonial reports with the private writings of colonial officials, such as memoirs and papers, proved useful. In private papers and diaries, sometimes a name appears and an important piece of information about an Acholi leader in a colonial report is revealed.

Besides the archives of the colonial state, I also consulted the archives of the missionaries. More specifically, I drew heavily on the CMS archives housed at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The university houses the largest body of material on the CMS activities in Acholiland. Specifically, it contains annual letters and reports of missionaries like A.B. Lloyd, A.L. Kitching and A. E. Plyedell, the pioneer CMS missionaries in Acholiland. The documents contain the first impressions of the missionaries upon encountering the Acholi, their initial activities in the region, their achievements and challenges, and their opinions about specific Acholi figures who worked with them, figures that I call precolonial intellectuals. The CMS archives also contain the private papers of A. B. Fisher who opened the second mission station in Acholiland in 1913 after the pioneering CMS missionaries had abandoned the first

station in 1908.⁴¹ Fisher's papers provide some of the most useful information on the activities of the CMS and some of the roles that local evangelists played in the service of the Society. Fisher, however, did not live long enough in the region. He arrived in 1913, and retired and left Acholiland in 1914.

Besides the CMS archives at the University of Birmingham, Cambridge University Library houses the largest body of material on the CMS's translation of the Bible into Acholi. Apart from the different versions of the translated Bible, there are also a few progress reports on the Bible translation, including brief minutes of different meetings and correspondences between the field personnel and headquarters. All these provide insights into the process of translation as well as the kind of debates that were going on as the Bible was being translated.

In Uganda, the CMS archives at both Uganda Christian University in Mukono and Makerere University in Kampala have some important sources on the work of the CMS. These include documents on the establishment of the mission station in Acholiland, baptism and marriage records, early catechism books, numerous pictures, minutes of meetings, and prayer books. The archives at Uganda Christian University provided useful information on the formation of the Upper Nile Diocese that included Acholiland. Together, these two libraries provided some useful information on the work of the CMS in Acholiland and on the Acholi who worked with the CMS.

Like the colonial records, the missionary records pose significant challenges. The problem with the CMS archives, especially with the first body of works from pioneering missionaries, is their shallowness and obvious bias. Upon their arrival, missionaries focused only on chiefs and did not understand subordinate leaders, especially healers; and they ended up

⁴¹ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 27.

writing disparagingly about these figures. Generally, the first body of work is littered with pejorative words, such as “savage”, “heathens”, “sorcerers”, “wizards” and “witches,” making it difficult to discern Acholi voices in their work. Initially, the pioneering missionaries in the region, like Lloyd and Pleydell, appear to have had a negative view of the Acholi. But as they stayed longer in the region, their writing changed and became more constructive. In their later works, letters and reports, one can catch glimpses of the role of Acholi in the CMS activities. But not all missionaries were negative in their works. Some missionaries, like Kitching, who did most of the translation of the Bible, and Fisher, who opened the second CMS station, approach their subjects differently: they are more accommodative, curious and, as a result, more detailed in their portrayal of the natives, allowing Acholi to speak, by quoting their evangelists and converts.

To address some of these challenges with European records that ignore Acholi voices, I sought non-European sources. The Africana Collection at Makerere University proved useful. It contains other important sources: unpublished (and unusually un-catalogued) short manuscripts of latter-day Acholi writers who wrote in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a collection of theses written since the 1970s, and some papers from the Uganda History Project, an initiative of the History Department of Makerere University in the 1970s to collect both written and oral sources on precolonial Uganda. Though interrupted during the regime of President Idi Amin (1971-1979), the northern Uganda researchers transcribed a few hundred pages on the precolonial history of Acholiland. All these documentary sources provided information on the precolonial and colonial history of Acholiland, some of which proved central to my project.

Finally, I supplemented the non-European sources with an extended period of fieldwork in Acholiland. The goal of my fieldwork was twofold: first, I wanted to find more documentary

sources that had not made it into the libraries and archives, or what Derek Peterson calls documents “tucked away in tin trunks, suitcases, boxes or cabinets.”⁴² As a result of this somewhat ambitious initiative, I found some useful documentary sources. As elsewhere in Uganda, the mission-educated Acholi elite have been writing history and about themselves. Documents I collected ranged from short clan histories to autobiographies and biographies as well as works on general clan or customary norms. Perhaps most important of all, I found the papers of Fr. Mario Cisternino, an Italian missionary who authored *Passion for Africa: Missionary and Imperial Papers on the Evangelisation of Uganda and Sudan* (2004), archived at the Comboni House in Layibi, Gulu.⁴³

The second goal of my fieldwork was to interview as many relevant people as possible. More specifically, I wanted to interact with Acholi elders, especially those who had lived under colonial rule, or worked with the colonial state and the CMS, to get a sense of their view of, and experiences under, the colonial state. In short, I sought to transport them back to their time as colonial employees and local evangelists. In all, I conducted 85 interviews without an assistant. All the interviews were in the Acholi language. I located my informants using late colonial reports of the 1940s and 1950s, practicing Acholi historians, who themselves were important sources, and in some cases I was just lucky. I encountered some of my informants by chance: by being at the right place at right time, for example, when I would chance upon elders debating the performance of their current traditional chiefs.

⁴² Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c.1935-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 31.

⁴³ For a brief Biography of Fr. Mario Cisternino, see “Mario Cisternino Salvatore,” last modified May 20, 2015, <http://www.comboni.org/en/in-pace-christi/105131-mario-salvatore-cisternino>. See his work, *Mario Cisternino, Passion for Africa: Missionary and Imperial Papers on the Evangelisation of Uganda and Sudan, 1848-1923* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2004).

Perhaps the most important debate that occurred in the course of my fieldwork was when corruption emerged as an issue in the *Ker Kal Kwaro*, the Acholi cultural institution that brings together all the chiefdoms in Acholiland. I found elders criticizing their current chiefs for corruption. But, whenever they criticized the present chiefs, they would refer to past norms to assess the performance of the present chiefs. I became interested in some elders that my Acholi informants identified as “knowledgeable” and were regularly involved in radio-talk shows to educate the community on Acholi history and culture. I followed them (after radio talk-shows or public gatherings) and interviewed them on a number of issues. In all, I interviewed chiefs, clan elders, former colonial employees, descendants of deceased colonial employees, and practicing Acholi historians.

But my fieldwork was not limited to asking informants questions and soliciting responses from respondents. Beginning my fieldwork with archival work proved beneficial. The CMS archives, for example, provided a photograph collection that challenged me with caption nouns such as “witchdoctors” and “sorcerers.” These photographs informed most of my interviews, especially with elders whom I asked to comment on the Acholi characters and situations depicted in the pictures. As it turned out, these pictures proved significant in generating important discussions about healers and royal messengers that missionaries dismissed as witches. When my elderly informants saw the pictures that I had extracted from the archives, and observed the paraphernalia of the “witchdoctors” in the pictures, such as a scepter and animal skins, they concluded that what the missionaries had depicted as “witches” were actually powerful healers or royal messengers. Patterns of agreement emerged from these pictures and generated important insights into Acholi concepts of power, knowledge, skill and legitimacy that are absent in both colonial and missionary records. Moreover, after learning about the importance of using pictures

to involve people in my project, I also presented my informants with extracts of selected documents, including the first Acholi translation of the Bible. In the Acholi Bible extract, for example, my informants identified words from different Acholi dialects and different languages, like Alur and Arabic. This raised important questions about how these dialects and languages had found their way into the Acholi Bible, and about the roles of natives in the translation of the Bible.

Taken together, all my interviews and discussions yielded both documentary and oral sources to work with. More specifically, my interviews offered insights into the kinds of people who became colonial employees, and their precolonial lives. I began to understand why and how some people became more “successful” in the colonial era, how some Acholi negotiated the colonial and missionary bureaucracies, climbing from one position to another; and I began to understand the Acholi notions of power and legitimacy, which differed significantly from those of missionaries and colonial agents. Finally, interviews gave me a different lens to not only approach in a different way the figures that Europeans often called witches, but also to better read their writings on the so-called witches or sorcerers.

Like most interviews, mine were affected by the very context I was working in. Acholiland, as I have already stated, is still emerging from the brutal armed conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army, which has lasted for over two decades. The conflict resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of people, massive loss of property, and death. The conflict has certainly had serious impacts on the way people remember, interpret and present their past. Perhaps the most obvious impact to me was what I perceived as their idealistic view of the past, which is quite understandable. Because of their current problems, many elders glossed over the hardships of both the colonial era and the period before the LRA

war. They often talked about these periods as times of peace and plenty. Yet these were also times of hardship in Acholiland. Some elders even went as far as telling me that the present conflict would not have persisted, or even happened in the first place, if some of the people I call precolonial intellectuals were still alive. “One of them would have just killed Kony [the LRA’s leader] with the extraordinary powerful medicines that they had.”⁴⁴ Statements like this show how, frustrated by the extreme hardship and suffering occasioned by the LRA war, some of my informants tended to paint an idealistically rosy picture of the past.

Perhaps the most important impact of the war on my work was reflected in the refusal of some potential informants to talk to me. As a result of war, different organizations have come to play important roles in peace-building in Acholiland. For example, religious organizations, especially the Born-Again churches, have come to support victims of the war. But, fairly often, this kind of support is rendered on condition that the intending beneficiary adopts the faith of the benefactor. This presented me with a challenge as some of the elders, described to me as the most knowledgeable in the village, did not want to talk to me about anything “unchristian” because they had already become Born-Again Christians. My best guess is that either they did not trust me enough to begin discussing “old Acholi practices” or they did not want to be excommunicated from their adopted churches and thus lose their monthly stipend from the church. In this way, I lost important informants and access to important information.

In the end, my actual and potential informants had encountered, and were still encountering, many problems at the time of our interviews, problems that definitely affected their memory and view of the past, and in some cases restrained them from participating in my interviews. All the same, I am convinced that the many stories that I heard in the course of my

⁴⁴ Matteo Obol, interview, 15 October 2014.

fieldwork, when read critically, still offer illuminating insights into the early colonial era, and fill significant gaps in the documents left behind by Europeans and the first generation of literate Acholi who muted some aspects of their lives to avoid jeopardizing their colonial state or CMS careers. More specifically, the stories provided insights into the kinds of Acholi men who became colonial employees, the kinds of knowledge and skills they possessed and brought to the colonial state, and their roles in facilitating the missionary and colonial state projects in Acholiland. It is these interviews, combined with European and non-European documentary sources, which helped me to reconstruct the history of the precolonial intellectuals and their contribution to European projects in Acholiland.

The Dissertation's Architecture

This dissertation explores the role of Acholi precolonial intellectuals in the CMS and colonial state projects in Acholiland. The work is divided into five chapters. In Chapter One, I examine events in Acholiland from the 1850s, when the first Arab traders arrived in the region, to 1910, when a formal colonial presence was established. I argue that the role of the precolonial intellectuals cannot be understood without grasping what was going on prior to the advent of the Europeans in the region. This chapter, therefore, presents an historical overview of Acholiland, highlighting the kind of changes, developments or transformations that had occurred in the region prior to 1910, developments that shaped the characters of the first generation of Acholi colonial employees and evangelists. The chapter shows that, contrary to standard accounts, the first generation of colonial employees was not composed exclusively of young and literate converts. The men who became converts and eventually evangelists and colonial employees were already well established, and many of them had been, and continued to be, courtiers in their

respective chiefdoms; and it was their past standing (or roles) that enabled them to join the Europeans.

Chapter Two focuses on courtiers or subordinate officials. More specifically, it asks how these men ascended to their positions, detailing the trajectories of non-royal court figures from their humble backgrounds to prominent positions in Acholi chiefdoms. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section explores the process by which knowledge about these figures has been produced, and explains why they have been neglected for so long. The second part revisits the works of Europeans and of the first generation of Acholi writers, and traces the events and processes through which courtiers (and other influential figures) were initially identified and trained for their various roles. I argue that, among the Acholi, leaders did not emerge out of the blue, or largely by patronage as commonly suggested in academic writing: they were identified early and trained following well established processes. Those who exhibited superiority in knowledge and skills became pivotal members of their societies, and rose to leadership roles. This chapter challenges the idea that subordinate court officials were randomly appointed.

Chapter Three builds on the previous chapter, and it details the roles of subordinate court officials in their respective polities in the decades before colonial conquest. I argue that understanding the roles of these figures in their chiefdoms prior to colonization offers us even better insights into the sort of knowledge and skills that courtiers, who transitioned from the pre-colonial to the colonial eras, possessed and brought to the service of the colonial state. This chapter is essential for grasping the knowledge, the skills, the followers and the powers that these figures possessed before colonization. By following these men from the precolonial era to the colonial state, this chapter complements the first two chapters in setting the stage for grasping

what the precolonial intellectuals brought from the precolonial era to the colonial state and their contribution to the European projects.

Chapter Four examines the roles of subordinate court officials in the Church Missionary Society's mission in Acholiland. While many works argue that the European missionaries played an important role in implanting Christianity in the region, this chapter reveals the limitations of the European missionaries and unveils the role of subordinate court officials, who became the first CMS converts, in the spread of Christianity in Acholiland. I argue that the courtiers or subordinate leaders who became converts played significant roles in entrenching the CMS project in Acholiland. The chapter, therefore, focuses on the activities of the courtiers or subordinate leaders in the evangelization project of the CMS. This chapter begins the discussion about the contribution of precolonial intellectuals to European projects in northern Uganda.

Finally, Chapter Five focuses on specific precolonial figures who became colonial employees. It argues that when precolonial intellectuals joined the service of the colonial state, most of them "succeeded" because they already embodied qualities that legitimized their leadership positions in the eyes of Acholi people, qualities that they had acquired in the precolonial era. The chapter explores their career trajectories from the precolonial era to the colonial state. It delves into the precolonial era and identifies the unique knowledge, skills, values, perceptions and experiences that these individuals later mobilized in the service of the colonial state. Moreover, unlike most works that focus on the conflict between the colonial state and the Acholi, this chapter examines conflicts that emerged among the Acholi as a result of the implementation of colonial rule, as some precolonial intellectuals joined the European projects while traditional chiefs and other intellectuals were eventually left out. This chapter, like Chapter Four, expands the discussion about the contribution of the precolonial intellectuals, and it reveals

some of the limitations of existing works that often overemphasize the role of British military heroics and violence in the institutionalization of colonial rule in Acholiland.

CHAPTER 1

Acholiland from the 1850s to 1910

On December 30, 1878, Emin Pasha, a German explorer and the third governor of the Equatoria Region of Sudan, arrived in Patiko in the heart of Acholiland. His goal was to tour “the Shuli [Acholi] country, where the post of Fatiko [Patiko] is situated, which [Sir Samuel] Baker has used as his headquarters.” But, upon arriving in Patiko, Pasha was surprised to find the land deserted, the crops burned and the buildings demolished. This was the aftermath of the brutality of the Egyptian troops stationed in the area in 1872 by Sir Samuel White Baker. As the first governor of Equatoria Province, Baker had deployed the Egyptian troops at Patiko to fight the slave trade then rampant in the region. From March 1873, when Baker left Acholiland, to December 1878, when Pasha arrived, the Egyptian troops had subjected the nearby chiefs and their subjects to forced labor and saddled them with a corn tax. These harsh deeds prompted Chief Camo, the most powerful chief at the time, to lead a multi-polity force that defeated the Egyptian soldiers, driving them out of the area. But, fearing retaliation from the better armed Egyptian troops, the people around Patiko had abandoned their villages and moved eastwards, about sixty miles away.

After three lonely days in Patiko, Pasha, to his astonishment, received an invitation from Chief Camo. “All the more surprising to me,” Pasha wrote, “was a visit from his *son* [italics mine] and an invitation from him to visit his father, who had heard of my going to Kabrega [Kabalega, the King of Bunyoro] and wished to speak to me, but was afraid to come himself.” Pasha saw in this invitation an opportunity to repair broken relations in the area and allow his administration to function effectively; and as he was to recall later, he “willingly assented.” Together with the person he called the son of Chief Camo, but who was most likely a royal

messenger, Pasha arrived “after a day’s journey in an easterly direction.” What Pasha saw in the chief’s compound, from a distance, was even more astonishing: “A guard of honor awaited us, consisting of about twenty of the chief’s servants, in gaily-coloured dresses and armed with old guns; he [Camo] himself stood a little to one side of the escort, in the centre of a group of negroes dressed in skins and freshly painted with red paint.”

Once Pasha arrived at the entrance to the compound, some of the chief’s servants stopped him from entering, and subjected him to a short welcome ritual meant to cleanse him, a stranger, to prevent him from polluting the chiefdom. Thereafter, Pasha reported, Chief Camo welcomed him “by touching my hands and led to me to a village close by where *angareb* (a bedstead covered with a web of plaited thongs) was placed for me under the tree, while my chair stood nearby in the shadow of the house.” In the courtyard, Pasha observed, “were posted guards, musket in hand, while a young man, apparently his confidant, knelt in front of him [Chief Camo].” Pasha, then, had discussions with the chief and spent the night in the chief’s compound. The following day, Pasha returned to Patiko, but he “stayed only one day,” and he left Acholiland the following day.⁴⁵

Pasha’s account—his arrival in Patiko, his journey to the chief’s compound, his welcome to the palace—is significant. It gives us an unusual insight into some of the subordinate court officials that we rarely encounter in most European accounts (and that we shall focus on in some detail in the next chapter). More importantly, the account shows that, prior to the arrival of the Europeans in Acholiland, the region had already been infiltrated by foreigners who had introduced the people to firearms. The presence of Chief Camo’s gun-equipped royal guards that

⁴⁵Emin Pasha, *His Life and His Work* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1998), 69. On Pasha in Acholiland, see John Vernon Wild, *Early Travelers in Acholi* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1954), 70. See also J. V. Wild, *Early Travelers in Acholi* (London: Nelson, 1954), 29; Crazzolara, *The Lwoo: The Lwoo Tradition*, 247-255; Reuben S. Anywar, *Acholi Ki Ker Megi* (Kampala: The Eagle Press, 1954), 19-20.

Pasha observed reveals the sort of transformation the region had already undergone, and it begs the question: What sorts of transformations had taken place in the region during the decades preceding the arrival of the first Europeans in Acholiland? This, however, is an exceptionally difficult question to answer, given that existing works on Acholi history rarely, if ever, dwell on events before the arrival of the Europeans in the region.⁴⁶ Put simply, professional historians have generally paid very little attention to the period before 1910. Scholars have focused almost exclusively on the colonial and post-colonial periods, leaving untold a significant part of Acholi history.

This chapter aims to rectify the omission by focusing on events in Acholiland from the 1850s, when the first Arab traders arrived in the region, to 1910, when a formal colonial presence was established. The chapter seeks to unearth and understand the kind of changes, developments or transformations that had occurred in the region prior to the formal colonization of Acholiland. Although European explorers, colonial officials, missionaries and local historians have all written about this period, the insights they give us are limited. Examining this period has several potential pay-offs. First, it will yield insights into a period of Acholi history that is significant but largely ignored by professional historians, a period during which social transformation was happening prior to colonization. Secondly, and more specific to the goal of this chapter, it introduces us to figures who were already mediating between the Acholi and non-Acholi actors prior to colonization. This is significant because it lays the groundwork for understanding the backgrounds of the sorts of intellectuals and political figures who transitioned from the late precolonial order to the colonial era. In sum, these broad outlines will set the

⁴⁶ The only exception here are: Atkinson, *The Roots*, 1994; Ronald R. Atkinson, "A History of the Western Acholi of Uganda c. 1675-1900: A study in the Utilization and Analysis of Oral Data" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1978); Girling, "The Traditional, Social and Political Order," 1952; Okot p' Bitek, "Oral Literature and its social background among the Acholi and Lango," (bachelor's thesis. University of Oxford, 1963).

background for our study of the Acholi and their indigenous intellectuals who spanned the precolonial and colonial periods, and for our understanding of the knowledge, skills and ideas that these intellectuals brought from the late precolonial period to the colonial era. The chapter begins with an examination of the arrival and activities of the Arabs in Acholiland.

The Entry of the Arabs into Acholiland, 1850-1886

The history of the presence in Acholiland of Arabs from Khartoum, in present-day Sudan, provides a crucial backdrop to understanding the social transformation and, more specifically, the emergence of the Acholi figures who would later mediate between the Acholi and the Europeans. The Arab traders were the first group of foreigners to infiltrate Acholiland in the 1850s. Acholiland was then organized into numerous chiefdoms with “settled agricultural populations.”⁴⁷ The Arab traders, financed by Egyptian and Sudanese ruling classes, cut through Acholiland in search of slaves and ivory. Though they have generally been referred to as Arabs, they were not all Arabs: some of them were simply Islamized Africans, such as the Bari who made up the bulk of the “Arab” fighting force.⁴⁸

Upon their arrival, the traders established three permanent stations in Acholiland at Pabbo, Padibe, and Patiko. As the historian Ronald R. Atkinson explains, these stations “became the centers of their activities in northern Uganda and the contiguous southern Sudan.”⁴⁹ The reasons for choosing these three locations have remained unclear; but given that the three locations were in some of the most powerful chiefdoms, the traders must have sought to ally

⁴⁷ R. R. Atkinson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity among the Acholi of Uganda: The Precolonial Phase,” *Ethnohistory* 36 (1989):120.

⁴⁸ F. K. Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation in the Nineteenth Century” (bachelor’s Graduating essay, Makerere University, 1971), 17.

⁴⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 267.

themselves with dominant chiefs to facilitate their activities. Moreover, the locations of Pabbo, Padibe, and Patiko in the west, north-east, and central parts of Acholiland respectively, suggest a deliberate strategy on the part of the traders to position themselves for maximum trading advantage. These centers became “storage [stations] for the major commodity of trade, ivory, until it could be transported north [Sudan and Cairo] for sale,” and they also acted as “garrisons in which the outsiders and their hangers-on could live and from which they traded and raided.”⁵⁰

After establishing the trade stations in the three chiefdoms, the traders reached out to other chiefs, seeking military assistance for raiding and porters for transporting their goods to Khartoum. As F.K. Uma explains, “Each chief [who cooperated with the Arabs] appointed an influential member of his chiefdom,” or courtier, to represent him to the Arabs.⁵¹ These emissaries became the first group of Acholi natives to learn Arabic. They learned Arabic through regular contacts with the traders, “performing menial tasks around the Arab stations,” and becoming interpreters.⁵² Their role was to mediate between the Arabs and the chiefs. As Uma explains further, if the traders “wanted to go for raids against the neighboring ethnic groups,” they used the interpreters to “ask the permission of the *rwot* [chief].” Furthermore, Uma adds, “If the Arabs required food, it was the interpreters who went into the villages with the permission of the *rwot* to buy or to ask the villagers for free food for the maintenance of the trading stations.”⁵³ In essence, these interpreters became what Nancy Rose Hunt has called “middle figures” in the

⁵⁰ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 267.

⁵¹ Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 19.

⁵² Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 531.

⁵³ Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 19.

sense that they journeyed back and forth between the Arabs and the Acholi, mediating between the two parties.⁵⁴

Trade boomed in the region following the establishment of trade stations and the emergence of local interpreters. From the late 1850s to 1872, slaves and ivory became the dominant trade items because of the high demand for them in Sudan and Egypt.⁵⁵ The Acholi chiefs provided porters “to carry goods like ivory and other local products purchased by the Arabs from stations in Acholi to Gondokoro.”⁵⁶ Because of the close contacts between the traders and the porters during the journeys to Gondokoro and back, it is likely that even some porters learned Arabic. The raids conducted by the Arab traders in Acholiland were by no means indiscriminate. Collaborating chiefs directed raids against their enemies both in Acholiland and outside, although most of the raids appear to have been outside.⁵⁷

The impact of the traders’ activities was multi-faceted. They established regular trade and delivered new goods to Acholiland, especially firearms and clothing, in exchange for ivory, slaves, cattle, brass, and copper. This trade benefitted many Acholi chiefs, but Chief Camo of Payira Chiefdom, who came to power in 1857, and Chief Ogwok of Padibe Chiefdom, who ascended to power in 1862, benefited the most from the trade. This was largely because the two chiefs and their respective chiefdoms occupied dominant positions in Acholiland at the time, and they collaborated with the Arab traders.⁵⁸ Moreover, having introduced firearms into the region, the Arabs created further instability and violence, causing hundreds of deaths as they (and their

⁵⁴ Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual*, 7.

⁵⁵ Girling, *The Acholi*, 137.

⁵⁶ Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 269.

collaborators) raided villages for slaves and livestock. This destruction and its attendant spiraling instability, coupled with the deteriorating relations between traders and chiefs, prompted some important chiefs, Chief Camo in particular, to terminate their alliance with the traders. Relations between the Arab traders and the Acholi chiefs deteriorated partly because most “porters did not come back or were refused payment.”⁵⁹ But some chiefs, like Ogwok, maintained their association with the Arab traders. The trade, therefore, did not only cause violence and instability; it also created division among Acholi chiefs. Finally, and most importantly, the advent of the Arabs created a group of new Acholi that Atkinson has called “new men.”⁶⁰ These “new men” were Arabic interpreters, who became known in Acholiland as “turujumani,”⁶¹ a word that Rev. Kitching, of the CMS, translated as “interpreter” in his 1907 dictionary.⁶²

According to the available documentary record, the first Acholi men to become interpreters were Keny Koropil, Ywa Gimoro, Obwona Acholi and Obwot Rengamoi. There is, no record of any female interpreter, which should not be surprising given that courtiers were largely men. Existing records tell us very little, if anything, about the backgrounds of these men prior to becoming interpreters. There is therefore no way of knowing their dates of birth, childhood and upbringing, among other things. Atkinson has suggested that these interpreters were actually people who were already working as “la, or (messenger of the rwot [chief]).”⁶³ But

⁵⁹ Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 21.

⁶⁰ Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 529.

⁶¹ Uma, “Acholi-Arab Nubian Relations,” 75.

⁶² Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 68.

⁶³ Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 529.

a close reading of these figures in local histories suggests that they were not all royal messengers: some were generals.

For example, of the first four interpreters, only Obwona Acholi, from the Pagaya Clan in Patiko Chiefdom, was a royal messenger.⁶⁴ The rest, according to local historians, were *oteka*, a term that literally means “generals.”⁶⁵ Both Keny of the Pachua clan and Gimoro of the Pugwinyi clan were generals from Patiko Chiefdom.⁶⁶ Obwot Rengamoi, about whom there is lot more information, was from the Bobi Clan in Puranga Chiefdom; but, like in the case of the other three interpreters, there is no information on his childhood. However, existing records reveal that, prior to becoming an interpreter, Obwot had already become a general. His titular name—Rengamoi—denotes his military position in his chiefdom.⁶⁷ According to Lacito Okech, however, Obwot Rengamoi was not only a war leader but also an outstanding farmer.⁶⁸ Thus, before Obwot became an interpreter, he was already a war leader and an accomplished farmer.

If most of these interpreters were military commanders rather than royal messengers, one might ask: why did most of the collaborating chiefs appoint generals as mediators or interpreters? From the very beginning of their activities, the Arab traders depended primarily on military alliances with Acholi chiefs, and this may explain why, instead of sending royal messengers to the Arabs, some chiefs preferred to send generals.⁶⁹ Thus, the arrival of the Arabs not only strengthened some chiefs; it also created new opportunities for a few men – those who

⁶⁴ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 9. See more on Obwona in Crazzolara, *The Lwoo*, 250.

⁶⁵ See more in Crazzolara, *The Lwoo*, 72.

⁶⁶ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 5 & 9. See also more information on Keny in p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central*, 130; Crazzolara, *The Lwoo*, 245, 248, 250 & 252. See more on Gimoro in p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 136.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 29.

⁶⁸ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58; see also Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 29-30.

⁶⁹ Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 20.

could acquire knowledge of Arabic and mediate between the Arabs and chiefs. As already intimated, however, most of these interpreters were not ordinary Acholi. They were already “professionals” who combined interpretation with other roles, such as being a general or a royal messenger.

The destructive effects of Arab trade, especially slavery, remained unknown to the outside world. It was not until 1862, when John H. Speke, the first European to pass through the region on his way back to Gondokoro and England after reaching the source of the Nile, revealed the activities of the Arab traders. Speke reported the growing slavery, but his report was not taken seriously, perhaps because it was the first of its kind. Moreover, Khedive Ismail, the then Egyptian leader who controlled this region, was also a close ally of England, and the British may have been reluctant to annoy their ally.⁷⁰ But, a few years later, in 1867, Sir Samuel Baker, another English explorer, who had traveled extensively through Acholiland between 1863 and 1865, corroborated Speke’s account. Baker, in his popular travelogue, accused Ismail’s regime of perpetuating slavery.⁷¹ Together, these two successive reports of the English explorers indicted Ismail and tainted his image, putting him “under pressure from England, [and he immediately] decided to take action and bring to an end the actual collection of slaves on the Upper Nile.”⁷²

Interestingly, Ismail responded by appointing the very Baker who had written the damning account that indicted Ismail as Governor-General of Equatoria. Baker’s mandate was to lead “an expedition to take permanent possession of the Equatorial regions [that included

⁷⁰ John H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (London: Harper, 1864), 530-2; 576 & 588.

⁷¹ For Baker accounts see, Samuel Baker White, *The Albert Nyanza Great Basin of The Nile, and the Exploration of the Nile Sources*. 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1866); Samuel Baker White, *Ismailia – A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression Of Slave Trade* 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1866).

⁷² Girling, *The Acholi*, 137. See also Gray, “Acholi History, 1860-1901,” 125.

Acholiland] in the name of the Egyptian government and in doing so to stop the slave trade.”⁷³ Ismail gave Baker the “rank of Pasha and a [huge] salary of £10,000 a year for four years.”⁷⁴ In 1869, Baker assumed his new job with three ambitious plans: to end slavery, to civilise the population and to engage the natives in agriculture. Even though Baker’s appointment took effect in 1869, he did not return to Equatoria, the main source of slaves, until March 1872, which begs the question: why?

Baker himself offers us no clue. But F. K. Girling informs us that the slave trade was still a lucrative business and slaves were an “an essential part of the economy of Sudan, Egypt and other Islamic countries”⁷⁵ Did Ismail deliberately keep Baker occupied in Egypt in a ploy to prevent him from destroying his most lucrative business at the time? It is possible, but we shall never know for sure. Baker finally arrived in Acholiland on March 30, 1872. He came with another group of Arabs, but these were soldiers who came specifically to fight the slave traders. Baker also enlisted “about 300 of the men who had formerly worked for the [slave] trading companies” to “supplement his own insufficient forces.”⁷⁶ By the end of 1872, these soldiers had driven out the slave traders, but their own arrival ushered in a new era of Arab presence in Acholiland, which lasted from 1872 until 1888.⁷⁷

The presence of Baker and his troops had one important impact: it swelled the number of interpreters in Acholiland as the numerous Egyptian troops needed interpreters. Most of the interpreters who had worked with the slave traders shifted their allegiance to the new

⁷³ Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 515.

⁷⁴ Girling, *The Acholi*, 137.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 517.

⁷⁷ Atkinson, “The Evolution of Ethnicity,” 35.

administration. Not surprisingly, two of the most prominent first-generation interpreters, Obwona Acholi and Ywa Gimoro, became Baker's interpreters, guides and informants, and they travelled widely with him, gaining considerable repute in the region. In 1872, when Baker returned "to establish Egyptian rule in Acholi it was...Ywa Gimoro and Obwona Acoli, both of Patiko, who acquainted him [Baker] with the deteriorating situation in Acoli caused by the Arab traders. It was [also] the same interpreters who accompanied Baker and acted as guides for him from 1872 when he decided to annex Bunyoro to Egypt." This was because these "interpreters knew the trade routes between Acholi and Bunyoro because they had been travelling to and from between the two kingdoms with the Arab traders."⁷⁸ Their work with Baker gave them considerable standing, which, in turn, led many people to become interpreters.

In March 1873, Baker's contract expired, and he left Acholiland. In 1874, Charles Gordon, another Englishman, replaced Baker as the governor of Equatoria. By the time Gordon's tenure began, more men (and still no women) of varied occupational backgrounds had joined the first generation of interpreters. The existing documentary sources reveal that pioneering old guards, such as Keny Koropil, Ywa Gimoro, Obwot Rengamoi and Obwona Acholi, were joined by a new crop of interpreters, such as Omara Aryamu, Oyaro Ocik, Acol Odelmak and Ojok Aliaka. In his work, *Tekwaro*, Lacito Okech, the first Acholi to publish a history of his own people, lists up to 40 men who served as interpreters during this period, many of them coming from the Patiko, Payira, Puranga and Koch chiefdoms, which were places of major Arab installations.⁷⁹ Yet, our sources do not adequately reveal the occupational backgrounds of these figures; they simply indicate the clans and chiefdoms of this growing network of interpreters.

⁷⁸ Uma, "The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,"76.

⁷⁹ See Okech, *Tekwaro*, 13-4. See also Crazzolara, *The Lwoo: The Lwoo Tradition*, 223-255.

Generally, local histories only occasionally reveal the names and roles of some of these figures prior to becoming interpreters. For example, Omara Odong tells us that Omara Anyamu was from Koch Ongako and, prior to becoming an interpreter, he was a royal messenger of the Koch Chiefdom.⁸⁰ Like Omara Anyamu, Oyaro Ocik was also a royal messenger, but from Payira Chiefdom.⁸¹ There is no more information on the backgrounds of the other interpreters. But the backgrounds of these two suggest that most interpreters were no ordinary mortals. As Atkinson suggests, most of them appear to have come from the “ranks of the *lu’or* [royal messengers].”⁸² They were thus still linked to the higher echelons of their respective polities, which must have paved the way for them to become interpreters.

But, why did the number of interpreters shoot up so dramatically? First, after over a decade of Arab traders and Egyptian soldiers in the region, Arabic was no longer confined to a few men. Many courtiers and porters had already learned the language in various ways, which paved the way for them to become interpreters. Secondly, the roles of Gimoro and Keny, as Baker’s interpreters, guides and companions in the region, gave the job a good reputation that attracted many people. But it was not only interpreters who benefitted from associating with Baker. Chiefs benefitted as well. For example, Chief Camo and Chief Omor-Oyaa benefited the most from Baker, who provided them with security that enhanced their standing and enabled them to accumulate more wealth as well.⁸³ These benefits could have motivated other chiefs to

⁸⁰ Omara Odong, “Tekwaro Koc” (Koch History) (Gulu: Incomplete manuscript, 1977?) archived at the Makerere University Archive.

⁸¹ See Okech, *Tekwaro*, 13; Uma, “The Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relation,” 77.

⁸² Atkinson, “A History of Western Acholi of Uganda,” 529.

⁸³ See a detailed account of Chief Omor-Oyaa in Crazzolara, *The Lwoo: The Lwoo Tradition*, 223-255.

send their own representatives to Baker and the Egyptian soldiers to become interpreters, as well, thus swelling the ranks of interpreters in Acholiland on the eve of Gordon's tenure.

Unlike Baker, who stayed in Acholiland, however briefly, and worked closely with some interpreters, promoting their popularity in the region, Gordon did not stay in the region. Between 1874 and 1876, Gordon "made [just] one quick march through [Acholiland]," and he did not return. "This meant that the 'administration' of Acholi was left in the hands of the locally garrisoned soldiers and their officers."⁸⁴ As a result of Gordon's absence, some interpreters, with the help of Egyptian troops, committed a litany of abuses. For example, "In Pabo, the interpreter Awir succeeded in getting the *Jadiya* [Egyptian troops] to kill Rwot Ojok" because Awir "wanted to become rwot himself, and used his position as interpreter to try to achieve his goal." In Payira, another interpreter, Oyaro, portrayed himself as "the true rwot of Payira, and at one point tried to rid Payira of Rwot Camo by plotting with the Arabs against him."⁸⁵

These actions illustrate the growing powers that some interpreters acquired and exercised as mediators in their respective polities. The situation was made even worse by Gordon's resignation in 1876. Following Gordon's resignation, the Egyptian soldiers became even more brutal than the slave traders: they levied "a burdensome grain tax, which they often collected with...excessive force and in excessive amounts."⁸⁶ The brutality of the Egyptian troops reached its height in October 1878, when Taib Bey, the commander of the Egyptian troops at Patiko, arrested Chief Camo, beat him up and imprisoned him. This intensified the anti-troop sentiments

⁸⁴ Atkinson, "A History of Western Acholi of Uganda," 517.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 531-2.

⁸⁶ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 268.

of other chiefs and their subjects.⁸⁷ After Chief Camo's release, he and other chiefs ordered their subjects to burn down their crops, demolish their buildings and move about sixty miles away from the Egyptian troops.

Thus, in December 1878, when Emin Pasha, Gordon's successor, arrived on an exploratory visit, he found Patiko already deserted, and his soldiers isolated. The Acholi were on the verge of war with the Egyptian troops. From the onset of his appointment, Pasha had two major problems that had arisen during Gordon's absentee tenure: how to restrain his soldiers and how to restore the trust of the people in his government. But Emin Pasha, like Gordon, established his headquarters in Wedelai, which was far from Acholiland, and he was thus rarely in the region. As Atkinson tells us, "Between 1878 and 1881," Pasha "managed only three visits."⁸⁸ He therefore failed to intervene in the Acholi situation, and the Egyptian soldiers and some interpreters continued their harsh treatment of locals, thus cementing the unity of Acholi chiefs against these foreigners in their land. Eventually, the chiefs mobilized an inter-chiefdom force that began conducting a guerilla war against the Egyptian troops in 1882.⁸⁹

This internal guerilla warfare did not defeat the Egyptian troops, but it weakened them. The subsequent defeat of the Egyptian soldiers in Acholiland was a result of an external factor: the Mahdi revolt. Like their rule in northern Uganda, Egyptian rule in Sudan was also characterized by brutality that resulted in a large-scale rebellion in eastern Sudan, beginning in 1881. This revolt had one major impact in Acholiland: it cut off the Egyptian troops in northern Uganda from Khartoum and Cairo, denying them the firearm supplies that they needed to sustain

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Atkinson, "A History of Western Acholi of Uganda," 517.

⁸⁹ Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 42.

their stay in Acholiland.⁹⁰ Thus, with relentless guerrilla warfare against the Egyptian troops in Acholiland, masterminded by Chief Camo, the Egyptian soldiers were eventually defeated and began retreating from the region in 1886.

But the Egyptian troops did not all leave Acholiland immediately. Some of them moved to Padibe Chiefdom, under Chief Ogwok, who had been their strongest ally in the region. Those who moved to Padibe, it seems, felt insecure, fearing that Chief Camo might attack them again. In 1887, these remnants of the Egyptian troops allied with Chief Ogwok and attacked and killed Chief Camo.⁹¹ Upon receiving news of the death of Chief Camo, Pasha was thrilled and noted, “Our task will be much easier.”⁹² But, contrary to Pasha’s hopes, Camo’s death did not make Pasha’s administration much easier. Camo was replaced by his young and ambitious son, Awich, who, with some other Acholi chiefs, continued attacking the remaining Egyptian troops until they eventually left Acholiland in 1888.

Therefore, long before the arrival of Europeans, Arabs had already infiltrated Acholiland, beginning with traders who were followed by soldiers. The Arab traders began trading with the locals, mainly in slaves, ivory, firearms and cattle. Most of the trade commodities, especially slaves and cattle, were acquired through raids conducted by the Arab traders and their Acholi collaborators, Acholi chiefs directed these raids against their foes to strengthen their positions in the region. These activities spawned violence and destruction in the region, paving the way for a new group of Arabs who arrived to fight the traders. Perhaps the most durable impact of the presence of these two groups of Arabs was the emergence of a new group of Acholi men, with

⁹⁰ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 268.

⁹¹ Anywar, *Acholi Ki Ker Megi*, 16; see also Reuben S. Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” *Uganda Journal* 12 (1948): 73.

⁹² Girling, *The Acholi*, 147.

knowledge of Arabic, who became interpreters. Because of the trade transactions they facilitated, the interpreters received “payment in return,” and they accumulated wealth, which enhanced their prestige in the community.⁹³

The wealth and enhanced social prestige acquired by the interpreters combined to motivate more people to become interpreters themselves, exposing them to Arabic and other aspects of Arab culture. In the only study of Acholi relations with Arabs and Nubians, F.K. Uma rightly argues that interpreters became agents of change. Besides introducing Arabic to the natives, Uma adds, they also brought “the Arab and Nubian ... [styles] of dress, [and] greetings,” as well as “Islamic names.”⁹⁴ In fact, early colonial reports corroborate Uma’s assertion: they are chock full of Acholi men with Muslim names. Though there is little evidence to suggest that many people became Muslims, there is plenty of evidence to prove that many learned Arabic and, as a result, became exposed to foreign ideas.

In the end, by the 1880s, despite the evacuation of the Arabs, a thriving group of interpreters had already been firmly established in the region. These men were products of the Acholi encounter with Arabs. It is some of these men and some of their sons who, as we shall see later in this chapter, would continue to play an important role at the dawn of British colonization, mediating between the Acholi and the Europeans. But the presence of the Arabs was just one episode in Acholi history before 1910. After their evacuation, the region continued to undergo further transformation, and it is to this additional transformation that we now turn.

Acholiland in the aftermath of the Arabs, 1886-1896

⁹³ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 269.

⁹⁴ Uma, “Acholi-Arab-Nubian Relations,” 76. See also Girling, *The Acholi*, 148.

The evacuation of the Arab traders and soldiers in 1872 and 1888 respectively opened up a new and vital, though brief, chapter in the history of Acholiland. From 1888 to 1897, Acholiland witnessed a brief interlude without foreign interference. But there was another kind of transformation. The region witnessed a speedy rise to preeminence of Chief Awich and his chiefdom—Payira—in the affairs of Acholiland. This short period, therefore, is important because it will set the stage to enable us to comprehend the relations between the Payira Chiefdom, other Acholi chiefdoms and the Bunyoro Kingdom prior to colonization, and the long-running battle between Awich and the colonial state at the beginning of the colonial rule. Like the preceding era, this period was still largely characterized by violence. But, the violence was intra-Acholi as two chiefdoms—Payira and Padibe—fought for supremacy.

The violence stemmed from the assassination of Chief Camo of Payira Chiefdom in 1887 by the joint forces of Chief Ogwok of Padibe Chiefdom and the remnants of Egyptian troops, and it spilled over into the new era. Beginning in 1882, as Emin Pasha claimed, Chief Camo had organized several attacks on Pasha's troops in Acholiland, which had eventually led to their defeat. In 1887, either because of pressure from the Egyptian troops or because of a desire to dominate the region, Ogwok allied with the remnants of the Egyptian troops and killed Chief Camo. The death of Chief Camo paved the way for Awich, his son, to succeed him.

The installation of Awich, and his eventual policies, ushered in a brief but significant period in Acholi history. In 1888, Awich was installed as the chief of Payira Chiefdom in a unique ceremony. Several writers have described the ceremony, but Reuben Anywar—the second Acholi to publish a book on Acholi history in 1954—provides perhaps the best account. He states that the installation was the best event in the nineteenth century, attended by gift-

bearing guests from within and outside Acholiland.⁹⁵ From within Acholiland, Anywar recorded, chiefs came from “Palaro, Lira [Palwo], Puranga, Pajule, Atyak, Cwa and Paimol,” and they all presented Awich with gifts of ivory. Since the arrival of Arab traders in Acholiland, ivory had become one of the most valuable commodities, making it a fitting gift for royalty. Significantly, and understandably, Chief Ogwok, who, with the Egyptian troops, had killed Camo, was not among the guests at Awich’s installation. This reveals that, after the death of Chief Camo, relations between the Payira and the Padibe chiefdoms were particularly sour.

From outside Acholiland, Anywar tells us, the King of Bunyoro Kingdom sent a representative who brought many gifts, including “a double-headed spear, a wooden dish, and a drum, together with countless cowrie shells.”⁹⁶ Though we do not know the exact symbolic or material value of each of these gifts, the presence in Acholiland of a representative from Bunyoro Kingdom is intriguing. John H. Speke and James Grant, for example, offer us evidence of prior cordial relations between Bunyoro Kingdom and Acholi chiefdoms that go back to 1862. During their stay as captives at the court of the King of Bunyoro, the two explorers recorded that, several times, they “heard rumours of visits to the King by natives from many interesting countries round about, whom, to their annoyance, they were not allowed to meet.”⁹⁷

But on October 1, 1862, Grant wrote: “Gani (Acholi) men, twenty-five in number, had arrived, and given him (Kamurassi [King of Bunyoro]) a lion skin, several...monkey skins and some giraffe hair as well as a stick of copper or wire brass.”⁹⁸ Because Payira was the dominant

⁹⁵ Anywar, *Acholi Ki Ker Megi*, 33. See also Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 49; Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” 74.

⁹⁶ Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” 74.

⁹⁷ John H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 530-2; see also p’Bitek, “Oral Literature,” 15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 530-3; see also p’Bitek, “Oral Literature,” 15.

Acholi chiefdom at the time, it is not far-fetched to assume that the “Gani men” at Kamurassi’s court were emissaries from Payira. The works of Father J.P. Crazzolaro also highlight some of the relations between the two polities. In his work, Crazzolaro claims that it was the Lwoo who invaded Bunyoro and, after the invasion, they mixed with the citizens of Bunyoro. Though the Lwoo in Bunyoro, according to Crazzolaro, lost their Lwoo languages, with many Lwoo words “bantunized,” a strong bond, he contended, had been created between the Bunyoro Kingdom and Acholiland, especially the Payira Chiefdom.⁹⁹ Although these details of Crazzolaro’s description are debatable, the account points to prior contacts between Acholiland and Bunyoro Kingdom.

Taken together, the accounts of Grant and Crazzolaro testify to the prior existence of a relationship between Payira and Bunyoro. Thus the exchanges of gifts may have been meant to buttress these prior relations that were set to become even stronger during the colonial era. Awich’s installation was particularly significant for him. As many commentators have noted, the installation gave “Awich and his ‘court’ greater standing among the Acholi clans through the association with the royalty of Bunyoro,” an association which no other Acholi chiefdom could claim.¹⁰⁰ In sum, the presence of guests from within and outside Acholiland at Awich’s installation offers us important clues about the nature of the inter-polity socio-political relations that Payira Chiefdom enjoyed at the time. More importantly, it gives us a clue as to why Awich would go on to dominate the Acholi political scene: he had powerful internal and external allies.

Awich’s policies did not differ significantly from those of his father. He continued his father’s aggression against the Egyptian troops, and, more importantly, he pursued an expansionist agenda that made him the undisputed “king” of Acholiland by the mid-1890s. He

⁹⁹ Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo*, 91; see also J.P. Crazzolaro, “The Lwo,” *The Uganda Journal* 5, 1(1937):1-21.

¹⁰⁰ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 49.

began his reign by avenging his father's death. For Awich, the remnants of the Egyptian soldiers, and chiefdoms that had collaborated with them to kill his father, had to be defeated. In 1888, he fought the remnants of the Egyptian troops in Ajulu and Akworo, forcing them out of the region.¹⁰¹ This triumph over the Egyptian troops obviated any recurrence of a strong alliance against Payira Chiefdom.

In 1889, Awich turned his attention to Payira's fiercest rival—Padibe Chiefdom. Though the 1889 Payira-Padibe war was not the first (they had fought in 1886), it was unique. Contrary to tradition, Awich personally participated in the war. Traditionally, a chief did not go to war personally because, being a rainmaker, his death in battle would plunge his chiefdom into drought and chaos. It was the duty of *oteka* (generals), and not of the chief, to lead warriors in battle. What could have compelled Awich to break the tradition and go to war? First, Awich's most obvious motivation appears to have been a burning desire to avenge his father's murder personally, and to demonstrate to his people that he was capable of defending them against any rival, however fierce. Secondly, as a young man, Awich might have exhibited such outstanding military skills (perhaps in the first war when he was not yet a chief) that the war leaders did not foresee any risk in allowing him to join them in battle. These same skills might also partly explain why the elders chose him to replace his slain father. Awich must have put up a sterling performance in the war, for he earned himself the praise name *Lutanyamoi*, which means a brave man.¹⁰² Padibe Chiefdom, without the support of the now vanquished Egyptian troops, was defeated.

¹⁰¹ Nyeko, "The Acholi," 11.

¹⁰² Nekanori Lukwiya, interview, 18 March, 2014.

However, details of this war have proved elusive: neither documentary nor traditional sources give us any details of the Payira-Padibe war of 1889. For example, we do not know the number of people killed during the war. John Dwyer, the only historian to have focused at length on this war, only states that the Padibe suffered heavy casualties: “Large numbers of Padibe were killed in the attack, but Rwot [Chief] Ogwok himself escaped.”¹⁰³ What is almost certain is that the victory must have been particularly gratifying for Awich because he had defeated one of the fiercest rivals of his chiefdom. After defeating Padibe Chiefdom, Awich attacked and defeated the Paibona Clan that was “questioning his authority.”¹⁰⁴ Awich’s triumph over the Egyptian troops, Padibe Chiefdom and the Paibona Clan, in quick succession, eliminated whatever residual opposition there was to his reign, making him the most powerful chief in Acholiland.

The writings of local historians attest to the dominant position that Awich had attained at the dawn of British rule in Acholiland. For example, Reuben Anywar tells us that Awich became a mediator in many conflicts in the region, helping to resolve conflicts in the Puranga, Atyak and Koch chiefdoms.¹⁰⁵ Thus, after the evacuation of the Arabs, Awich allied with many chiefs but, more importantly, he fought his way, elevating himself and his chiefdom to the apex of power in Acholiland. Perhaps the most remarkable transformation in the decade leading to the commencement of British rule over northern Uganda was Awich’s, and his chiefdom’s, speedy rise to preeminence in the affairs of Acholiland. But his meteoric rise to dominance was also to bring Awich into a long-running battle with the colonial state as he refused to relinquish his

¹⁰³ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 50.

¹⁰⁴ Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” 75.

¹⁰⁵ Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 36; see also Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 57.

independent and powerful position. The extension of the British rule over Acholiland and Awich's battle with the state constitute the developments which we examine in the next section.

Awich and the advent of the colonial state, 1896-1903

The British annexed northern Uganda in 1896, but they did not have any immediate plan to establish a permanent station in the region. The decision to annex northern Uganda as part of the Uganda Protectorate was largely motivated by rumors that the West Nile region, adjacent to northern Uganda, had already fallen under Leopold II, the King of Belgium. Fearing that the Belgian king would soon claim northern Uganda as well, the British hurried to annex Acholiland.¹⁰⁶ Yet, after formally seizing northern Uganda, the British had no immediate plan for the region, and deserted it. This neglect gave Chief Awich the opportunity to continue exercising and extending his dominance over Acholiland, but not for long. Two major "outside events intruded upon Acholiland, and forced Awich into a commitment...[that led] to the destruction of the delicately balanced paramountcy which he was trying to construct."¹⁰⁷

The first of these two events was the Nubian mutiny, an uprising by Nubian troops in Uganda against the British. The Nubians, as will be recalled, were largely the remnants of Emin Pasha's soldiers. But after the collapse of Pasha's project in the region, most of the Nubian soldiers became redundant, and "Captain Fredrick Lugard, who was employed by the Imperial British East African Company," recruited them because the "company needed military protection

¹⁰⁶ See document cited by Fredrick Odoi-Tanga in "Politics, Ethnicity and Conflict in Post Independent Acholiland, Uganda 1962-2006" (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 81.

¹⁰⁷ Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 59.

for a successful colonization of the people of the headwaters of the Nile.”¹⁰⁸ These troops became the British fighting force in the entire Uganda Protectorate and beyond. However, in September 1897, the Nubian troops rebelled because of a litany of grievances. According to J. V. Wild, a colonial agent in Acholiland, two of these grievances were particularly important.

First, the Nubians claimed that they were overworked, and “tired of being marched about [across the region].” Secondly, the soldiers claimed that their code of conduct was unfair. More precisely, they complained that “they were not allowed to take their women” on any mission for the colonial state.¹⁰⁹ These, and other minor reasons, Wild noted, caused the revolt. Fearing punishment, many of the Nubian troops fled from Buganda Kingdom and ran to Acholiland where they sought Chief Awich’s protection.

The second event that intruded upon Acholiland was the flight of King Kabarega from his Bunyoro Kingdom to Acholiland, also in 1897.¹¹⁰ Kabarega had been resisting the colonization of his kingdom since 1894, but towards the end of 1896, he was defeated.¹¹¹ To avoid capture, and mobilize troops to recapture his kingdom from the British, Kabarega fled to Acholiland and sought the support of Chief Awich. That both the Nubians and Kabarega ran to Acholiland, and sought Awich’s protection or assistance, is significant on two counts. First, it demonstrates that Acholiland was still relatively free from effective British control. Secondly, it implies that, at the dawn of colonization, Awich had already established himself as the most powerful chief in

¹⁰⁸ Charles Amone, “Strangers Everywhere: Exclusion, Identity and the Future of Nubians in Northern Uganda,” *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 3, 8 (2013), 392; see also, Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890 – 1985* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ J. V. Wild, *The Uganda Mutiny* (London: Macmillan Press, 1954), 16.

¹¹⁰ Okot p’ Bitek, “Oral Literature and its social background among the Acholi and Lango,” (Bachelor’s thesis, University of Oxford, 1963), 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

Acholiland, so powerful that both the Nubian troops and King Kabarega regarded him as capable of protecting them against the British. But Kabarega's flight to Payira Chiefdom is also further testimony to the strong and cordial relations between Payira Chiefdom and Bunyoro Kingdom that we have referred to earlier. In sum, the flight to Acholiland of both the rebellious Nubian troops and the intransigent King Kabarega posed a threat to British security, forcing the British to organize military expeditions and return to Acholiland in 1898.

The first expedition, led by Lieutenant Neill Malcolm, lasted from 1897 to 1899. It was largely meant to "to subdue the mutinous Sudanese [Nubians]" in Bunyoro Kingdom and "to find a suitable place for a base camp in west Acholiland from which operations [against the Nubians] could be directed."¹¹² In 1898, Malcom crossed from Bunyoro into Acholiland; and it is from that year that we begin to get evidence of Acholi chiefs and their men joining the colonial state. For example, in his diary entry of April 19, 1898, Malcolm described this emerging trend as follows: a "Shuli [Acholi] Chief by name Quatch came in early saying that the Nubies [Nubians] were three days off to the North with Kabarega, that they meditated making a fort near the crossing just below here from which they could raid into Unyoro [Bunyoro]." Six days later, on April 25, 1898, Malcolm recounted a war in which the Acholi fought on his side and defeated the Nubians. Thereafter, the Acholi fighting abilities caught the attention of Malcolm, and he wrote: "The Shuli are a very fine race of men, far the best I have seen in Africa. They are well armed and pretty brave. I should say that they have probably never been conquered, as they appear friendly and confident." Four days later, Malcolm again recorded, "Some men from

¹¹² Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 74. For more on Macdonald and his activities see H. H. Austin, *With Macdonald in Uganda: Narrative Account of the Uganda Mutiny and Macdonald Expedition in the Uganda* (London: E. Arnold, 1903).

Abdulaguz—the Chief of Fatiko [Patiko], came in to say that he wished to be friendly and to get rid of Kabarega. I gave them presents, saying that I'd do what I could for them.”¹¹³

Taken together, one can see in Malcolm's account the incipient emergence of an alliance between the British and some Acholi chiefs whose subjects were already providing intelligence and military assistance to the British. Though Malcolm states that some Acholi joined him, or expressed the wish to join forces with him, we do not get to know these Acholi well enough. This is largely because their names are often misspelled, and they are equally often referred to collectively, unless they happen to be chiefs. For example, the chief that Malcolm calls Quatch may have actually been Kwach. As a result, tracing these figures in the documents has proved futile. In the end, Malcolm's expedition did not achieve much for the British, although it laid the ground for another expedition.

The second British expedition into Acholiland was led by Major Charles Delme-Radcliffe. The expedition was meant to achieve three goals: to survey and map the region, to “persuade” the chiefs to identify “with the Administration and... [make] them a part of the Government organization” through treaty, and to defeat Kabarega and the mutineers.¹¹⁴ During this second expedition, even more Acholi joined the British either willingly or by coercion. V. Pellegrini—one of the pioneering Verona missionary priests and a historian—recounts that when Delme-Radcliffe arrived in Acholiland, he “ordered all the chiefs to go and meet with him. [Chief] Ogwok of Padibe, [Chief] Oloya of Atyak and many [other chiefs] attended the meeting but Chief Awich did not attend.”¹¹⁵ Subsequently, Delme-Radcliffe signed treaties with the

¹¹³ For these quotes, see Sir Neill Malcolm, typescript on the Uganda Mutiny, 1897-1899, Rhodes House Library Shelf No. Mss Afr.s.759.

¹¹⁴ As cited in Atkinson, *The Roots*, 5; Bere, “Awich,” 77.

¹¹⁵ V. Pellegrini, *Lok pa Acoli Macon* (Kitgum: Catholic Mission Press, 1949), 118.

chiefs that honored his call, bringing their chiefdoms into the colonial state. But Awich's Payira Chiefdom was not among them. The most notable chief to sign the treaty with Delme-Radcliffe was Ogwok of Padibe Chiefdom.¹¹⁶ Ogwok's readiness to enter into an agreement with the colonial state was purely strategic: it was largely to secure himself and his chiefdom against his main foe, Chief Awich. But why did Chief Awich snub Delme-Radcliffe?

Pellegrini has argued that Awich snubbed Delme-Radcliffe because the chief was wary of alliances with foreigners, some of whom had landed his father in trouble.¹¹⁷ But, given the general transformation in the region, there may have been other reasons for Awich's aloofness. First, Awich had already established himself as the *de facto* paramount chief of Acholiland, and the arrival of the British represented a challenge to his supremacy. Secondly, Awich may have spurned Delme-Radcliffe because he had received intelligence that Ogwok, his arch-adversary, would be meeting Delme-Radcliffe. These developments may have prompted Awich to reject any association with Delme-Radcliffe, thus becoming a *de facto* enemy of the colonial state.

From the time Awich refused to meet Delme-Radcliffe and conclude a treaty with him, the colonial agent saw him as a threat to the colonial establishment. Delme-Radcliffe then began coercing Awich into submission to the colonial state. In November 1899, according to Reuben Anywar, Delme-Radcliffe sent to Awich an Acholi emissary called "Ogwang Labuc of [the] Pudyek [Clan]...with instructions to send Kabarega's followers away [from his chiefdom] and surrender their guns."¹¹⁸ But Awich ignored the instructions, and Delme-Radcliffe ordered him

¹¹⁶ Nyeko, "The Acholi," 11.

¹¹⁷ Pellegrini, *Lok pa Acoli Macon*, 118.

¹¹⁸ Anywar, "The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich," 76.

arrested. The order of arrest began a long-running feud between Awich and the new colonial state. Awich went into hiding and, for about seven months, the British failed to arrest him.

It was not until 1901 that Captain Herman eventually arrested Awich, who was then tried by Delme-Radcliffe at “Nimule [where the colonial state had opened a station], found guilty, and imprisoned in Kampala for two years.”¹¹⁹ Because the same Delme-Radcliffe who had ordered Awich arrested also tried the chief, the trial could hardly have been fair. For Delme-Radcliffe, establishing colonial rule over Acholiland must have been much more important than respecting judicial process. Little wonder that the crime for which Awich was tried and deported does not feature in the colonial documents for this period, and has thus remained unclear. It is clear, though, that over the short time the colonial agents had been in the region, they had come to view Awich as a threat to their enterprise. Therefore, they must have deemed it expedient to punish him, partly to demonstrate to other chiefs that the colonial state would not tolerate any resistance. It is thus that Awich was dethroned and deported to Kampala, the capital of the Uganda Protectorate. To replace him as Chief of Payira, the state appointed his brother, Abuya Lakarakak. The location to which Awich was deported is significant. Kampala, located in Buganda Kingdom, is about 400 miles away from Acholiland. That the British took Awich that far shows that they wanted him isolated from his people, and it lends credence to our earlier assertion that the colonial state saw Awich as a threat to the colonial enterprise in Acholiland.

The dethronement, deportation and imprisonment of Awich had far-reaching consequences in Acholiland. It broke the spirit of hitherto “uncooperative” chiefs and their court officials, leading to their submission to the colonial state. Explicit in the Awich episode, especially his arrest after evading the colonial agents for seven months, is the use of local agents

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 76; see also Okech, *Tekwaro*, 43; Pellegrini, *Lok pa Acoli Macon*, 120-123.

in providing intelligence. But who were these local agents now in the service of the colonial state? Details of these local colonial agents will perhaps never be known. The British colonial agents rarely, if ever, tell us about their local collaborators, apart from the chiefs among them. But by 1901, many Acholi, especially chiefs and their courtiers, had already joined the state, mainly as interpreters and guides, either out of expediency or because they were cowed by the treatment meted out to Chief Awich. Only four Acholi participants in the British expeditions in Acholiland feature in the colonial documents: Ogwang Labuc, Okello Mwoka, Chief Lagony and Chief Quatch, whom Malcolm mentioned in his diary.

While two of these participants were chiefs, it is those who were not chiefs who are of particular interest. There is not enough information on Labuc to enable us to know his background prior to these events. Even Delme-Radcliffe, who employed him as an emissary, does not tell us about his background. The only time Labuc is mentioned in the colonial documents is in 1902, when he is referred to as “a runner from Padyak [Pudyek].”¹²⁰ “Runner” was the British designation for a messenger, including a royal messenger.¹²¹ This statement and the work of Reuben Anywar suggest that, prior to joining Delme-Radcliffe, Labuc had been a royal messenger from Pudyek. This may explain why Delme-Radcliffe found him an ideal choice to send as an emissary to Awich: Labuc had most probably already been sent to Awich by the Chief of Pudyek, and thus knew the Payira chief personally. Delme-Radcliffe does not tell us anything about Okello Mwoka Lengomoi’s background either. But in his 1902 report on the expedition, Delme-Radcliffe reveals a brief, yet important, role that Okello Mwoka played: “Okello Mwaka, was my right hand man throughout the expedition, and was certainly one of the

¹²⁰ A16/2 Shuli (Acholi), 1902-1903, Correspondences Inward, Vol. 111.

¹²¹ Jenaro Odoki, interview, 21 December, 2013; John Odong, interview, 23 December, 2013.

most plucky, sensible, honest, and single minded natives I have ever met.”¹²² Thankfully, there is more information about Okello Mwoka Lengomoi than there is about Labuc because of the former’s close association with other colonial agents.

Born in the 1860s in Bobi, Mwoka was the son of Obwot Rengamoi, one of the second generation of interpreters. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, Mwoka had also risen to the rank of a general in Puranga Chiefdom. His titular name, Lengomoi, designates a military genius. The Acholi reserved this name only for men who had rendered exceptional military service to their chiefdoms. As a general in the precolonial era, Mwoka traversed Bunyoro and Sudan, and learned Runyoro and Arabic. Because of his military prowess and knowledge of Arabic, in 1896, Kabarega commissioned Mwoka to lead the former’s delegation to Prophet Mahdi (in Sudan) to seek military assistance against the British. Mwoka spent about three years in Sudan.

But upon his return in 1899, Mwoka, fearing arrest because of his association with Kabarega, abandoned the Bunyoro king and joined the British. Colonial documents portray Mwoka as the first colonial interpreter, who “gained a considerable reputation among both Europeans and Africans [Acholi].”¹²³ But, as Dwyer has argued, Mwoka was much more than just an interpreter. Mwoka’s “services to them [colonial state] went far beyond those of an interpreter or local chief; he provided the government with such valuable intelligence.”¹²⁴ Thus, well before the British could establish colonial control over Acholiland in 1910, a cadre of middlemen, many of them courtiers, military generals and royal messengers, also acting as interpreters, had already emerged. The sketchy portraits of Mwoka and Labuc suggest that many

¹²² See Major Delme-Radcliffe, *Report on the Lango Expeditions* 16 (1902): 6; see also Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 186.

¹²³ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 173.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101; see also Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History,” 7.

of those who joined the colonial state, especially in its embryonic phase, were not ordinary people. They were already established men, with distinguished pre-colonial careers in their respective chiefdoms.

In 1901, after almost two years in Acholiland, Delme-Radcliffe departed, having “pacified” the region. However, again this time, the British did not establish a station in Acholiland, preferring to continue governing the region from their bases along the Albert Nile and in Nimule, through Acholi chiefs and some prominent Acholi men.¹²⁵ However, this system proved ineffective, and denied the British effective control over the region. This was largely because, unlike the centralized polities of Buganda and Bunyoro, Acholiland did not have a single overall ruler through whom the colonial state could impose its will. This may also explain why the British eventually decided to release Chief Awich in the hope that, after his imprisonment, Awich would be sufficiently cowed to collaborate with them, and they would then use him to entrench the colonial state in the region.

Awich was therefore released and taken back to Acholiland. Not surprisingly, the colonial state deposed Lakarakak, Awich’s brother whom they had installed in Awich’s place, and restored Awich to his chieftaincy. As Reuben Anywar recounts, it was in March 1902 that two British colonial agents, Mr. F.A Knowles, Collector at Wedelai, and Captain Herman of the King’s African Rifles, reinstated Awich.¹²⁶ That Awich was reinstated as Chief of Payira, and accompanied by two colonial agents, suggests that the British understood that he was crucial to the success of their mission. Yet, after his reinstatement, Awich did not co-operate with the state; instead, he sent a delegation of five royal messengers to Bunyoro Kingdom to invite the Church

¹²⁵ For more on the activities of the colonial state from 1902 to 1909 see the Uganda National Archives files from 1902 to 1909 see Shuli (Acholi) Correspondence Files: A16/2; A16/3; A16/4 & A16/5.

¹²⁶ See Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” 76.

Missionary Society (CMS) to Acholiland.¹²⁷ The CMS responded with a tour of the region in 1903, and opened the first mission station, at Keyo, in 1904. The activities of the CMS, especially schooling, attracted many Acholi and brought them closer to Europeans. The CMS school produced literate Acholi who later became employees of the CMS and the colonial state. The activities of the CMS and their first converts are the subject of next section.

Awich and the advent of evangelization, 1903-1910

In August 1903, Rev. A.B. Lloyd, of the CMS, arrived in Acholiland for an evangelization tour, at the invitation of Chief Awich. “My chief aim in this journey,” Lloyd wrote, “was to reach the capital of the biggest chief, whose name is Awitch, or Owitch, for he it was who had sent urgent messages begging for teachers, and for a visit from myself.”¹²⁸ Lloyd, however, was surprised to find that Awich was in detention.¹²⁹ “To my astonishment,” Lloyd wrote, “in the early morning I received the information that Awich had been imprisoned by the officer in charge.” After inquiring about the reason, Lloyd noted that he “was told that it was an old standing charge.” Unfortunately, Lloyd does not name the exact “old standing charge” against Awich, most probably because he did not get to know it either. However, we can speculate that Awich’s offense may have been his refusal to cooperate with the colonial state after his reinstatement, and that the colonial agents were not about to see him honored by a visit

¹²⁷ J.K. Russell, “Church Extension to the North,” in A D Tom Tuma; Phares Mukasa Mutibwa, eds., *A Century of Christianity in Uganda, 1877-1977: A historical Appraisal of the Development of the Uganda Church Over the Last One Hundred Years* (Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1978), 60.

¹²⁸ A. B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Notes* 5, 1(1904): 11.

¹²⁹ A. B. Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum: Life and Adventure on the Upper Nile* (New York: Dutton & Co, 1906), 161. For more on the CMS’ arrival in Acholiland see A. B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Notes* 5, 3 (1904): 31-34; A. R. Cook, “Missionary Advance in the Nile Valley,” *Uganda Notes* 5, 8 (1904): 114-118; A. R. Cook, *Uganda Memories* (Kampala: Uganda Society, 1945), 187-204.

from, and a joint tour with, a White missionary. The confinement was perhaps another attempt to apply more pressure on Awich to co-operate with the colonial state. Awich's detention prevented Lloyd from touring the region with him. "I went away, wondering why 'an old standing charge,' should have been left unpunished until late at night the evening before he was to set out with me," Lloyd noted.¹³⁰ Awich's detention did not last long: he was released shortly after Lloyd had returned to Hoima in October.

In April 1904, Lloyd returned and established the first church at Keyo. In June 1904, Bishop Tucker, the leader of CMS, sent Rev. A. L. Kitching to begin translating the Bible into Acholi. In December of the same year, Tucker sent Rev. A.E. Pleydell to help Lloyd and Kitching with the evangelization of the region. The first two converts were Ali and Ameda, though many more Acholi had initially been drawn to the CMS school. Kitching baptized them on November 26, 1905. Ali was christened Muca (Moses) and Ameda became Yakobo (Jacob). Kitching does not tell us why he chose those particular Christian names for Ali and Ameda, or why the first converts may have chosen the names themselves.

The CMS records tell us little, if anything, beyond the names, places of origin and the date of baptism of these first two converts. Missionaries, like colonial agents, do not seem to have been interested in the backgrounds of their local figures. In the typical CMS missionary parlance of the time, these men were all "savages" before the CMS came to their rescue. But from fragments of the CMS records, local histories and early studies about the expansion of the church in Acholiland, especially by Mary Margaret Louise Pirouet, we are able to retrieve the backgrounds of some figures. We learn, for example, that the first convert, Muca Ali, was a son of Ywa Gimoro, one of the first cohort of Arabic interpreters and, more importantly, Sir Samuel

¹³⁰ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 202; see also A. B. Lloyd, "Acholi Country," *Uganda Notes* 5, 2 (1904): 21.

Baker's interpreter in the 1860s and 1870s.¹³¹ There is, however, no information on Ali's date of birth, his childhood or his prior career. However, information gleaned from interviews and fragments of documentary sources (that I will come to, shortly), suggest that he was healer. As a son of an interpreter, Ali was most likely exposed to aspects of Arab culture as a youngster, especially the language and Islam, as his name, Ali, implies. His conversion to Christianity, then, may even have been motivated by a desire to become an interpreter for the CMS missionaries. As for Ameda, the Patiko royal records reveal that he was from the Pugwinyi clan and a royal messenger in Patiko Chiefdom.¹³² But that is as far as the royal records go. Like in the case of Ali, we have no information on Yakobo Ameda's date of birth or childhood.

Accounts of the reactions of the clansmen to the baptism of these first two converts, especially of Ali, provide further insights into the backgrounds and roles of these figures. For example, Pirouet tells us that Ali's "[b]aptism caused an uproar," leading to insults and violence.¹³³ In the 1960s, Alipayo Latigo, the first Acholi reverend and informant of Pirouet, explained the cause of the uproar: "[Ali] had two wives, and at the time of baptism he sent the second [wife] away. The people thought him mad for the first wife was barren, whereas the second had borne him a son. They made up songs about him, saying what a fool he was to keep only a woman who could be of no use to him at all."¹³⁴ This observation is important on two counts: First, it shows that the clansmen reacted negatively to Ali's pre-baptismal conduct, and that, generally, the Acholi were still strongly attached to their traditional norms and values,

¹³¹ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 25; see also Pirouet, "The Expansion of the Church of Uganda," 286.

¹³² Nekanori Lukwiya, interview, 18 March, 2014.

¹³³ Pirouet, "The Expansion of the Church of Uganda," 286.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

including polygamy. Secondly, that Ali was a polygamist suggests that he was fairly wealthy, which is not surprising, given that his father was an interpreter.

Two other varying accounts give us some more insights into Ali prior to his CMS schooling and conversion. In one account, Pirouet tells us that, after his conversion, Ali came into conflict with his clansmen because “he refused to build an *abila* ... in his homestead [after his father’s death], and instead he began to build a church. For this, “he was badly beaten up.”¹³⁵ In the second account, Bishop J. K. Russeel, a CMS bishop in Acholiland, adds, “Muca Ali...[instead] destroyed the *abila* in his father’s home.”¹³⁶ Both these accounts highlight the same contentious item: the *abila*. What is an *abila*? And what can it tell us about Ali? *Abila* is a shrine, “a place where acts of worship are partly or wholly executed. Thanksgiving and offerings to ancestral spirits are made here.”¹³⁷ Travelling through Acholiland on his evangelization tour of 1903, Rev. Lloyd was struck by the number of *abila* he saw, calling them “devil huts.”

Lloyd describes an *abila* as “one big hut, set apart to the favored spirit of the tribe,” and was “neatly built, with fine grass on the floor, in the center of which is sometimes to be seen a curious iron spear stuck in the ground blade upper-most.” He further notes that “no stranger is permitted to enter [the *abila*]—even I was not allowed to do so.”¹³⁸ “In most cases,” the historian Atkinson informs us, “the lineage head was the primary caretaker... and led the group’s approaches to the ancestors. Such approaches occurred through various ceremonies (including

¹³⁵ Ibid., 370.

¹³⁶ Russell, *Men without God*, 28.

¹³⁷ Santo Ocitti, “Some Aspect of Jok among the Acholi” (Bachelor’s thesis, Makerere University, 1973), 23.

¹³⁸ A.B. Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum: Life and Adventure on the Upper Nile* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1907), 178-9.

small offerings of food and drink) and for many purposes (ranging from birth to funerals).”¹³⁹ In this case, Ali was not an “ordinary” man: he must have been a lineage head (after his father’s death) or even a priest or healer. Thus, for a lineage head or priest to refuse to construct an *abila*, let alone to destroy one, was regarded as an abomination that would put the lives of many people at risk. This may explain why, as Pirouet informs us, Ali was “badly beaten up” following his conversion.

On the other hand, no such negative reaction to Ameda’s conversion is reported. Yet, in the same chiefdom—Patiko, we would expect a similar, if not identical, reaction. The absence of any negative reaction to Ameda’s conversion is significant, and it corroborates the claim that he was a royal messenger. He might even have been a spy for his chief. In that capacity, it is not farfetched to conclude that Ameda may have been sent by his chief to understand the essence of Christianity and report back to his chief. In that case, his conversion would have been in his line of duty to his chief and chiefdom. In sum, these first two converts, as our sources suggest, were no “ordinary” men. Their backgrounds show a pattern of continuity of the type of figures that foreigners, upon arriving in Acholiland, found and recruited into their service. It was difficult for ordinary people to join the missionaries without the approval of their chiefs. We will meet Ali and Ameda again in Chapter Four.

In 1906, the number of converts grew. The CMS baptized 12 more men, two of whom were Alur: Matayo (Mathew) Adimola and Lakana (John) Kija.¹⁴⁰ Though we know how Adimola arrived in Acholiland, we know nothing about Kija’s itinerary. He may have been one of the unnamed people Lloyd had taken with him to Acholiland; and the name “Kija” [Kiiza]

¹³⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 87-88.

¹⁴⁰ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 26.

suggests that either he was a Munyoro (citizen of the Bunyoro Kingdom) or a non-Munyoro with a Nyoro name. But Okech tells us that Kija was an Alur, and we have no reason to doubt Okech's word.¹⁴¹ It is, therefore, probable that Kija acquired his name from Bunyoro. Regarding Adimola, Pirouet tells us that he was also an Alur from the West Nile region, and that he had arrived in Bunyoro as a captive after a battle between the Banyoro and the Alur. Upon his arrival, Pirouet claims, Adimola "found himself in danger of being sacrificed, and went to the government officer in Masindi, who sent him to Rev. A.B. Lloyd, whose household he joined."¹⁴²

When the CMS sent Lloyd to open a new mission in Acholiland, Lloyd took Adimola with him. Because of Adimola's background, it is plausible to assume that Kija, being another Alur, had found himself in the same predicament. Thus, when Adimola and Kija arrived in Acholiland, they had to convert to Christianity in order to stay with Lloyd. But, their social vulnerability apart, the two Alur men were an asset for Lloyd: they spoke Alur, which is mutually intelligible with Acholi. So, Lloyd might even have deliberately recruited Adimola and Kija as potential interpreters in preparation for his mission in Acholiland, after finding out how useful Donge was in mediating between him and the Acholi leaders during their first trip.

The other ten converts of 1906 came from various backgrounds: some were sons of chiefs while others were sons of prominent Acholi men. For example, we are told that Chief Awich sent two boys: "Aliker his son, and Obwoya, who was just a boy living in the household." It is possible that Obwoya was a courtier sent along to guard Awich's son and report on the work of the CMS. For his part, Chief Lagony of Koch Chieftdom did not send his son, opting to send

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Pirouet, "The Expansion of the Church of Uganda," 369.

someone called Oyugi who could also have been a courtier of Chief Lagony. The chief of Patiko sent only one son, Lagara. Besides chiefs, prominent men also sent their sons to the school. For example, Okello Mwoka Lengomoi, arguably the greatest war leader in the second half of the nineteenth century and early colonial Acholiland and one of the first Acholi to join the colonial state during the “pacification” of Acholiland, sent his sons, Olal and Otuke. Similarly, Obwona Acholi, a first-generation interpreter, sent two sons, Dony and Odur.¹⁴³ In the same way, Owiny, only recorded as an “elder,” who may have also been a courtier, sent his son, Okelokoko. Only one 1906 convert, Laraa, is of unknown paternity. But who were these non-royals that chiefs and prominent men were sending to the CMS school?

Unfortunately, there is little information on the pre-CMS lives of these converts. The only converts about whom we have fragments of information are Olal and Nuwa Dony. Olal was born around 1882.¹⁴⁴ He was the son of Okello Mwoka Lengomoi, whom we have encountered earlier. In his early years, Olal explained to Pirouet, his father had taken him to a *madrassa* in Nimule where he learned Arabic and adopted Islam. But, when the CMS arrived in Acholiland, he joined their school at Keyo and became the seventh convert.¹⁴⁵ Later on, Olal joined the colonial state and became a chief. “He was the first Acholi to be awarded the British honorary title of MBE (Member of the British Empire) for exemplary service, on 1st January, 1949.”¹⁴⁶ Given the lucrative nature of the interpreter’s profession in Acholiland before colonial rule,

¹⁴³ For more on Acholi and the CMS see A. B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Notes* 5, 2 (1904): 19.

¹⁴⁴ Ocitti, *Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 26.

¹⁴⁶ Ocitti, *Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 25.

Okello Mwoka Lengomoi must have wanted Olal to become an interpreter, which may well explain why he sent him, first to a *madrassa* in Nimule, and later to the CMS school.

There is less information about Nuwa Dony. The only information that Pirouet gives us is that, shortly after his baptism, Dony was “killed in a clan war.”¹⁴⁷ According to Sira Donge, Dony was always involved in war, and was actually killed in a battle that Donge claimed he had unsuccessfully persuaded him not to join.¹⁴⁸ But that he died in a clan war is intriguing: could he have been a warrior, or even a general? That much might never be known. But his death suggests that some converts may have been, and continued to be, warriors before and after conversion; and that they were sometimes called upon to defend their clans. Though we have information on only two of the 1906 converts, their backgrounds suggest the type of Acholi men that the missionaries found and converted: men who hailed mainly from chiefly or otherwise prominent families, some of whom were already widely travelled and versed in Arabic and/or other foreign languages. The CMS class of 1906, like that of 1905, was exclusively male.

Even though the CMS had a promising start, with 2 converts in 1905 and 12 converts in 1906, CMS records show that there was not even a single baptism in 1907; and there is no explanation for this failure to save even a single soul in 1907. However, in July 1907, 5 people joined the reading classes, and they were all baptized on February 5, 1908. These five were: Eliya Lukwi, Anderea Olok, Musa Oryem, Daudi Odongpiny and Musa Kibwola. The first four men came from Patiko Chiefdom while the last one came from Koch Chiefdom. Interestingly, of these five, Chief Lagony of Koch Chiefdom, who had initially declined to send a son to the school, now sent Kibwola. The sons of other prominent men continued to arrive at the school.

¹⁴⁷ Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 288.

¹⁴⁸ Canon Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo” in Source Materials in Uganda History, Africana Collection, Makerere University Library, Kampala, 17/18.

For example, a man that Pirouet names as Aboga, but describes as a *ladit*, a title that to her meant “clan elder,” but most likely was a courtier, sent two sons, Oryem and Odongpiny. Another elder, only named as Owiny, who had initially refused to send his biological son to the school, now sent Lukwi. Finally, Ayong, another clan elder, also sent his son, Olok.

There is, unfortunately, no background information on any of these five 1908 converts, apart from their paternity. But the CMS report of 1907 gives us further glimpses into the men who joined the CMS school. In November, Rev. A.E. Pleydell reported on the state of Acholiland to his Bishop, Tucker. “The whole country,” he wrote “was infested with the spirit of war. It is needless to point out the general effect of this upon the work; *some of the readers joined the raid* [italics mine].” This further suggests that the first group of converts must have been royal messengers, warriors or war leaders.

But on February 25, 1908, perhaps as result of such reports, Bishop Tucker was compelled to order his missionaries out of Acholiland, bringing the work of the CMS to an abrupt end. It was not until 1910 that the British established a permanent administrative center at Gulu in the heart of Acholiland.¹⁴⁹ The impact of the colonial presence was immediate. The CMS missionaries returned to Acholiland the following year, and resumed evangelizing and, more importantly, teaching reading and writing. The post-1910 group of learners, like the earlier ones, came from various backgrounds and attained important positions in the colonial state and the Church. They include, for example, Lacito Okech, who was already working as a royal messenger in Koch Chiefdom before rising up the ranks from a clerk to a chief and a native financial assistant; Nekodemo Latigo, who was already a general in Payira Chiefdom before becoming a chief and, according to Andrew A. Adimola, “became well-known to the readers of

¹⁴⁹ For establishment of Gulu, see: CO 536/ 12271: Opening of Gulu as an Administrative Centre.

the Acholi Magazine for his interesting accounts of inter-tribal wars in ancient time;”¹⁵⁰ and Kalokwera Bartolomayo, who was already a healer before becoming a CMS evangelist. The post-1910 group of learners also included several sons of chiefs and prominent men from various chiefdoms.¹⁵¹ This second group of converts joined earlier graduates in the service of the CMS and the colonial state.

However, much as CMS schooling enhanced the possibilities of these people by making them literate, the vast majority of the CMS school graduates did not owe their prominence exclusively to the CMS school. Most of them were already outstanding before they joined the CMS school, having undergone different pre-colonial training regimes that had turned them into healers, priests, royal messengers, generals or warriors, among other elevated pre-colonial occupations. It is these figures, who began their training and leadership in the pre-colonial era and buttressed their positions by becoming Christians and literate at the dawn of colonial rule, who would go on to monopolize Acholi leadership until the late 1930s, facilitating the transition from the pre-colonial order to the colonial era.

Conclusion

The period between 1850 and 1910 was one of great transformation in Acholiland. The intrusion of the Arab traders into Acholiland, and the subsequent occupation of the region by the Egyptian soldiers, introduced significant changes in Acholiland. Besides the introduction of firearms and the consequent violence in the region, as traders raided villages for slaves and ivory, the presence of these two groups of Arabs also severely damaged relations among Acholi

¹⁵⁰ Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” 166.

¹⁵¹ Nekanori Lukwiya, interview, 18 March 2014. For more on Kalokwera’s biography see Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 398. See Okech, *Tekwaro*, 26-7, for various names of the post-1910 converts.

chiefs, pitting some against others. Finally, and most importantly, the presence of these foreigners created a new social class of Acholi men, well versed in aspects of Arab culture, and fluent in Arabic.¹⁵² It is this new social class that mediated between Acholi chiefs on one hand and Arab traders and soldiers on the other. Because of their work, they acquired considerable wealth and prestige, which attracted other Acholi men to emulate them, especially by learning Arabic. But most of those who learned Arabic were not ordinary Acholi men: they were mainly royals, courtiers and sons of prominent men. Thus, long before the Europeans arrived, there was already a class of Acholi men with knowledge of Arabic and Islam, and of other regional languages, already mediating between the Acholi on one hand and Arabs and other regional polities on the other.

Upon the arrival of the Europeans, some members of this class of Acholi “middle figures,” along with some of their sons, joined the Europeans. In the colonial documents, these figures are generally referred to as interpreters. However, to call them simply interpreters is grossly misleading, for they were not only versed in languages; most of them were also prominent professionals (royal messengers, generals, healers or priests) in their respective chiefdoms. By 1912, many of these men had already become literate and were already working side-by-side with missionaries and colonial agents. They occupied prominent positions as Anglican ministers or colonial chiefs, straddling the late pre-colonial and the early colonial periods. Contrary to the popular assumption that Africans who flourished in early missionary work and colonial service did so mainly because of their missionary education, these Acholi figures prospered in both spheres largely because of their pre-colonial formation and achievements. It is their pre-colonial formation and achievements that had led them to the

¹⁵² See more in Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 342.

mission school in the first place, and made them acceptable as leaders and agents of change among their people.

Unfortunately, most missionaries and colonial agents largely ignored these figures or wrote disparagingly about them, thus deflecting attention from them. This inattention has, in turn, obscured these figures and their more profound roles in the transition from the pre-colonial order to the colonial era. In particular, existing literature is conspicuously silent on the range of knowledge, skills and experiences, and the socio-political legitimacy, that this class of Acholi men brought from the old order to the new one. Therefore, if we are to understand the transition from the precolonial order to the colonial era in Acholiland, we have to take very seriously the precolonial positions and roles of these figures. The processes that produced royal messengers, generals and healers constitute the theme of the next chapter; and Chapter Three focuses on their respective roles. Together, these two chapters will shed new light on Acholi historical figures other than chiefs, and enable us to grasp their roles in the functioning of the older order as well as lay the ground for comprehending their contributions to the colonial state.

CHAPTER 2

The Making of Pre-colonial Intellectuals

In late October 1949, about four decades after the establishment of colonial rule in northern Uganda, F.K Girling, a doctoral candidate in Social Anthropology at Oxford University and a student of E. E. Evans-Pritchard, relocated from Oxford to the “remote” northern town of Gulu to study Acholi modes of livelihood as well as political and social institutions. Nine months later, Girling critiqued the existing works of missionaries and colonial agents, arguing that they had focused their attention almost exclusively on chiefs, marginalizing what he called “subordinate officials.” According to Girling, these “subordinate officials” were crucial in the functioning of their chiefdoms, and he attributed their neglect in existing works to the fact that the Acholi “did not maintain a large retinue of officials and court functionaries.”¹⁵³

Apart from the *Rwot* (chief), Girling claimed to have found only three court functionaries. The first functionary, “the *wang* [military general],” Girling explained, “may perhaps be rendered as the *Rwot*’s confidant, with whom he consulted and who was empowered to act for him in his absence.” The position, Girling noted, was not marked out by royal blood. Rather, the *wang-Rwot* “was frequently a man of a commoner lineage and may have been selected for his personal qualities.” The second functionary, Girling wrote, was the *oo* [*la or pa rwot*], the royal messenger. According to Girling, like the *wang-Rwot*, the *oo* also came from “one of the commoners’ lineages,” but “lived in [the] *Rwot*’s household.” The main role of the *oo*, Girling continued, was “to carry his decisions [chief’s messages] throughout the area.” Thus, the *oo* himself acted as an intermediary between the center and the periphery of political power. Finally, Girling concluded, “In each domain [chiefdom] there is said to have been one important

¹⁵³ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97.

ajwaka, medicine man or herbalist, whom the *Rwot* consulted about planting crops, hunting, sickness, and other matters.” Like the military general and the royal messenger, the medicine man was also a commoner.¹⁵⁴ Aware of the inadequacy of his findings about these courtiers, Girling noted in his private papers, “[t]hese officials and their roles require further examination.”¹⁵⁵

Girling’s account summarizes the types of Acholi leaders that Europeans found on the ground in colonial Acholiland. While Girling was generally correct in observing that every chiefdom possessed each of these figures, large chiefdoms often had many messengers, priests and generals, though there was always one royal diviner regardless of the size or power of the chiefdom. But, as Odongo tell us, some of these positions were sometimes vacant.¹⁵⁶ Each of these three figures performed highly specialized functions, and was thus vital in the working of his polity because, as Steven Feierman noted among the Shambaa, each one of them “held a bit of knowledge [and skill] that was seen as his own.”¹⁵⁷ These are the figures I call precolonial intellectuals, men (and women) who, in the few decades preceding colonization, had undergone specialized training to acquire various positions and perform particular roles in their respective chiefdoms. Later, by virtue of their positions and roles, partly as intermediaries, these figures would facilitate the transition to colonial rule.

Despite Girling’s call to focus on these courtiers and their roles, later historical narratives on Acholiland have continued to focus exclusively on chiefs, ignoring the courtiers who were

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ CO 927/158/4.

¹⁵⁶ Odongo, “The Luo,” 124.

¹⁵⁷ Steven Feierman, “On Socially Composed Knowledge: Remembering a Shambaa Royal Ritual,” in *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania*, ed. Gregory H. Maddox and James L. Giblin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 15.

collectively responsible for the fate of their chiefdoms. As a result, we still know very little about these courtiers in Acholiland. In particular, we know practically nothing about the processes that culminated in their ascendancy to their prominent positions. Nor do we know enough about the type of knowledge and skills they possessed or the roles they played. All we have are simple historical narratives that leave largely untold the story of how Acholi chiefdoms functioned. And yet these figures were among the leaders whom the Europeans found on the ground and who played a crucial role in the transition from the precolonial dispensation to the colonial era.

In 1904, when the Church Missionary Society established a mission school in Acholiland, many of these courtiers became literate, learned English and acquired Christian names. Most of these “men who had [previously] occupied lowly position in traditional political hierarchy,” Girling explained, “entered the service of Europeans as interpreters, messengers and domestic servants. They [also] secured appointments as chiefs when vacancies occurred.” These men, Girling wrote, included Okello Mwaka [Mwoka] who had previously been a war leader in his chiefdom, and became an interpreter for the colonial state before being appointed a chief. Girling also cited other examples, including Lacito Okech who had been a royal messenger, and joined the colonial state as an “interpreter and later a County Chief.” The list goes on. What is even more fascinating about these men, Girling concluded, is that “Each tended to attract to [himself] a number of followers in a way not greatly dissimilar from the former traditional rulers.”¹⁵⁸ These men became prominent colonial or missionary servants on whom Europeans relied in the first three decades of evangelization and colonial rule.

Generally, existing analyses of African colonial employees often take colonial or missionary schools as their starting points. It has almost become standard practice for historians

¹⁵⁸ Girling, *The Acholi*, 189.

to gloss over the pre-colonial positions and roles of the first group of colonial employees, and instead to begin their analyses of these figures from the time they joined a colonial or missionary school. This is largely because most colonial and missionary accounts of these figures begin from the time they joined European institutions, be they schools, churches or colonial state positions. This has created a stark but false dichotomy between their lives in the decades preceding colonization and their positions under colonial rule, in spite of the functional links between their pre-colonial positions and roles and their continued prominence in the colonial era. As such, most works have continued to portray these transitional figures as products of European institutions, typically Christian mission schools. Yet, while some of these figures joined the CMS schools, which further enhanced their possibilities by making them literate, they were essentially products of their indigenous institutions. They were already royal messengers, generals or war leaders and healers, all accomplished professionals. I argue that because scholars tend to neglect the pre-colonial dimensions of these transitional figures' lives, they have failed to understand the essence of a royal messenger, a general or a healer in the pre-colonial era, and inevitably produced shallow historical narratives on the contributions of Africans to the missionary and colonial enterprises.

This chapter aims to correct this oversight by exploring the trajectory of non-royal court figures from their humble backgrounds to prominent positions in Acholi chiefdoms. This shift away from the conventional focus on chiefs brings to the fore a set of previously overlooked figures, and allows us to explore the caliber of leaders that Europeans found in Acholiland in the first decade of the twentieth century. Exploring the trajectories of these figures to various positions changes the ways in which we view the first group of Acholi missionary and colonial employees. It introduces a fresh perspective on these figures by unearthing the various forms of

the knowledge, skills, legitimacy, power and followings that they possessed in the decades leading to colonization, and often deployed in the service of the colonial state. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section explores the process by which knowledge about these figures has been produced, and seeks to explain why they have been neglected for so long. The second part revisits the works of Europeans and the first generation of Acholi writers to trace the events and processes through which courtiers (and other influential figures) were initially identified and later trained for their different roles.

Courtiers and the Production of Knowledge

In the past decade or so, historians have renewed interest in colonial employees.¹⁵⁹ These scholars have made useful contributions to our understanding of the positions of Africans and their roles in the functioning of the colonial state. More importantly, this body of work has also facilitated a shift away from the old model of thinking about these figures merely as “collaborators.” However, this growing body of work does not adequately explain why or how some of these figures rose up the ranks and became important colonial servants. Scholars rarely take into account the prior positions and roles of the first generation of African colonial employees, a generation that had been forged in the decades preceding the colonial era. This generation of colonial employees included diviners, healers, generals, royal messengers, priests and artists who brought to the colonial state a variety of knowledge, skills and experiences acquired in the precolonial era.¹⁶⁰ One of the reasons for the neglect of this generation in

¹⁵⁹ See for example this edited volume by Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks, 2006*; Osborn, “Circle of Iron,” 29-50.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*; Karen E Flint, *Healing Traditions African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008); David Lee Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social identity in the Great Lakes region*

existing literature is the fact that scholars have focused almost exclusively on African employees who worked during the later decades of colonial rule (1920s-1960s), employees who were almost exclusively formed during, and by, the colonial state. The inattention to the precolonial backgrounds of the first generation of African colonial employees has obscured the ways in which their precolonial backgrounds and training contributed to the transition from the precolonial dispensation to the colonial era.

As already intimated, analyses of colonial employees often take colonial or missionary schools as their starting points. As a result, it has become standard practice for historians to do the easy thing: gloss over the lives of the first generation of colonial employees, especially their roles before the arrival of Europeans, and focus on them beginning from the time they joined a colonial or missionary school. As such, most works have continued to portray the first generation of colonial employees as products of European educational institutions. Though this approach might suit later colonial employees who were born during the colonial era, it does not help us to understand fully their transitional counterparts. Instead, it sharply separates the latter from their deeply rooted history, concealing much of what we need to know about them.

This inattention can largely be attributed to the lack of constructive information on the historical processes that produced these figures and on their roles prior to colonization. The inattention has a history of its own. The missionaries, the first group of Europeans to settle in the region, encountered many figures, including courtiers, and they produced the first written sources in the early twentieth century. This body of literature treats these figures in two ways. The bulk of this literature treats some of these figures, especially healers, with scorn. This is because, by keeping prospective converts away from missionaries, healers presented a particular

to the 15th century (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998); Steven Feierman, and John Janzen, *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

challenge to the missionary enterprise. For example, in 1906, Rev. Lloyd complained that the people “follow witches and all of them participate in heathen rituals.” As a result, missionaries perceived healers as rivals in the battle for the souls of the Acholi people, and deliberately disparaged them, dismissing them as mere witches, sorcerers or heathens.¹⁶¹ A handful of other missionary writers did not disparage these figures; but they tell us very little about them, certainly not about their socio-political significance or their precolonial functions. Thus, the works produced by the first missionaries in Acholiland pose two problems for understanding the roles of the pre-colonial courtiers and the historical processes that produced them. First, most of the literature is clearly biased. Second, the less biased literature is not particularly insightful. The result is a dearth of constructive information on the courtiers and other figures that the missionaries sought to suppress.

The colonial state joined the missionaries in their efforts to suppress particular figures among the Acholi courtiers. From the onset of colonial rule, the state sought to co-opt only chiefs from the preexisting structures. The subordinate figures were neglected. Others who wanted to join the colonial service had to be literate in order to qualify for state employment. Thus, many courtiers and other powerful pre-colonial figures were initially relegated to the margins of the colonial state. Moreover, like their missionary counterparts, the colonial agents saw some of these figures as a threat to the colonial enterprise because of their organizational abilities and the followings they commanded. In particular, colonial agents loathed and feared healers in equal measure. Besides writing disparagingly about healers and healing practices that went counter to the colonial enterprise, the colonial state also enacted laws that banned healers, sending many of

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 163-4.

them underground.¹⁶² Colonial reports are replete with cases of healers being deported from their home areas to neutralize their powers.¹⁶³ These activities further silenced courtiers and other influential figures.

These European attitudes and actions had profound consequences for the production of knowledge about the subordinate court figures. Besides producing a biased and shallow history of these figures, distorting their functions and portraying them as undesirable remnants of the old dispensation, the attitudes of missionaries and colonial agents also trickled down to the first generation of literate Acholi intellectuals. Having attended a mission school where they were taught by missionaries who were opposed to subordinate and other powerful figures, and because they later worked in missionary or colonial state projects, the early Acholi elite adopted or imitated the likes and dislikes of their mentors. As a result, in order to reinforce their positions in the rapidly changing colonial era, the first generation of literate Acholi wrote selectively, shunning themes that were likely to endanger their positions as colonial or Church employees.¹⁶⁴ More importantly, because some courtiers had already become chiefs, they played up the glory and importance of the apical leaders clearly relevant to the shapes of imperial thinking and practice of hierarchy. Consequently, the early Acholi writers either entirely ignored courtiers and other figures, or wrote cursorily about them. Yet some of these early writers had themselves been courtiers in their chiefdoms.

For example, in his renowned work, *Tekwaro Acholi (Acholi History)* (1953), Lacito Okech, one of the first generation of literate Acholi intellectuals, states that he had been a royal

¹⁶² R.M. Bere, "Awich: A Biographical Note and a Chapter of Acholi History," *Uganda Journal* 10, 2(1946), 78.

¹⁶³ See, for example, WO 106/253. However, there is no information If/when any of them returned home; how people understood their exile—the new places they had been, people they had met, and knowledge they'd acquired.

¹⁶⁴ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 31.

messenger in Koch Chiefdom prior to colonization and evangelization. But he does not tell us how he ascended to that position; instead, he simply and hastily enumerates his roles.¹⁶⁵ If, indeed, Okech had been a royal messenger, why did he not feel proud enough to tell us more about the position and how he ascended to it? The answer lies largely in the fact that as a Christian convert and a colonial state chief, Okech was expected to portray a radical break with his “heathen” past and to conform to the Christian code of conduct.

Moreover, as Heike Behrend has argued, “[b]eing a Christian, i.e. Protestant, was a prerequisite of acquiring a position of a chief” in colonial Acholiland.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Okech must have deemed it injudicious to delve into his precolonial formation and roles, for to do so would have jeopardized his standing with his European mentors; and he must have deliberately refrained from writing about his precolonial self and about other colonial servants whose precolonial titles he cited.¹⁶⁷ But this kind of self-censorship is not unique or necessarily original: Kodesh’s work on the Buganda Kingdom demonstrates how Ganda intellectuals, like Apollo Kagwa, also suppressed aspects of the kingdoms’ history by writing selectively about it.¹⁶⁸ And Okech also claims to have read the works of Apollo Kagwa, which may have influenced his own authorial stance. In sum, the lack of information on courtiers and other powerful figures is a product of the context in which the first generation of literate Acholi intellectuals were writing, and of the deliberate choices they made on what to include in their works. This kind of self-censorship further suppressed the courtiers and other influential figures in Acholi historiography.

¹⁶⁵ Patrick William Otim, “The Emergence of Local Intellectuals: Lacito Okech and the Writing of Early Twentieth-Century Acholi History in Northern Uganda” (MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012).

¹⁶⁶ Heike, *Alice Lakwena*, 115.

¹⁶⁷ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 5 & 9.

¹⁶⁸ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 32-33.

Taken together, European bias and misrepresentation conspired with local self-censorship to constrain the efforts of scholars working in the late colonial era and after. This explains why Girling, the first professional anthropologist in the region, did not find any constructive literature on Acholi courtiers. As mentioned earlier, scholars have largely ignored Girling's early call to examine these courtiers and have for the most part continued to focus on chiefs. However, some Acholi intellectuals, especially among the second and third generations of missionary-trained figures, who wrote in the less constrained post-colonial context, have turned their attention to the courtiers. Unlike their European and Acholi predecessors, later Acholi writers have chronicled the courtiers and portrayed them more positively; but they, too, have faced some challenges, although of a slightly different nature. The case of Onyango Odongo offers a constructive example.

In 1978, Onyango Odongo produced perhaps the best account on Acholi courtiers, though his work has not been published. Upon reading his manuscript, I was struck by the depth of his account, and I became interested in the process of its production. In an interview I conducted with him in 2014, Odongo told me that he was born in 1921, a decade after the colonial state established a station in Acholiland. His father was a courtier in the Puranga Chiefdom and became "a minor chief in the British colonial administration." In his manuscript, Odongo states that he received two types of education. First, he writes, "[I] received very deep traditional education of the Acholi people during my childhood." Later, he adds, "I went first to the Catholic Mission, but I was later forcibly taken away from the Catholic Mission on orders of the Senior Protestant chief who said that the Catholic Church could not groom chiefs, and taken to [the] CMS school."¹⁶⁹ Upon completing his schooling, Odongo joined the colonial state service,

¹⁶⁹ Odongo, "The Luo," 124.

starting as an interpreter in 1937, and joining the army in 1940, during the Second World War. After Uganda's independence in 1962, Odongo worked for the Government of Uganda as a teacher, clerk and district administrator before retiring in 1988.

According to Odongo, his interest in writing history stemmed from reading the works of Lacito Okech and Reuben Anywar, members of the first generation of literate Acholi intellectuals. He told me: "I was struck by the scantiness of Okech's and Anywar's knowledge on Luo migrations, and by their omission of eastern Acholi chiefdoms, especially my Puranga Chiefdom." These inadequacies, Odongo claimed, prompted him to begin his research in 1955. Odongo further revealed that his interest in history was enhanced when, in the 1970s, Prof. J.B. Webster made him his research assistant on the Uganda History Project, an initiative of the History Department of Makerere University. The project culminated in a book that Odongo co-authored with Webster: *The Central Luo during Aconya* (1976).

I then asked Odongo why he had dedicated an entire chapter to courtiers, and why his own manuscript was not yet published. In response, he revealed that his father had given him valuable information, and he "felt that because the European and Acholi writers, including Okech and Anywar, had not written on the courtiers at all, these important figures were at risk of being completely forgotten." On why his own manuscript was not yet published, Odongo explained that he had successively presented his manuscript to three publishers, and that each of them had advised him to omit the "three chapters on Acholi religion, rituals and courtiers because their readers would find it difficult to understand these chapters." But, on each occasion, Odongo told me, "I rejected the advice because I felt that these three chapters were the core of

my work.” After the manuscript had been rejected for the third time in 1979, Odongo told me, “I gave up and buried it in my house, but over the years, I kept on adding new things.”¹⁷⁰

Odongo’s comments point to the impact of Euro-centric tendencies in the publishing world and to some of the challenges that Acholi historians faced in the post-independence period: the Euro-centric framework continued to determine what constituted proper historical writing and suppressed certain themes and their corresponding personalities, including courtiers, relegating them to the margins of historical writing. As a result, these figures rarely surface in published works and may seem to be virtually forgotten; but they are still popular and vividly remembered among Acholi elders.

The fieldwork I conducted in Acholiland from 2013 to 2015, and the unpublished histories that I collected, gave me a much more positive view of the courtiers than the one I had encountered in the European literature, and strengthened my resolve to recover these figures. During my fieldwork in Acholiland, I interviewed 8 current chiefs, 24 courtiers from different chiefdoms and descendants of past prominent chiefs and courtiers. I also interviewed other elders and Acholi intellectuals. The majority of my informants were male, and most interviews took place in their homes. The discussions about Acholi cultural institutions were not initiated by me. When I began my fieldwork in 2013, people were already talking about their current chiefs and other principal characters in their polities. Sam Lawino, an investigative journalist of the *Daily Monitor*, one of Uganda’s leading dailies, had initiated the discussions when he broke a story about a major corruption scandal in the Acholi cultural institution.

In December 2013, Lawino reported: “The Acholi Paramount Chief, Rwot David Onen Achana II, could be in trouble after the Netherlands Kingdom asked the cultural leader to refund

¹⁷⁰ Onyango Odongo, interview, 13 August 2014.

Shs230 million [part of the Shs1.3 billion] donated to the institution to help end [the Lord's Resistance Army] conflicts in the area." According to Lawino, in a letter to the Paramount Chief, "the Netherlands Ambassador to Uganda, Alphons Hennekens, demanded that the money be refunded or the cultural institution faces legal action." The blame for this scandal was put squarely on the chief and his prime minister, Kenneth Oketa. According to Lawino, the chief did not deny the scandal; rather, he asked his subjects to unite and "write back to the ambassador for negotiations."¹⁷¹

To make matters worse, the scandal was broadcast on all local radio stations, and the vernacular newspapers carried the story. This ignited fierce criticism of the chief and other people at the helm of the Acholi cultural institution. Many elders reflected on the scandal, and sought to understand why the chief and his courtiers had misappropriated money meant for the Acholi people. They drew on the past to make sense of this present predicament, and chastised the paramount chief and his premier. Many Acholi called for the disbandment of the institution.

In an interview with an elder whom I will call Odong, I was told, "We do not know these people." And when I probed him, Odong expressed a sentiment shared by many of my informants: "The titles of paramount chief and prime minister were not in Acholi. They were created by the British, and recently re-imposed on us by [President] Museveni, who wanted to manipulate the Acholi through one chief to get their votes." What did you then have in the past, I asked? "Every chiefdom had its chief who had his servants. There was a healer, a royal messenger, a priest and a general. They were properly identified and trained by courtiers and elders before they could take up their positions. They were not appointed by the chief as we see

¹⁷¹ Sam Lawino, "Acholi king in trouble over Shs230m donor fund," *The Daily Monitor*, December 03, 2013, 17.

today,” Odong replied.¹⁷² In another interview, a 90-year-old man whom I shall call Odoki asked me, “Do you know why our paramount chief is failing?” When I eagerly confessed my ignorance, Odoki was quick to educate me: “Well, when the British took over our chiefship system, and recently President Museveni emulated them, they forgot one thing.” He then paused for a long time before continuing. “You know,” he finally said, “every chiefdom had its most powerful *ajwaka* [healer/diviner] whose role was to divine and reveal in good time people or forces that were working against the institution, and eliminate them. If our chief was not a Christian and had an *ajwaka*, this theft would not have occurred.” Today, he added, “the people working for the chief are not brought up in the ways of the Acholi. In the past, different lineages nominated young people who went through a long process of training by elders, and the best among them were assigned roles. They were not appointed by the chief.”¹⁷³

I listened studiously to many such accounts in different homes, and they all contained a recurrent theme: pre-colonial subordinate officials were very special figures, and they were crucial to the running of chiefdom affairs. Unknown to early European observers and writers, courtiers were carefully selected and rigorously trained for their roles. Most people I interviewed affirmed that, contrary to current practice, in the past, courtiers “were properly identified and trained,” pointing to the special path that these figures trod to prominence. While one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that some of my informants may have romanticized their accounts of the governance structures and performance of precolonial Acholi, especially in view of their prevailing disenchantment with the current cultural institution, they all concurred that young men were “properly identified,” and then “brought up [trained] in the ways of the Acholi,” a

¹⁷² John Odong, interview, 23 December 2013.

¹⁷³ Jenaro Odoki, interview, 21 December 2013.

consensus that we cannot simply dismiss. If the Acholi elders agree that young men were “properly identified,” and then “brought up in the ways of the Acholi,” what did these two processes involve or consist in? Answers to this question will enable us to comprehend the basis of the uniqueness and powers of some of these figures, and to challenge the conventional view in Acholi historiography that ascending to power was generally fortuitous. To explore how prospective courtiers were identified, we have to revisit the early literature produced by Europeans and the successive generations of missionary-trained Acholi intellectuals.

The Socio-politics of Identifying Children with Special Attributes

That individuals were trained to become courtiers (or other influential figures such as healers) may be apparent. But how these individuals were selected is not. Scholars have long neglected the question of what distinguished some young people and made them qualify for training for, and appointment to, positions of leadership in precolonial Acholiland. Generally, it is assumed that court officials were merely named by the chiefs as an act of political patronage or favoritism; but the selection of future courtiers and other influential figures, such as healers and diviners, was a more complex and broadly rooted social process. In 1904, Rev. Lloyd, perhaps bothered by the power healers wielded over people, embarked on a correct path by asking who could become a healer. Lloyd wrote that he had been told that most of “the powerful sorcerers [healers] were those born with deformities.”¹⁷⁴ While Lloyd did not explain the link between being born with physical deformities and becoming a healer, he, at least, provided us with a clue to the process of selecting a future healer. Similar stories surfaced numerous times over the course of my fieldwork. For example, informants narrated to me that prominent military

¹⁷⁴ Makerere University Archives: AR/CMS/98/7.

generals in their chiefdoms were born with one eye or spoke to their parents while they were still in the womb. Initially, these stories did not make sense to me. But when I returned to the twentieth-century ethnographies, I began to gain glimpses into the events and processes that enabled adults to identify potential courtiers, healers and diviners, right from their childhood. The works revealed three important occasions when the potential of a person would be manifested or identified.

For the yet-to-be-born, the first occasion was while they were still in the womb. Oral tradition from eastern Acholiland reveal that *Jok*, the spirit that governed the life of the people, would possess a fetus, and the fetus would communicate with its parents who would then know that their as-yet-unborn baby was endowed with special talents. This account is also contained in the work of Lakana [John] Odwar, a member of the second generation of the CMS-trained Acholi elite, who wrote much later in the 1960s, although he treated the subject with contempt.¹⁷⁵ At birth, such babies were welcomed with an immediate public rite.¹⁷⁶ They had predetermined names: Ojok for a boy and Ajok for a girl. These names derive from the noun *jok*, which signifies the powers both to help and to punish the living.¹⁷⁷ Babies given these names were believed to be unique and strongly linked to *Jok*, an association that could be harnessed for the good of the people.

However, neither oral nor written sources tell us much more about the circumstances that attended the birth of such babies. For example, we do not know who was, or had to be, present at birth, or what kind of ritual was performed. But given that such babies would already have

¹⁷⁵ Lakana Odwar, 'Kit me Nyodo I Acholi,' (Acholi Birthing) (Gulu: Incomplete manuscript, 1967?) archived at the Makerere University Archive.

¹⁷⁶ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 179. See the rules in pages 253 and 265.

¹⁷⁷ In Acholi, the noun prefixes *o-* and *a-* serve as gender markers, with *o-* and *a-* designating males and females respectively.

communicated their uniqueness by speaking while in the womb, it is not farfetched to imagine that such prenatal intimation would elicit a flurry of consultations by the parents. The parents would most likely consult different diviners to help them prepare appropriately for the impending birth. In the course of my fieldwork, I interviewed dozens of people about this type of birth. Informants noted that healers usually presided over a special public birth ceremony to welcome every baby who had communicated while in the womb. Therefore, adults must have activated the process that separated children who spoke in the womb from their ordinary counterparts well before such babies were born. But this mode of identifying special babies was not peculiarly Acholi

The norm seems to have been observed in a broader regional context that extends beyond Acholiland, which gives us more glimpses into how this birth might have been treated in Acholiland. For example, in discussing nineteenth-century authority in Busoga in Eastern Uganda, David Cohen comments briefly about “speaking in the womb,” noting that it was a common way of identifying “the [yet unborn] young prince with the symbols of highest office,” and it attracted wide attention. Cohen adds that people came from all parts of the Kingdom and ritualists arrived “to offer advice and complete their ritual assignments.”¹⁷⁸ The rituals performed in Busoga, it appears, did not differ much from those in Acholiland, at least in terms of drawing people, especially ritual specialists. But unlike in Busoga where this baby was automatically guaranteed leadership, in Acholiland this child was only marked out, and still required to exhibit his or her special capabilities by distinguishing himself or herself in deeds before he or she could be trained for a particular role.

¹⁷⁸ David William Cohen, *Womanafu's Bunafu: A Study of Authority in a Nineteenth-Century African Community* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1977), 33-4.

In an effort to explain the powers of children called *jok* and how they were tested, a healer explained to me: “if a child of *jok* (*latin jok*) is angry with the parents, that child can make them sick; but the child could also cure the parents if they were sick.”¹⁷⁹ This type of story about testing the power of “a child of *jok*” cropped up several times during my fieldwork. Those who failed to demonstrate their powers to either cure or harm were neglected; and of them, it would be said that their *jok* was not strong. In 1938, a convert explained to a missionary that when a child is “named Ojok or Ajok,” names given to children who spoke in the womb, but is not a healer, it means that “the *jok* of that child is weak”, and they live like “ordinary persons.”¹⁸⁰ This pre-natal mode of talent identification provides the first valuable insights into ways in which adults set some young people apart for particular positions in society.

Those who did not “speak in the womb” could still manifest their special attributes at birth. Adults paid attention to the way a baby was born, for it allowed them to identify babies with special attributes. The first Europeans who expressed interest in the way the Acholi treated birth described it as a closely guarded event. For example, in 1906, a CMS missionary observed that “only one or two people” attended to birth, and the “heathen categorized births into two types: normal births and ‘*jok anywala*’ or godly birth.”¹⁸¹ The birth attendant, S. Higgins, a CMS missionary, clarified, was “normally an old woman with considerable experience,” and her role

¹⁷⁹ Otto Odora, interview, 29 December 2014.

¹⁸⁰ See Paper of Mario Cisternino, a collection of writing of other missionaries that Cisternino used to write his book. These papers are in the Comboni Missionary Library in Layibi, Gulu Town. Hereafter, I cite as Layibi Papers, Comboni Missionaries.

¹⁸¹ Makerere University Archives, AR/CMS/98/7. This same quotation is found in S. Higgins, “Acholi Birth Customs,” *Uganda Journal* 30, 2(1966), 175. See also Apoko, “*At Home in the Village*,” 49; a detailed account can be found in Christine Achieng, “Birth Customs among the Acholi” (BA thesis, Makerere University, 1980), 25-40.

was to identify and announce the type of birth.¹⁸² Higgins notes that the type of birth could reveal the baby's link to *Jok* and determine its name which, too, signified the child's link to *Jok*.

Throughout Acholiland, normal birth was either when a “baby...comes out head first,” facing upward, or when a “baby...comes out [head first] facing downward.” Babies born in the former position are “called by any name.”¹⁸³ In 1912, Rev. A.L. Kitching noted that their names were often circumstantial: the “circumstances of the birth will often suggest a name...and from the name much may be argued as to the circumstances of the parents at the time.”¹⁸⁴ This means that if the baby was born during the rain—*kot*, the name reflected that fact: such a male baby was called Okot and a female one was named Akot, to recall the circumstance of their birth. But female babies who came out facing downward (*uma*) would be named Auma, and male ones would be called Ouma.¹⁸⁵ These babies did not have any special relationship with *Jok*, and if they had any special attributes, they would have to demonstrate them during general training, which we shall come to shortly.

On the other hand, “godly birth” involved babies coming out of the womb in a unique position or number, or with some distinctive body features.¹⁸⁶ The narratives about “godly birth” reveal that all such babies had predetermined names, and they were apparently associated with *Jok*, although with varying levels of association. Existing literature reveals four types of godly birth. First, if a baby emerged from the womb legs first, it would be named “Adoc if it is a girl,

¹⁸² S. Higgins, “Acholi Birth Customs,” *Uganda Journal* 30, 2(1966), 175.

¹⁸³ Apoko, “*At Home in the Village*,” 49.

¹⁸⁴ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 177.

¹⁸⁵ Apoko, “*At Home in the Village*,” 49. For more on naming see Achieng, “Birth Customs,” 41-51; Jalobo Jacan Ngomlokojo, *The Acholi, my Souvenir* (Kampala: J. J. Ngomlokojo, 1999), 122-140.

¹⁸⁶ Higgins, “Acholi Birth Customs,” 178.

and Odoc if it is a boy.”¹⁸⁷ Secondly, the birth of twins was also understood as godly, and it attracted great attention. Unlike the birth of children who emerged from the womb legs first, the birth of twins, as Kitching observed, was different: “many rules have to be observed,” and one of them was the immediate performance of a public rite at the family shrine.¹⁸⁸ The Acholi anthropologist Christine Achieng argues that the essence of this ceremony was to thank “the gods of birth so that they may grant more of their pleasure to the people and the parents to bear more twins.”¹⁸⁹ Evidently, therefore, the birth of twins was an occasion of immense joy because their association with *Jok* could be harnessed for the good of the community. If the first twin is a girl, she is called Apiyo, and if it is a boy, he is called Opiyo. The second twin is named Acen if a girl and Ocen if a boy.¹⁹⁰ Failure to perform a public ceremony following the birth of twins constituted an affront to *Jok*, and was believed to result in illness, infertility, or even death in the family. “In the case of the death of twins,” Rev. Kitching wrote, “they were not said to have died, but to have flown up to heaven,” or disappeared.¹⁹¹ The mandatory public rite and the implied ability to transcend death suggest the sort of powers that twins were believed to possess, and account for the special attention they received at birth. This further suggests that babies associated with *Jok* were not all equal: some were more revered than others.

The third type of godly birth was that of the first two consecutive children born after twins: they, too, were automatically considered to belong to *Jok*. The baby that followed

¹⁸⁷ Apoko, “*At Home in the Village*,” 49.

¹⁸⁸ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 179. See the rules in pages 253 and 265.

¹⁸⁹ Achieng, “Birth Customs,” 35.

¹⁹⁰ Apoko, “*At Home in the Village*,” 49.

¹⁹¹ For details of the ceremony see Achieng, “Birth Customs,” 31-36. Similarly, among the Baganda of Buganda Kingdom, twins do not die: they “fly”.

immediately after twins, if a girl, was named Akello, and if a boy, it was called Okello. The second child after the twins would be named Adong if it was a girl and Odong if it was a boy. However, unlike the birth of twins, but like that of babies who emerged from the womb legs first, the two consecutive births after twins did not merit any special ceremonies; and the status and potential power of the children themselves was not clearly defined.

Finally, if a child was born with what we now call physical defects or abnormalities, or what Rev. Lloyd called “deformities,” such as “with teeth, with a hare-lip, with short arms, or with partial paralysis,” or with an abnormal number of fingers or toes, the abnormalities were “considered to be a sign from *Jok* that the child is his special gift to the family. The names Ojok (for a boy) or Ajok (for a girl) were given to the baby.”¹⁹² Significantly, the names given to these children were the same as those given to babies who “spoke in the womb.” Moreover, the birth of a baby with physical defects, of a baby that “spoke in the womb,” and of twins, all elicited special public ceremonies. Because of the mandatory feasts, one can conclude that adults were actively engaged in distinguishing babies who “spoke in the womb,” twins and children born with abnormalities from others: they were thought to have the strongest association to *Jok*. The status of the two immediate and consecutive followers of twins, like that of babies who emerged from the womb legs first, remains unclear, even though they were still somehow associated with *Jok*.

Taken together, this account affords us yet another glimpse into the intriguing circumstances that set some children apart right from birth, if not while still in the womb. The account also clarifies the answer that Lloyd received when he enquired about healers: “the

¹⁹² Higgins, “Acholi Birth Customs,” 178.

powerful sorcerers [healers]...were those born with deformities.”¹⁹³ Some of these people are believed to have derived their powers from their perceived close association with *Jok*. The circumstances of their birth bestowed upon them a kind of spiritual nobility that imbued them with special powers, putting them on the path to prominence. Yet, as already mentioned, despite their supposed close links with *Jok*, these babies, like those who spoke in the womb, did not all automatically grow into powerful individuals. They had to demonstrate their potential before they could be trained for any special position.

Finally, children who did not manifest any connection to *Jok*, by either “speaking in the womb” or being of “special birth,” were not automatically disqualified from future prominence. Their special talents were identified by adults during the general training which took place during the maturation stage. Unlike the first two modes of talent identification in which *Jok* was perceived to play a critical role, the general training was controlled and conducted by parents. Although most commentators on this training agree that it was meant to equip all children with basic life skills and knowledge, there was much more to it. Tutors also used the general training to identify “normally” born children with exceptional abilities such as physical stamina, courage and a “sharp” memory.

The first phase of the training began at an early age, and it was largely conducted by parents or guardians. In 1912, Rev. Kitching noted that the general training begun at about six years, adding that a child below six years of age was generally “betrothed by its parent to some other infant or to one many years older than itself.”¹⁹⁴ The period from about six to thirteen years, J.P. Ocitti noted in his illuminating study of indigenous education in twentieth-century

¹⁹³ Makerere University Archives, AR/CMS/98/7.

¹⁹⁴ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 173; see also Ocitti, *African Indigenous Education*, 47.

Acholiland, “was considered by most parents to be the true foundation years for proper future adult life.”¹⁹⁵ In between these years, Ocitti explains, children were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to play their respective gender-specific roles in the future. More precisely, boys in this age-bracket were introduced to “gathering firewood for making outdoor fire...at dusk; being sent out as messengers; sweeping the compound, herding [livestock] in the wild pasture, tethering some domestic animals.”¹⁹⁶ Kitching points out that girls in this age-bracket were introduced to “the mysteries of food preparation and beer-brewing,” central to their future adult roles.¹⁹⁷

The second phase of the training began from about thirteen years when boys began their training as “warriors.” As Rev. Lloyd observed, boys in this age group were considered “the ‘bucks’ of the society.”¹⁹⁸ They were introduced to using spears and arrows, and as E.N.T. Grove observed, whenever these boys play, they “are always playing at war and so practicing for the real thing.”¹⁹⁹ In the 1930s, Camuconi [Samson] Okelo Okwir, one of the early Christian converts of the 1910s, recorded in his autobiography that courage, spear-throwing and the ability to guard and defend oneself against violent aggressors were essential skills that adults looked out for in adolescent boys.²⁰⁰ It is partly the levels of courage and excellence at these skills that must have distinguished the more talented adolescents from their less talented counterparts. But these

¹⁹⁵ Ocitti, *African Indigenous Education*, 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹⁷ Kitching, *From Darkness to Light*, 175.

¹⁹⁸ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 174-5.

¹⁹⁹ E.T.N. Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” *Sudan Notes and Records* 2, 3(1919), 171.

²⁰⁰ Camuconi Okelo Okwir, “Autobiography of Camuconi Okelo Okwir,” in *Source Materials in Uganda History*, Africana Collection, Makerere University Library, Kampala; see also A.M. Bishop and D. Ruffel “A History of the Upper Nile Diocese,” Africana Collection, Makerere University Library, Kampala, 14-15: AF Q 276.761 BIS.

were not the only important attributes. J.P. Ocitti tells us that for boys and girls above thirteen, a good memory was another very important attribute. According to Ocitti, adults used riddle games to teach children the art of memorizing. “Riddles,” Ocitti writes, “were not intended to train children to think, but rather to test their ability to remember.” He adds, “A close examination of Acholi riddles would indicate that each had more than one correct answer, but only one of the numerous answers was accepted by the community as being correct.” “In a society that had no written culture,” Ocitti concludes, “a retentive memory was an asset required in every individual. Thus the game of riddles helped to train children’s memory.”²⁰¹

As we have already noted, parents and other tutors also used the general training to identify children with unique talents. Physique, stamina, courage, memory and skills such as spear-throwing and the ability to guard and defend oneself against violent aggressors were all useful attributes that tutors looked out for and sought to develop. According to Onyango Odongo, children who excelled in this training joined those who had been identified by *jok*, and they were placed in a talent pool called “*lugwok paco*” or *lugwok gang* according to other informants.²⁰² The term *lugwok* means “keeper” while *paco* and *gang* are synonymous, and they both mean “home.” These two terms—*lugwok paco* and *lugwok gang* or home-guards—recurred over and over in my interviews. By placing a child in this pool, parents separated him or her from “ordinary” children.

Many of my informants in Acholiland narrated to me the manner in which *lugwok paco* were distinguished from other lads. These youth, informants told me, wore *lak lyec*, a small piece of ivory, which they clipped on the hair atop their heads, and *yat cing*, an arm-band amulet.

²⁰¹ Ocitti, *African Indigenous Education*, 53.

²⁰² Odongo, “The Luo,” 60; Otto Odora, interview, 29 December 2014.

Obong Odoki, an intelligent old man whose father had served as a royal messenger of the Patiko Chiefdom, provided perhaps the best insight. In his own words, “Youths selected for their talents were given small pieces of *lak lyec* which were clipped in the hair, and *yat cing*.” The *lak lyec*, he explained, “was to distinguish the selected few from the rest, and to imbue them with knowledge.” *Yat cing*, on the other hand, “was meant to ward off jealousy and any harm.”²⁰³

Missionary travelogues and oral traditions corroborate Okodi’s assertions. Describing the heads of young men in 1907, Rev. A. B. Lloyd noted, “Right on the crown of the head just behind the cone, a curved spike of ivory is fastened on to the hair, the point bent towards the front. This spike varies in length; some I saw were probably six inches, while others were not more than two inches. Brass and iron rings are wound tightly above the biceps of the arms, and also around the wrists.”²⁰⁴ Although Lloyd does not specify that the wearers belonged to a special category of lads, the pictures that he took in 1903 clearly show that not all young men wore these ornaments, a fact that Lloyd must have missed. This suggests that Lloyd was not a keen observer, and that he generalized the wearing of these objects to all the male youths, thereby missing the significance of the ornaments. An examination of oral traditions associated with elephants offers further insights into the type of young men who wore a curved spike of ivory on their heads, and why they did so.

The elephant has long been the symbol of the Acholi. Even today, both the *Ker Kwaro Acholi*, the Acholi Cultural Institution, and Gulu University, the first public university in Acholiland, use the elephant as their emblem. Ethnographers working in Acholiland in the early twentieth century and later Acholi writers have highlighted the importance of the elephant to the

²⁰³ Obong Odoki, interview, 24 September 2013.

²⁰⁴ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 174-5.

Acholi people. Akena pa Ojok, hereafter referred to as p'Ojok, provides perhaps the best account of the relationship between the Acholi and the elephant. Building on the oral traditions he collected, p'Ojok notes, "The elephant is an intrinsic part of the ... Acholi [who] have lived side by side with the elephant from time immemorial. They love the elephant and adore its size and strength." He adds, they adore "its *unfaltering memory, sharp sense of hearing, intelligence* [Italics mine] and its overpowering presence and dignity." Moreover, p'Ojok adds, "... elephants look after their young ones collectively, in a nursery, mourn their dead, [and] bury or carry their dead to a common ancestral burial ground 'dipo lyec'."²⁰⁵ According to p'Ojok, the oral traditions portray the elephant as a unique animal: highly intelligent and "responsible."

p'Ojok's description of the characteristics of the elephant furnishes us with the elements we need to understand the type of young people who wore the "curved spike of ivory." p'Ojok's interpretation of the symbolic significance of the elephant to the Acholi suggests that the young men wearing "a curved spike of ivory," whom Lloyd observed and photographed, were no ordinary lads: they must have been *lugwok paco*. The "curved spike of ivory" on their heads served two purposes: first, to inspire them to emulate the elephant's "unfaltering memory, sharp sense of hearing, intelligence" and sense of responsibility, the core qualities of good leadership in Acholiland; and secondly, to distinguish them from their less worthy counterparts.²⁰⁶ Moreover, the "brass and iron rings" that Lloyd saw "wound tightly above the biceps of the arms, and also around the wrists" may have had much more than the aesthetic value that Lloyd attributed to them. They were most probably amulets meant, in Odoki's opinion, to "ward off jealousy and any harm" to these talented youths.

²⁰⁵ Akena pa Ojok, "The Acoli Love the Elephant," *The Acoli Times*, June 22, 2011, <http://www.acholitimes.com/>

²⁰⁶ Obong Odoki, interview, 24 September 2013.

In sum, these scraps of evidence would appear to corroborate Odoki's claim, and to point to the trajectory that outstanding young people followed to prominence, under the guidance of adults. After being nominated to the *lugwok paco*, they were distinguished from their ordinary counterparts, symbolically imbued with the uniquely positive attributes of the elephant, and protected from danger by wearing amulets. But those identified and selected as *lugwok paco* still had to undergo a long and complex training process before they could qualify as experts in a variety of fields; and some failed to qualify. To understand the knowledge, skills and powers of royal messengers, generals and healers – figures who dominated the first two decades of colonial rule in the twentieth century – we must now examine their training, in spite of the paucity of the sources available to us. In order to piece together the scope and content of the training, I have drawn on fragments of works produced by European and Acholi scholars in the twentieth century, works of the later generation of missionary-trained Acholi intellectuals and Acholi oral traditions. I also examine the significance of specific Acholi words in European documents. Even then, these sources only allow us to paint a general picture of the specialized training that a *lugwok paco* would have to undergo before graduating as a royal messenger, a healer or a military general. The descriptions that follow are not intended to suggest a static or spatially uniform curriculum: specific aspects of content must have varied from time to time or from one chiefdom to another.

The Making of Royal Messengers

The Royal Messenger, locally known as *la-or pa rwot*, or *la-kwena pa rwot*, was a significant courtier among the subordinate chiefdom officials. The titles *la-or pa rwot* and *la-kwena pa rwot* are synonymous and they mean “the messenger of the chief,” hereinafter referred

to as the royal messenger. Perhaps of significance in this title is the phrase *pa rwot*, which literally means “of the chief.” It suggests that, apart from royal messengers, there were other types of messengers, for other “big men”, and that, in the profession, *la-or pa rwot* were *la crème de la crème*. The position, as Girling has pointed out, was very important. It was neither hereditary nor exclusively reserved for one person at a time: evidence shows that large chiefdoms may have had more than one royal messenger. For example, Rev. Lloyd reported that, while he was in Bunyoro Kingdom in 1903, Chief Awich of Payira Chiefdom sent five royal messengers to invite him to introduce Christianity to Acholiland.²⁰⁷ While it is possible that the “five royal messengers” were actually one royal messenger and his entourage, it is equally possible that all the five were messengers. Whatever the case, this is clear evidence of the core role of royal messengers: they mediated between their chiefs and other chiefs and foreigners. But Europeans missed the significance of this role, and simply called royal messengers “runners.” But who were these early twentieth-century royal messengers? How did one become a royal messenger? And what kind of knowledge and skills did a royal messenger possess?

These are difficult questions to answer because of the lack of documentation, the bias and shallowness of European accounts and the self-censorship of the first generation of native Acholi historians. But an analysis of fragments of information from missionaries, colonial agents and later generations of mission-trained historians, along with my fieldwork data, yields some broad outlines of the training that royal messengers underwent, and the knowledge and skills that they possessed in the decades preceding colonization. As we have already noted, royal messengers emerged from a talent pool referred to as *lugwok paco*. As *lugwok paco*, they qualified for training at the Clan Council, the second most important body after the Chiefdom Assembly

²⁰⁷ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 160.

(*Gure Madit*). The Clan Council, as Onyango Odongo points out, had three major functions: “Firstly, it played [the] dual role of a legislature and [a] forum for [the] training of potential ‘Lugwok Paco’; secondly, it played the role of [the] clan court; and thirdly, it was the clan electoral college, where young men...could be identified and elected democratically to represent their clans at the Gure Madit.”²⁰⁸ Inherent in the Clan Council roles are some of the competencies that the training was meant to impart to the *lugwok paco*. First, because the Clan Council was also the Clan Legislature, specialists at the council introduced the *lugwok paco* to the clan legislation principles, customs and procedures. These norms were related to core societal values regarding issues such as murder, marriage, disputes and the general administration of the clan.

Secondly, because the Clan Council also acted as the clan court, the “guardians of the society” were schooled in such important areas as the history of their clan, mediation principles and skills, legal precedents (*ongon* in Acholi) used to argue cases in court, and the determination of legal cases.²⁰⁹ Odongo provides more specific insights into the training for the determination of legal cases. In the clan courts, he explains, the young men were observed, and “the experienced elder, particularly the ‘Rwot Kaka’ [Clan Elder] who chaired the meetings, would earmark such potential young leaders who impressed the Council.” If a young man “continued to distinguish himself as a creative political thinker during discussions,” Odongo adds, “before he was finally elected [to the Chiefdom Assembly], the elders would first subject such prospective representative of their clan to rigorous tests” to ensure he was absolutely the right person to represent them. For example, “during their clan meetings,” Odongo explains, “the elders would

²⁰⁸ Odongo, “The Luo,” 62.

²⁰⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 85.

purposely ask any young man they wanted to groom or assess to give his opinion on many complicated issues, particularly ...[highly contentious] disagreements and family disputes, to ascertain his...[astuteness] as a [legal and] political thinker.” As Odongo concludes, young lads, with a sharp mind and a good memory, who impressed elders at the clan level, were eventually sent to the “chiefdom assembly called ‘Gure Madit,’ to represent their clan,” and undergo further training.

There is much less detail about the specifics of the training at the chiefdom level.²¹⁰ However, evidence shows that this was a continuation of the clan training. Novice clan representatives were now introduced to chiefdom history and legislation principles, laws and procedures. The instruction in history covered a wide range of topics, including migration and clan totems, agreements between chiefs and their subjects and conflicts between chiefdoms. But what, one might ask, was the purpose of instructing these young men in the history of the chiefdom? Historical knowledge was imparted because it formed the basis of, and provided precedents for, solving problems, especially those relating to land and property ownership as well as tenure of political positions.

Those who excelled again at the chiefdom level would then be apprenticed to various positions, including that of Royal Messenger. Those who were not selected returned to the administration of their respective clans or villages, but with advanced knowledge of chiefdom history, norms and customs.²¹¹ While it is not possible to determine the exact correlation between a person’s skills and the responsibilities accorded to him in the court, it would appear that all the attributes that we encountered earlier, such as physique, physical stamina, courage, a

²¹⁰ Odongo, “The Luo,” 63.

²¹¹ Odongo Onyango, 21 December, 2014.

good memory and skills such as spear-throwing, came into play. But it would be incorrect to believe that people achieved their positions within a purely meritocratic environment, devoid of political maneuvering. These court positions meant power, wealth and prestige, not just for the individuals who held them but also for their families and clans. Therefore, even though the system was basically meritocratic, it was not entirely devoid of political maneuvering, which might explain why large chiefdoms, like Payira, had more royal messengers, priests and generals, perhaps representing different constituencies to ensure stability and harmony in the chiefdom.

But once the chiefdom council earmarked somebody for training for a particular position, for example, as a royal messenger, that candidate was trained by the existing royal messenger(s) for an extended period of time, to develop the necessary specific knowledge and skill sets for the position. The training often took the form of travel within and beyond Acholiland to introduce the apprentice to the roles of a royal messenger, and to the different chiefs and chiefdoms that he was likely to visit in the course of his future duties. Trainees became part of the entourage of the royal messenger wherever he went, and this afforded them the opportunity to learn the courtly etiquette and protocol of different chiefdoms, the art of oral delivery, and taboos or what Girling called “avoidances” of other polities. And because animal transportation was entirely absent in precolonial Acholiland, novices also learned to walk and run over long distances, and mastered the geography of the region. Thus, the five royal messengers that Rev. Lloyd reported having been sent to him by Chief Awich of Payira Chiefdom, to invite him to introduce Christianity to Acholiland in 1903, may actually have been one royal messenger and his apprentices.²¹²

²¹² Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 160.

Though we cannot definitely determine the distances that royal messengers covered on any particular mission, we do know that running was part of their training in the early twentieth century. This might explain why early Europeans who encountered royal messengers simply called them “runners.” J.R.P. Postlethwaite, one of the first colonial agents in the region, tells us that, in 1913, a royal messenger (he called a runner) from the Atyak Chiefdom covered about 50 miles in a few hours to bring information about an uprising against his chief by his subjects for supporting the colonial policies.²¹³ Less precisely, Fr. Angelo Negri, a Verona Father (later Bishop) who worked in the region, noted that “whenever we sent information to chiefs on our arrival as the state required us to, chiefs responded by sending trained runners, who covered enormous distance and brought us immediate feedback.”²¹⁴ Thus, running (and the political expediency of efforts to collapse space by shrinking the time it took to cover it) constituted part of the training; and, given the physical rigor of long-distance running, many apprentices may have been eliminated during their training. But to perceive royal messengers as mere “runners” is to exhibit limited understanding of these figures whose training and roles involved much more than running.

Novices had also to acquire more cerebral and subtle knowledge and skills. In addition to history and law, they also learned languages in order to mediate between their chiefs and other chiefs and foreigners. In 1916, an anonymous missionary noted that “most runners could speak as many as four languages.”²¹⁵ Though the missionary does not specify the languages the “runners” spoke, these must have been regional tongues such as Madi, Lugbara, Alur, Lunyoro

²¹³ Papers of J.R.P. Postlethwaite: GB 0162 MSS.Afr.s.2007. See also Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 34; Melland and Cholmeley, *Through the Heart of Africa*, 234.

²¹⁴ Layibi Papers, Comboni Missionaries.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and Ngakorimonjong. But not all royal messengers would have learned the same languages. Different royal messengers must have learned different languages, depending on the locations of their chiefdoms, and therefore the languages of their neighbors. However, prevailing socio-political contexts, such as the infiltration of the region by Arabs in the 1850s, also dictated the languages that royal messengers learned. For example, as we have seen in Chapter One, by the end of 1870s, many royal messengers were already fluent in Arabic. It is clear, then, that royal messengers had to learn different languages and languages were added with great regularity to facilitate their work.

Finally, the training of apprentice royal messengers involved the acquisition of skills in augury, skills that I shall cover at length in Chapter Three, when I focus on the roles of royal messengers. For now, it suffices to know that royal messengers learned augury to foretell events, based on occurrences around them, to protect themselves and their entourage. In 1949, Girling noted that “when the Rwot [Chief] travelled he was preceded in the path by the *oo* [royal messenger]. By slapping his thigh,” Girling added, the *oo* “pointed out stones and tree stumps which lay in the way and which might cause the Rwot to injure himself.” Unfortunately, Girling did not delve into this function; but it points to important knowledge and skills that royal messengers possessed, and to the roles they played to ensure their safety and that of their entourage which sometimes included the chief. Some of these roles necessitated that the apprentice royal messenger learn the different ways of “reading the path” to ensure his safety and that of his entourage. Travelling with established royal messengers therefore was one of the ways through which novices learned to “read the path,” so as to travel safely.

Together, these scraps of evidence show that becoming a royal messenger was a long and arduous process, involving different types and stages of education and training. Besides being

versed in customs, legal precedents and clan and chiefdom history, royal messengers were also skilled in languages, diplomacy and augury. This array of knowledge and skills, with both mundane and esoteric elements, may partly explain why prominent, literate and Christian ex-royal messengers and historians, such as Okech, refrained from delving into the specifics of their precolonial training and roles. Such figures were wary of compromising their Christian credentials and colonial careers, and thus their socio-economic privileges, by chronicling all aspects of their training and skills. And yet, it is this wide array of knowledge and skills that gave a royal messenger an independent base of power in his chiefdom and beyond, making him what Tim Allen has called “a particularly respected elder...who advised the *rwot* on all occasions.”²¹⁶ But royal messengers were not the only leaders that Europeans encountered in the first decades of twentieth. There were also healers with different knowledge and skill sets, and it is to their making that the following section is devoted.

The Making of Healing Experts

Called *lanenpiny*, *latak*, *lamak tipu* and *ajwaka*, these figures form a group of people I call healing experts, hereinafter referred to loosely as healers. Both men and women could become healers. The different nouns by which they were identified reflect their diversity and the corresponding variety of healing knowledge and skills that they possessed. But, the variety of names does not in any way imply that a person specialized in only one area of healing. A healer could be versatile, and capable of healing beyond the scope implicit in his or her title. Healers occupied important positions in the Acholi socio-political system (as priests and royal diviners) and in ordinary life. Yet, they are the most ridiculed figures in European documents. In

²¹⁶ Allen, “Acholi Decision Making.” 33.

Acholiland, they were understood to be chosen by *Jok*, as revealed by the circumstances of their birth. But this was not enough to make someone a healer. A prospective healer had to undergo training by an established healer for an extended period of time. In 1906, a Christian convert told a missionary that, in order to become healers, novices had to “apprentice themselves to witches [healers] for many years.”²¹⁷

Because much of the content of the training of a prospective healer comes from accounts of Christian missionaries and their converts, it is as incomplete as it is prejudiced. But, existing literature provides us with enough information to sketch a general picture of the training that prospective healers underwent in the early twentieth century, and of the knowledge and skills they acquired. In 1907, Rev. Kitching noted that the “training began by learning an arcane language to communicate with spirits, and then [learning] to dress to invoke [the] spirit of the dead.”²¹⁸ The practice of Acholi healers speaking in arcane tongues has been associated with spirit possession, and it is widely documented.²¹⁹ Although Kitching did not describe precisely the dressing code of healers and novices, other writers did. In discussing healing activities in early twentieth-century Acholiland, Okot p’Bitek, an Acholi anthropologist, informs us that “[t]he *ajwaka* [healer]” and his or her “small party of assistants [were] all dressed in animal skins or bark cloth robes, and garlands of *bomo*, a convolvulus creeper plant.”²²⁰ The “small party of assistants” was most likely a group of trainees. The animal skins they wore were those of lion and leopard. In 1926, a convert told a Verona Father that “lion and leopard skins were important

²¹⁷ Unarchived papers at Makerere University just written Gulu Papers, 102. Hereafter, I refer to as Gulu Papers.

²¹⁸ Gulu Papers, 102.

²¹⁹ See, for example, p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 96; 106-110.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

for witches [healers] because they were resting places of powerful spirits.”²²¹ Yet, as Atkinson noted, “leopard and lion skins were always due to the *rwot* [chief]” as signs of royalty.²²² That healers and their assistants donned skins ordinarily reserved for royalty, without incurring the wrath of their chiefs, suggests that healers and novices were neither ordinary mortals nor under the direct control of their chiefs.

Moreover, the creeping plant, *bomo*, was traditionally invested with important ritual meaning. In Acholi thought, *bomo* did not grow on its own or die by itself: it was believed to be planted and killed by *jok*. In 1907, Reverend Kitching noted that *bomo* was “a creeping shrub tied around the neck for sickness.”²²³ A decade later, a Catholic priest reported, “The most important use of *bomo* was to invoke *jok*. Witches and their followers tie them [*bomo*] around their heads and wrists, and without *bomo* they will not be possessed by ... *jok*.”²²⁴ Together, the significance of the leopard and lion skins as resting places of powerful spirits, and the close association between *bomo* and *jok*, bear out Kitching’s assertion that the dress code must have been one of the first things that novices mastered before learning how to perform any divination or healing ritual.

But an arcane language and a dress code were not the only pre-requisite skills that novices had to master. In 1923, a CMS convert explained to a missionary that novices also “learned singing, drumming, dancing, and gourd shaking to invoke their spirits.”²²⁵

²²¹ See Layibi Papers, Comboni Missionaries.

²²² Atkinson, *The Roots*, 204.

²²³ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 41.

²²⁴ Layibi Papers, Comboni Missionaries.

²²⁵ AR/CMS/106/1: Minutes of the Standing Committee of Upper Nile Mission, 1926-1937.

Unfortunately, existing early twentieth-century literature gives us no clue as to the type of drumming, dancing and gourd-shaking they learned. However, literature from the mid-twentieth century gives us a glimpse of the probable content of the novices' learning. For example, in 1971, Matayo [Mathew] Onek, an Acholi Christian convert, wrote that novices learned a "special dance called *myel-jok*, special drumming called *bul-jok*, and special gourd-shaking called *yengo jok*."²²⁶

The only activity we have some information on is the drumming; but even that information is just a thumb sketch. In an article in the *Uganda Journal*, Okumu pa' Lukobo tells us that "the *Jok* drum is small, and only one note is played, repeatedly, on it."²²⁷ The special dancing, drumming and gourd-shaking might, indeed, have been common practices that novices must have been taught before they learned to divine and heal at the turn of the twentieth century. Though existing literature is silent on the specifics of the special dancing, drumming and gourd-shaking, a few healers' songs have survived. In one of these songs, the novice healer sings: "Come and grab me, I want to help my people."²²⁸ This song sounds like an appeal by the novice, pleading with the spirit, *jok*, to possess him. It would, therefore, appear that novices were taught an array of knowledge and skills to acquaint them with the spirit world. The first of these were mastering the arcane language of *jok*, learning the dress code of the healer, and mastering the concomitant arts of singing, drumming, dancing, and gourd-shaking. These activities were all central to the ritual of invoking spirits. While we do not know the duration of this initial part of the training, we can speculate that it varied from trainer to trainer.

²²⁶ Gulu Papers, 12. See also Okumu pa' Lukobo, "Acholi Dance and Dance-songs," *Uganda journal* 35(1971): 55-9.

²²⁷ pa' Lukobo, "Acholi Dance," 60.

²²⁸ Gulu Papers, 16. See also pa' Lukobo, "Acholi Dance," 59-61.

The introductory stage, learning to invoke *jok*, paved the way for an important step: learning to divine and heal. In 1913, a CMS convert explained to Rev. A.B. Fisher that diviners “use sandals, sticks or cowry shells to communicate with spirits.” To use these objects, the convert told Fisher, one had to be “trained for a long time,” and, upon completing the training, the trainee usually paid for the training by “giving a bull.”²²⁹ In 1919, Captain E.N.T. Grove added that divination in some parts of Acholiland was “done with a collection of small stones shaken up and down in a pot.”²³⁰ Finally, Bishop Angelo Negri tells us of divination by reading the intestines of animals.²³¹ The variety of divination techniques reveals differences in the kinds of diviners and divination methods available to people.

European ethnographers working in the first three decades of the twentieth century in northern Uganda provide similar descriptions of divination with sandals, locally called *lamowar*. This suggests that divination by sandals was practiced in a broader regional context that extended beyond Acholiland. The word *lamowar* is derived from verb—*lamo*, which Kitching defined as “sacrifice, curse.” The term *war* simply means “sandal, boot.”²³² Thus, *lamowar* literally means “sacrificing/cursing sandal or boot.” However, in divination terms, it refers to reading of sandals or boots by a diviner to foretell the future for his client. In 1923, Jack Herbert Driberg, an anthropologist and colonial administrator in Lango, who had travelled extensively in northern Uganda, produced perhaps the best description of sandal divination. The technique, he wrote,

²²⁹ Papers of Rev. A. B. Fisher: GB 0150 CMS/ACC84.

²³⁰ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 175.

²³¹ Negri, *Gli Acioli del Nord Uganda*, 81. Although the use of sandals appears widely in available literature, I found only one reference to the use of cowry shells and of intestines. Available literature has nothing at all on the use of sticks and stones.

²³² Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 50 & 63.

entailed throwing up sandals, and interpreting their positions on falling to the ground.²³³ According to Driberg, “before going on a journey, or to battle, or to a hunt” people consulted a diviner to inquire about the likely fate of their mission. In his detailed recording of *lamowar*, Driberg captured some of the skills that initiates must have learned before they became accomplished diviners. He described the sandal ritual as follows:

The...sandal is of very primitive structure, consisting of a sole with a slightly raised pad at the back of the heel. At the toe and on each side are small lapels, through which laces are inserted joining up the lapels with the heel pad, the lace of the lapel passing between the wearer's big and first toes. To take the omens the sandals are held together sole to sole and toe to toe, by the inner edges, if they belong to the man making the inquiry; but if they are borrowed, the thrower holds them by the outer edges. Having thus grasped the sandals, the inquirer throws them up in the air, imparting a twisting motion by a turn of his wrists, and the omens are read by their respective positions [of the sandals] on falling to the ground.²³⁴

Driberg concluded that “should the omens persistently remain bad after several throws, the prediction is accepted [by the diviner's clients] and, in extreme cases, the projected journey [battle or hunt] is postponed.”²³⁵ The focus of the training of a future diviner at this stage was on the ability to interpret all the possible positions of sandals on falling to the ground. This training was not just for divination by sandal; it applied to all the different techniques of divination, including the use of cowry shells, stones or sticks, and the trainee had to learn how to interpret all their possible positions on falling to the ground.

Learning how to divine was therefore an important part of the training. But some trainees who mastered the divination skills did not advance any further; they became known as *lunenpiny* (*lanenwar*-singular), literally “readers of situations or events.” More specifically, those who

²³³ For description of the sandal, see <http://southernsudan.prm.ox.ac.uk/details/1925.14.3/>.

²³⁴ Driberg, *The Lango*, 264.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

specialized in “reading sandals,” or divination with sandals, were called *lunenwar* (*lanenwar*-singular) literally “readers of sandals.” Those who specialized in “reading intestines” of animals were called “*lunen ii lee*.” Generally, *lunenpiny* did not dispense medicine, implying that they did not possess medical knowledge or skills, but this did not deny them clients or crowds of followers. Their ability to diagnose illness and diseases and to foretell misfortune or suggest means of combating it still brought them prestige and followers. As Driberg informs us, travelers, warriors, hunters, traders and patients often called upon *lunenwar* to foretell what awaited them, and to understand the causes of their affliction. Having qualified as diviners, some trainees could then ascend to the healing stage—the final and most complex training stage.

At the healing stage, documentary sources reveal three healing techniques that novices must have learned: using the spirit dance to exorcise malignant spirits, using surgery, and using medicine. The first and second techniques are overt while the third one is not. There are several ethnographic descriptions of the spirit dance. The Acholi anthropologist p’Bitek provided perhaps the best description of the technique, and it deserves a lengthy quotation:

The preliminary examination of the patient usually took place at the home of the *ajwaka*, but the spirit possession ceremony, *yengngo jok*, shaking *jok*, was held at the home of the patient. The *ajwaka* arrived with a small party of assistants...On reaching the threshold of the homestead the party stopped and the *ajwaka* trembled all over. This was an indication that the spirit troubling the patient was opposed to the entry of the *ajwaka* and her group....The *ajwaka*’s assistants distributed rattle gourds, *ajaa*, to the people in the house.... The *ajwaka* began to sing a well-known *Jok* song, shaking her rattle gourd vigorously and rhythmically; and those in the house took up the chorus, and shook their gourds....The *ajwaka* pranced and made frightening gesticulations at the patient....If the patient did not respond at all, this would be interpreted to mean that the offending *Jok* was extremely hostile, dangerous and powerful.... In most cases, however, the patient soon began to tremble and to shout, and when this happened, the tempo of the drumming and the shaking of the *ajaa* and the singing quickened, and the volume increased. The diviner began to dance, and helped the patient to his feet, and other people joined the dance, *myel jok*. But only those who had been possessed before joined the dance. After a short time the patient collapsed. It was said, *jok oreto*, *jok* has thrown him down. The music and dancing stopped. The diviner bent over the patient and began to talk to the *jok*

through him [patient]. “In anga”, “Who are you?” The patient mumbled some words which only the *ajwaka* could make out, and then she told the people what *jok* had said....Having discovered the particular *Jok* that was the source of ill-health, the *ajwaka* asked it what it wanted, and why it was troubling the patient....The treatment consisted of persuading [the] *Jok*...to leave the...[patient] and go back to...where it belonged [and killing a goat in the bush to appease the spirit to remain there].²³⁶

p’Bitek’s description reveals several crucial features of the spirit dance and, more importantly, what novices must have learned—singing, drumming, dancing, and talking to malignant spirits and persuading them to leave patients. But because some of the spirit dance steps, songs and drum beats had already been mastered in the early stages of the training to invoke *jok*, it seems that only two aspects of content were new in the final stage of a healer’s training: the techniques of talking to, and persuading, a spirit to leave a patient, and the final ritual carried out in the bush (of which we know nothing). Significantly, there were healers who specialized in the spirit dance only, and they did not dispense medicine. This group of healers, present healers told me, was referred to as *lumah tipu* (*lamak tipu*, singular). Like diviners, this group of healers who cured their patients with the spirit dance often attracted followers. Villages often called upon them to exorcise malignant spirits from patients. In 1916, a colonial agent reported that in the months of “December to March,” which were not planting or harvesting seasons, a “large number of women and their husbands gather around witches to exorcise their bodies and their country.”²³⁷ This observation suggests the vital roles that this group of healers played, and the sort of followings they attracted in their communities.

The second healing technique is what Kitching called “surgery.” After touring Patiko in 1907, Kitching noted: “Actual medical and surgical treatment are not...totally neglected.”

²³⁶ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 107-8; pa’Lukobo, “Acholi Dance,” 59-61.

²³⁷ Entebbe Archives. This document is found in file A16/2, even when A16/2 is listed as 1902-3.

Kitching tells us that he once witnessed a woman who had “her arm broken in a drunken brawl” after which the arm “was carefully done up in a splint, made of small, straight twigs strung together in a row, so as to form a stiff, but flexible, bandage, which had the appearance of a fine grid. This was primitive, but quite effective.”²³⁸ But the most common form of surgery was called *tak*. Kitching has described *tak* as a way “to suck out poison.”²³⁹ According to Grove, *tak* was not limited to sucking out poison. “Many diseases,” he noted, “are attributed to foreign bodies having been introduced into the body.” The foreign bodies include “wood, stone, charcoal, etc.” According to Grove, “a class of doctors known as the Jotago [*lutak*, plural, and *latak*, singular] makes a specialty of extracting... [these things] in large quantities from the body of the sick man.” Grove ended by noting, “[a] man once showed me quite a bundle of miscellaneous objects which he alleged that a *Jotago* had taken out of his game [lame] leg.”²⁴⁰

Finally, novices were introduced to using medicine, which, however, is the least recoverable aspect of the training because of the shroud of secrecy that surrounded it. In 1907, Rev. Kitching described Acholi medicine as “any concoction which possesses supernatural power, whether for good or evil; it may be used to produce disease just as much as to relieve it.”²⁴¹ Kitching restricted Acholi medicine to physiological ailments. In the last decade or so, there has been a growing body of works on precolonial healing especially among the Bantu communities in the Great Lake Region of East Africa. These works demonstrate that different African communities understood medicine not just as substances to treat physiological ailments

²³⁸ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 245.

²³⁹ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 61.

²⁴⁰ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 163.

²⁴¹ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 266.

but also as substances used, for example, “to keep thieves out of a field of ripe crops or those used to keep hail from falling.”²⁴² Moreover, activities like trade warfare were believed to be successful only with medicine. The Acholi shared some aspects of this precolonial Bantu thought. In 1913, Matayo [Mathew] Adimola, a CMS local teacher (and later a colonial clerk), reported that there were medicines meant to “fight wars, convince women, catch game for food and increase soil fertility.”²⁴³ In order to protect their clients, Adimola added, healers gave their clients medicines that were “worn around the wrist, neck, waist or legs. Sometimes, medicines were hung on the door, garden or path.”²⁴⁴ Kitching added that medicines were also “buried round a village,” to protect residents.²⁴⁵ The variety of meanings attached to medicine in Acholiland reflects the diversity of medicines that novices must have had to learn.

While we know that apprentices learned how to identify, prepare and use a wide variety of medicines for a corresponding variety of ailments and other purposes, we do not know much about what they were made of, how they were formulated or concocted or which specific diseases or conditions each medicine cured, treated or prevented. In 1919 Grove, who took a keen interest in the various medicines, once voiced his frustration with the Acholi reluctance to discuss medicine, noting that there “is no doubt that they have many drugs of which we probably know very little.” In one case, Grove tells us that his own servant told him that he had the medicine to handle scorpions, “but when asked to produce it, he [servant] said he hadn’t got any

²⁴² See, for example, David Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” *American Historical Review*, 111, 5 (2006): 1418; Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 14-20.

²⁴³ Gulu Papers, 1.

²⁴⁴ Gulu Papers, 3.

²⁴⁵ Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 267.

left.”²⁴⁶ Grove’s remark offers us a glimpse of the shroud of secrecy that surrounded medicine. But those who could divine, perform the spirit dance, carry out surgery and dispense medicine were referred to as *ajwagi* (*ajwaka*—singular), and they were the most versatile in the profession. However, it appears that from the mid-twenty century to the present, the term *ajwaka* has come to mean any kind of healer.

Taken together, the preceding discussions reveal that becoming a healing expert in Acholiland was a long and elaborate process. Novices underwent rigorous training over an extended period of time, under an expert. As a result, they acquired different forms of specialized healing knowledge and skills. But it was only those who excelled in the profession who drew prestige and followers. In 1914, a European traveler who met a healer reported his impressions to the colonial officials: “some witches are more powerful than chiefs, and they hold the whole village hostage.”²⁴⁷ Though this seems overstated, it nevertheless gives us some insights into the sort of power some healers wielded and, more importantly, the kind of following they attracted. In contrast, healers who failed to impress by their efficacy had neither power nor following.²⁴⁸ Only the most powerful healers were regarded with awe, were consulted frequently, and became valued political actors (as priests and royal diviners) in their polities and in the lives of ordinary people. Besides healers and royal messengers, military generals constituted the last category of leaders that I found dominated the first decades of the transition to colonial rule.

The Making of Military Generals

²⁴⁶ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 181.

²⁴⁷ This document is found in the Entebbe archives file A16/2, even when A16/2 is listed as 1902-3.

²⁴⁸ Curley, *Elders, Shades, and Women*, 175.

Like healers, generals exercised considerable influence and enjoyed a special status in their chiefdoms. The first European observers in Acholiland recorded the presence of a stronger warrior tradition than they had not seen anywhere else in the region; and, in the 1860s, Sir Samuel Baker called for converting the “the greater portion of [these] African savages into disciplined soldiers.”²⁴⁹ Four decades later, A.B. Lloyd, the first missionary to arrive in the region, referred to the Acholi as “warlike,” with “fighting instincts.”²⁵⁰ Later, E.N.T Grove was even more hyperbolic, stating that “war was the constant occupation of the Acholi before the Government took over their country.”²⁵¹

Unfortunately, none of these European accounts explains the origin or development of this strong warrior tradition. It would appear, though, that the violence perpetrated by the Arab slave traders in the region, beginning in the 1850s (see Chapter One), was a major factor behind the growth of the warrior tradition. Perhaps because of this sometimes exaggerated warrior reputation, the colonial state turned to the Acholi to constitute the bulk of its colonial army, a process that became particularly pronounced with the “targeted recruitment of the Acholi to the colonial army ... [at] the beginning of the first World War.”²⁵² Subsequently, Acholiland became the main conscription zone, and the Acholi dominated the King’s African Rifles.²⁵³ But our major concern here is with the precolonial Acholi military generals. Who were they? How did one become a general? And what kind of knowledge and skills did they possess?

²⁴⁹ Baker, *Ismailia*, vol. 1, 302.

²⁵⁰ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 211.

²⁵¹ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 163.

²⁵² Morten Bøås, *The Politics of Conflict Economies: Miners, Merchants and Warriors in the African Borderland* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 100.

²⁵³ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 71.

Generals were the war leaders. Locally known as *oyita lweny*, *oteka lweny* or, according to Girling, “*oteka lawii mony*,” they led all war expeditions.²⁵⁴ The position of war leader, like those of other functionaries, was not marked out by blood. A general emerged over time by distinguishing himself as exceptionally knowledgeable and skillful in warfare. To gain a fuller understanding of the emergence of these precolonial generals, and of their knowledge and skills, we have to begin by understanding how one became a warrior in the first place. Perhaps because of their reputation, Acholi warriors have attracted scholarly attention, particularly in the 1970s. In an incisive piece published in 1977, Dent Ocaya-Lakidi, an Acholi political scientist at the Makerere University, noted that becoming a warrior involved a long period of training that “dealt with military skills on the one hand, and with military ethnics [ethics], on the other.” The military skills, he added, “tended to be acquired in three phases: during youth by play, during adolescence by apprenticeship, and during adult life by experience.”²⁵⁵

During youth, young men were introduced to a wide range of games to develop specific skills. The most popular game among the Acholi, Ocaya-Lakidi writes, was “a game [called] ‘lawala’.”²⁵⁶ In his 1907 dictionary, A.L. Kitching defined “lawala” as a “wheel.”²⁵⁷ Ethnographers working in Acholiland in the twentieth century have provided several similar accounts of the game, but Onyango Odongo provides perhaps the best description. In this game, Odongo explains, “Some highly skilled warriors would be assigned the task of teaching the boys...how to hold shields and spears when not in the battle front, and how to take positions in

²⁵⁴ Girling, *The Acholi*, 102.

²⁵⁵ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood,” 146.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 51.

case of sudden attacks by enemies, how to move towards the human enemies in extended line and how to balance their steps in action.”²⁵⁸ The game, however, was not played with spears. Rather, Odongo tells us, each child was “equipped with two long blunt point sticks called ‘Tir’, which represented spears, and a dummy shield called ‘Kwot Cal’.”²⁵⁹

The trainer would demonstrate how to hold the shield while throwing the spear, and when he was satisfied by the performance of his trainees, he would put them to task, testing their abilities to throw spears and at the same time defend themselves using shields. Thereafter, trainers fashioned a “twig...into a wheel [lawala] and the wheel was then, with a great deal of force, sent spinning among a line of boys with long sticks (for spears) at hand. The challenge was to put the stick inside the surging wheel, which would then stop dead. A ‘kill’ had been registered.”²⁶⁰ In 1919, Grove witnessed this game several times, and he commented that the “victorious side drink all the milk from the sheep of the vanquished.” But the losing side, or the “careless trainees,” as Odongo called them, and those who failed to protect their bodies, “would be seriously rebuked and given special time to practice.”²⁶¹ As all these writers agree, the *lawala* game gave young men “excellent practice in [wielding spears and] manipulating the shield;”²⁶² and the reward of the victorious party served a practical function: it was an incentive to encourage each youngster to do his best. But the *lawala* game was not the only way of training young men.

²⁵⁸ Odongo, “The Luo,” 67.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood,” 146.

²⁶¹ Odongo, “The Luo,” 68.

²⁶² Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 172.

Besides this game, Grove recounted other important games for imparting military skills to young people. The most popular of these, he noted, was *Yago*, which he described in the following terms:

A long sausage like fruit of a certain tree is tied on to a long piece of string and two players with sticks in their hands drag these sausages off into the bush and pretend to be elephants. Two or three others go and hide in the grass to represent lions. The remainder go through all the form of a big hunt and having surrounded the elephants, those in the rear rush in and throw dura stalk spears at the fruit on the ground. The elephants then wake up with characteristic noises and gestures and charge the nearest people to them, who run like hares (they get a good hiding from the elephants' sticks if caught). The reminder follow the elephant, throwing their spears at the trailing fruit and ready to turn and run at any moment. When the fruit is sufficiently full of spears the elephant is dead and they proceed to cut him up. This leads to a fight as to the ownership of the tusk, during which the lions generally intervene, and carry off one of the combatants and eat him. There is then a terrific fight with the lions (casualties strewing the ground in all directions) and finally the dead lion is carried off in a procession and the very impressive ceremony for excursing its spirit is then performed.²⁶³

In all these games, Grove noted, “the boys are always playing at war, and so practicing for the real thing.”²⁶⁴ Explicit in these two games is the level of competition that was meant to bring out the best in children. Emphasis was put on physical stamina, and dexterity in throwing spears and defending oneself with the shield. Lads unable to master the skills fast enough, and cowards, were rebuked. As Ocaya-Lakidi noted, “to show cowardice...was to invite the label of ‘woman’.”²⁶⁵ Early ethnographers working in Acholiland recorded songs and poems that praised courage and rebuked cowards. “Lalworo odok I mine,” goes one song, meaning, cowards have no place in Acholi society. They must go back to their mother’s womb.²⁶⁶ Moreover, physical strength and courage were not exclusively military assets: they also inspired great enthusiasm

²⁶³ Ibid., 171.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood,” 154.

²⁶⁶ p’Bitek, “Acholi Concept of Fate-Woko,” 86.

among women. According to Ocaya-Lakidi, these manly qualities also “determined a woman’s choice of a male partner.”²⁶⁷ Given the admiration that physical strength and courage attracted from fellow men and women alike, one can easily appreciate why young men would do their best to excel at these games and the warrior skills they imparted: to excel was a visa to the heart of the community *belle* and a future wife.

Mastering the use of make-believe spears and shields paved the way for the second stage of training, where young men were “trained on the spear, [and this] usually [began with a young man] accompanying his father about.”²⁶⁸ As Ocaya-Lakidi explains, “the young man may accompany those older than himself on communal hunts” but not on wars. Firearms, which arrived in Acholiland in the 1850s, appear not to have been an important part of the Acholi arsenal, and there are no indications, at least in the documents, that warriors were trained in the use of firearms. They seem to have been prestige objects.

Though hunting provided food, it was also “good training and...an introduction to warfare, since fighting often erupted among the various clans or sub-tribes during such hunts.”²⁶⁹ The ability to participate in hunting “put manliness to test by questioning the individual’s physique, courage and ability to secure victory from the enemy.”²⁷⁰ These pursuits enabled a young man to accumulate “experiences,” and demonstrate his talents to his superiors.²⁷¹ A young

²⁶⁷ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood” 152.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 146.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 147.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 52.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 147.

man who proved skillful, Ocaya-Lakidi concluded, was “thus gradually made a warrior.”²⁷² The position of a warrior was “of eminence in the context of the socio-political set-up.”²⁷³ Warriors protected and policed the community. In 1903, Rev. Lloyd noted that warriors were responsible for enforcing communal law by ensuring payment of communal fines.²⁷⁴

In essence, to be a warrior was prestigious. Practically every young man trained and wished to become a warrior; but not every young man became a warrior. “The only category of ‘deviant’ males accommodated appear to have been the disabled.”²⁷⁵ How then did a warrior rise to the rank of a general? Battle provided warriors with the opportunity to lay their claims to the position of “General” by demonstrating their knowledge of, and skills in, warfare. Generals, then, emerged from among the reputable warriors who had distinguished themselves in actual battle. In 1936, a colonial anthropologist, L. F. Nalder, observed, “The war leader, *otega* [*oteka*] was chosen apparently by the warriors of his village or tribe for known bravery and ability to command.”²⁷⁶ That the general was chosen by the warriors says a lot about the caliber of the general: he must have been not only outstandingly knowledgeable, skilled and brave, but also popular among the warriors.

Conclusion

The first group of Europeans who arrived in Acholiland did not pay enough attention to the first group of the Acholi that they employed. More specifically, they did not dig into their

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid., 156.

²⁷⁴ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 206-7.

²⁷⁵ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood,” 155.

²⁷⁶ L.F. Nalder, *A Tribal Survey of Mongalla Province* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 146.

backgrounds to find out who they were and what they had been doing prior to the imperial conquest. European missionaries only saw them as people in need of conversion to Christianity while the colonial state was happy to employ literate Christian converts, graduates of the mission school, in the service of the empire. As a result, the previous positions and roles of these figures were all but ignored by Europeans, and scholars who have relied on the works of the first group of Europeans have produced works that have continued to ignore these figures. Precolonial Acholi courtiers have been neglected in Acholi historiography.

This chapter has explored the trajectory of non-royal court figures that Europeans found on the ground in the first two decades of colonial rule. It has demonstrated that there were different figures, such as healers, royal messengers and generals, with different types of knowledge and skills prior to colonial rule. More importantly, the chapter has demonstrated that these people did not just emerge out of the blue. Rather, their abilities were identified at different stages and later nurtured through specialized training, largely by experts. As these young men (and women) emerged as royal messengers, generals and different types of healers, their knowledge and skills put them at the center of the community. It was largely their knowledge and skills in languages, the geography of the region, healing and warfare, among others, that led them to the courts of their chiefs and eventually made them intermediaries between their chiefs and other chiefs and Arabs (in Chapter 1).

But the trajectories of these figures (healers, royal messengers and generals in this chapter) do not tell us all that we would like to know about them. Besides mediating between their chiefs and Arabs, these figures also played other roles in their polities. The next chapter focuses on the roles of these figures, and expands the discussion to include specific categories of healers in the chief's court, such as priests and royal diviners. Exploring the precolonial roles of

these various figures in their chiefdoms will give us a better understanding of these figures, especially the knowledge, skills, legitimacy, power and followings that they possessed before the imperial conquest upset the traditional Acholi set-up, forcing some of them to become European employees. The next chapter will help us to achieve three main objectives. First, it will enable us to begin comprehending the unique attributes that the first group of Acholi missionary or colonial employees often deployed in the service of Europeans. Secondly, it will lay the ground for us to comprehend the factors that made some Acholi more likely than others to join missionary or colonial service. Finally, the chapter will help us to understand the forces at the root of the debates and struggles that emerged within African societies as a result of the implementation of colonial rule in Acholiland, debates and struggles which rarely feature in European documents

CHAPTER 3

Pre-Colonial Intellectuals and Functioning of Chiefdoms

One afternoon in 1938, Lakana Omal, a blind poet-musician, walked up to the *gang-kal*, the colonial administrative headquarters in his chiefdom, with his musical instrument, *nanga*, and a large calabash, *awal*.²⁷⁷ The night before, information had filtered through the villages that Omal was going to speak the following afternoon, which attracted considerable attention and drew a crowd estimated at several hundred to the *gang-kal*. Upon arrival, Omal sat in front of the crowd and put his large calabash down, facing the ground. He placed his *nanga*, “a seven-stringed, boat-like, wooden [musical] instrument” on top of the calabash, which served as his “amplifier.”²⁷⁸ Once his *nanga* was placed on top of the calabash, he began to play and sing, selecting his words meticulously as he lambasted every colonial official he believed was ruthlessly oppressing people in his chiefdom.²⁷⁹ Omal spared no official, from the lowest sub-chief to the topmost colonial agent and the King of England himself.

His song went as follows: (All italics in the English version are mine)

<i>Cuna mito telo,</i>	My penis wants to get erect ,
<i>An anongo min jago,</i>	When I find the <i>sub-chief's mother</i> ,
<i>Agero benebene;</i>	I will fuck her all night long;
<i>Ee, cuna mito telle,</i>	Ee, my penis wants to get erect,
<i>An ayenyo min rwot,</i>	When I find the <i>chief's mother</i> ,
<i>Agero i dye yo;</i>	I will fuck her in the middle of the road;
<i>Ee, gira mito telo,</i>	Ee, my penis wants to get erect,

²⁷⁷How? One may ask. In recollecting his childhood years James Abola wrote: “I was privileged that our home was some 200 meters from that of Lakana Omal and our family closely interacted with him. Although Omal was totally blind he would walk without a guide to his garden, till the land and get back home. How he could tell the boundary of the garden remains a mystery to me up to now.” See James Abola, “Dust, Darkness and Dancing in Gulu,” *The James Abola Blog*, February 01, 2006, <http://jhabola.blogspot.com/2006/02/dust-darkness-and-dancing-in-gulu.html>

²⁷⁸Charles Okumu, “Acholi Orality,” in *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape*, ed. Eckhard Breitingner (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 1999), 90.

²⁷⁹In 1919, E.N. Grove had noted that any man “who can sing and make songs and play the *nana* [*nanga*] (a stringed instrument) is thought of as highly as a warrior.” See Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 168.

<i>An aito wi lela,</i>	I am mounting the bicycle,
<i>Alaro Gulu;</i>	I am hurrying to Gulu; [colonial administrative headquarters]
<i>Ee, cuna mito telo,</i>	Ee, my penis wants to get erect,
<i>An anongo min Dici,</i>	When I find the <i>District Commissioner's mother,</i>
<i>Agero i bar Pece;</i>	I will fuck her in the football arena at Pece;
<i>Ee, cuna mito telo,</i>	Ee, my penis wants to get erect,
<i>An abedo i nge kwateng</i>	I will sit on the back of a kite,
<i>Watuk benebene;</i>	We shall fly all night;
<i>Ee, cuna mito telo,</i>	Ee, my penis wants to get erect,
<i>An anongo min king,</i>	When I find the <i>king's mother,</i>
<i>Jal, agero wi got.</i>	Man, I will fuck her on top of a hill. ²⁸⁰

These explicit obscenities cascaded from the blind man's mouth; and, for his "insolence," the colonial regime arrested and jailed Omal for up to 24 months; but he was not cowed.²⁸¹ Even as he was serving his sentence, Omal continued to attack the state. He composed another song, this time attacking only the Europeans. In his new song, *Adok too (If I could become death)*, Omal lamented his imprisonment, wishing that he could become death and kill all British agents, and escape without being jailed. This song resonated with so many people that Omal became known in Acholiland by the title of the song, Adok-too.²⁸²

On the basis of the lyrics of his first song alone, one might dismiss Omal as an idiot. Yet to do so would be to miss the point of his lyrics and the significance of his personae. Why did he oppose the colonial state in such extreme imagery? Several scholars have attempted to interpret Omal's outburst. Five decades or so ago, Okot p'Bitek explained that Omal's obscenely couched attack was a response to excessive colonial oppression, especially the "forced labour system."²⁸³ Recently, the theologian Todd Whitmore has argued that Omal was reacting to what he

²⁸⁰ Okot p'Bitek, *Horn of My Love* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd, 1974), 11-14.

²⁸¹ Todd Whitmore, "Sequela Comboni Mission Anthropology in the Context of Empire," *Practical Matters* 6 (2013): 8.

²⁸² p'Bitek, *Horn of My Love*, 13.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

perceived as taking men away from the community, which was a “threat to the sexual security of colonial mothers (and thus to the manhood of their sons who are supposed to protect them).”²⁸⁴

I first encountered the story of Omal while reading the work of p’Bitek at the Makerere University Library in 2013. This story sent me back to the colonial archives in Entebbe, in the hope of unearthing more information about Omal’s woes with the colonial state. When the archives did not yield any useful information, I decided to visit Lamogi, where the event had occurred. Lamogi is significant in Acholi history for three main reasons. First, it is the place where the CMS first settled in 1904. Secondly, it is the place where the British established their first colonial office in Acholiland in 1906, though temporarily. Finally, it is there that the British met the first violent anti-colonial rebellion in Acholiland in 1913.²⁸⁵ In Lamogi, I found people who had known Omal personally. More importantly, I encountered a local musical band of five elderly men going by the name *Adok-too*.²⁸⁶ They told me that they founded the band to play the music of their hero—Adok-too, and teach the new generation the ways of the Lamogi people. But when I asked them if any of them had witnessed Omal’s 1938 performance at the *gang-kal*, they told me that none of them had been born by then. However, they led me to an old man called Otto, who told me that he was about 18 years old when Omal staged his defiant performance.

In my discussion with Otto, he explained that “Omal was not just a musician who entertained people.” Rather, he was one of the court officials of the Lamogi Chiefdom. “He was one of the important people of the chiefdom.” “Though sometimes he played to entertain the

²⁸⁴ Whitmore, “Sequela Comboni Mission,” 9.

²⁸⁵ See, for example, Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” 1954.

²⁸⁶ Okello Olwedo, interview, 4 July 2013; Odongtoo Okello, interview, 21 July 2013.

chief and the people of Lamogi,” Otto added, “his role was not only to entertain. Apart from composing songs for royal functions, Omal also composed socio-political commentaries, often castigating bad leadership and sometimes arousing Lamogi warriors to battle.” Because of his exceptional abilities, Otto concluded, “People of Pamuca clan bewitched his eyes,” a statement that also corroborates p’Bitek’s claim that Lakana’s blindness had resulted from witchcraft.²⁸⁷ According to Otto, Omal occupied an intriguing position in Lamogi because he was “someone who could attack the chief for his bad leadership without incurring any wrath from the courtiers or subjects.” Otto was obviously bent on directing my attention away from the perception of Omal as a mere entertainer to that of the poet-musician as an important person at the court of Lamogi Chiefdom. As I was soon to learn, Otto’s perception of Omal was shared by another Acholi elder who was about 6 years older than Otto: Ananiya Akera.

Just as I had “discovered” Omal in a book at the Makerere University Library, I first “encountered” Akera in a special magazine published to celebrate the university’s 90 years of existence, in the same library.²⁸⁸ Upon learning that Akera was from Gulu, I followed him to his home. Born in 1914, Akera was 99 years when I met him in 2013. He had graduated in 1943 from Makerere College, where he shared a cubicle with Julius Nyerere, the late president of Tanzania.²⁸⁹ Akera told me: “To have a musical skill in our early days was very important. Look, Omal of Lamogi, Camconi of Payira and Lugaca of Pabo were all great *nanga* players, and they were all very important people in their chiefdoms.” In Akera’s opinion, “musicians and queen

²⁸⁷ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 129.

²⁸⁸ Mark Wamai, “Mzee Akera, the Oldest Alumnus,” *The Mak@90 Year-Celebrations*, July 23, 2013, 86.

²⁸⁹ See also “Rwot Ananiya Akera’s walk down memory lane,” Makerere University, accessed July 19, 2014, http://news.mak.ac.ug/2009/09/rwot-ananiya-akeras-walk-down-memory-lane_

mothers were as important as royal messengers and generals in their chiefdoms.”²⁹⁰ This view of poet-musicians as courtiers of Acholi chiefdoms recurred in many of my interviews and informal conversations. While it is well known that queen mothers were part of the court of any Acholi chiefdom, the courtly position and roles of poet-musicians are much less clear.²⁹¹

The size of the crowd that Omal drew at the *gang-kal* on the day of his defiant performance in 1938, coupled with the accounts of my informants, suggests that Omal must have been an important person in Lamogi Chiefdom. Moreover, Omal’s lyrics, if read carefully, were neither random nor the work of an idiot. Rather, the lyrical attack on the colonial masters and their servants must have been carefully planned, and the lyrics themselves must have been deliberately crafted to achieve maximum impact. Therefore, contrary to what some scholars have suggested, Omal’s outburst was much more than just an uncouth reaction to forced labor in the chiefdom. The imperial conquest upset many titled positions in chiefdoms. Although some holders were integrated into European projects, other were left out. The response of Omal, given his blindness, may, therefore, have been a reaction to the diminished power of his chiefdom and his position under colonial rule.

Building on the previous chapter’s examination of the trajectory of non-royal court figures from their humble backgrounds to prominent figures in Acholi chiefdoms, this chapter focuses on the roles of these courtiers in their polities in the decades before colonial conquest. This excavation has several potential payoffs. First, it will give us a better understanding of these

²⁹⁰ Ananiya Akera, interview, 14 July 2013.

²⁹¹ The trough zither—*enmanga* in Ganda (reflexes occur in Rutara languages, as well)—is a famous instrument of court life. The oft-reproduced image of John Speke and James Grant’s audience with Queen Mother Muganzirwaza includes an *òmùlanga* (harpist). The noun is derived from the verb *kùlanga* “announce; give notice of.” This image appears on page 424 of the first edition of *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*. Its presence in Acholi gives further testimony to the multiple sources of statecraft in Northern and Southern Uganda (and beyond). Quite a bit has been written on the epic poetry accompanied by *enanga* play in Buhaya. See, for example, M. Mulokozi, “The Nanga Bards of Tanzania: Are They Epic Artists?” *Research in African Literatures* 14, 3 (1983): 283-311.

figures, offering insight into the sort of knowledge and skills that courtiers possessed and brought to the colonial state. Secondly, it will introduce us to the magnitude of the powers that some of these figures wielded prior to colonization, and the kind of people that they controlled or deployed around them. Finally, an examination of the roles of these figures before European conquest will allow us to comprehend the debates and struggles within Acholi societies that resulted from the implementation of colonialism.

Court, Chief, and Intellectuals

In the previous chapter, I have argued that most court officials were not merely named by the chiefs as an act of political patronage or favoritism, and that the selection of future courtiers and other influential figures, such as healers and diviners, was a more complex and broadly rooted social process. Most of the courtiers possessed special attributes, knowledge and skills that distinguished them and enabled them to act as mediators between the center and periphery. More specifically, the best healers in the chiefdom, with first-comer status, were co-opted into the political structure as either priests or royal diviners.²⁹² They joined the rest of the officials and performed various specialized and often complementary roles for the functioning of the chiefdom.

The current Acholi discourse on subordinate officials and their roles suggests that these figures were so significant that they had large followings, as people with both individual and communal problems congregated around them to seek protection from famine, infertility and insecurity, among other ailments. More importantly, the current discourse does not regard chiefs to have been crucial in the functioning of the chiefdom. At first, I thought the disregard of chiefs

²⁹² Girling, *The Acholi*, 171.

was a result of the current political climate, but after listening to many stories from people, I learned that one's significance was tied to a particular ritual or rituals, and chiefs were not central to these rituals and also participated as ordinary commoners. This discourse is in contrast to the early works of missionaries and colonial agents who, for the most part, portrayed chiefs as sole figures in chiefdoms and responsible for a variety of activities. Many of the recent works that draw on these sources have continued to portray chiefs as sole figures in chiefdoms.

In the course of my fieldwork, I interviewed many informants about the roles of subordinate figures in the functioning of their chiefdoms. The several local FM stations in Gulu Town, especially their news and talk-shows, allowed me to follow on-going local discussions about courtiers and their roles. And whenever I heard a discussion about a courtier or courtiers, I followed it back to its source, and I interviewed the people at the center of the story. My interviewees described themselves as Christians, Muslims or nonbelievers. Some of my informants were part of the current Acholi cultural institution that unites all the Acholi chiefs. Others were courtiers in their different chiefdoms. A significant majority were prominent elders in their respective communities. Of the many informants I interviewed, only two refused to talk about pre-colonial courtiers, explaining that, being Born-Again Christians, they could not talk about such figures. All the others talked freely about the courtiers and their roles in their different chiefdoms. I conducted these interviews in a variety of settings between September 2013 and August 2015.

My first discussions about the roles of courtiers occurred in September 2013, after a group of elders in the present-day Koch Chiefdom explained that the then on-going drought in their chiefdom was due to the absence of a priest in the chiefdom. "Today we have several problems in our chiefdom," Olanya Ojok explained to me. "We have a chief, but we do not have

a priest; if we had a priest, he would lead us and take us to our *jok* where we ask for help. We do not have rain. Our crops are failing and many people will suffer in November, at a time when we should have plenty of food. Our women are not bearing enough children after the war.”²⁹³ When I asked Ojok if they had consulted their chief about the matter, he told me that his chief lived in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, but immediately added, “The chief only made rain after the priest had asked for rain at our chiefdom shrine.” “If we had a priest, drought and cases of infertility of women would not be with us,” Ojok concluded.²⁹⁴

In May 2014, a related incident occurred in the Patiko Chiefdom, where a group of elders blamed their chief for not having a royal healer who, they argued, would have averted the problem of crop failure. “Our biggest problem is the inability of our chief to install a royal healer to help people overcome crop failure.” Every year, one elder added, “we have a crop failure even though we receive enough rain. We are not producing enough food to feed our people.” In his opinion, “there is no way we can overcome this crop failure unless we get a healer. We need a royal healer who will carry out planting rituals every planting season to ensure adequate crop yields.”²⁹⁵

Finally, in July 2015, when cases of nodding disease were reported to be on the increase in Acholiland, the Chief of Odek and his councilors explained the epidemic in the following ways.²⁹⁶ Some people blamed it on the lack of a priest to make offerings to the spirit world. Others claimed that the epidemic was a result of war “because the rebel LRA war leaders broke

²⁹³ This war refer to the war between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda from 1987 to around 2009, when the LRA became weakened and left northern Uganda.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Olanya Ojok, 23 September 2013.

²⁹⁵ Matteo Ocitti, interview, 21 May 2014; Okello Onono, interview, 21 May 2014.

²⁹⁶ For more on the disease see David McKenzie, “Mysterious nodding disease debilitates children.”CNN.com, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/19/world/africa/uganda-nodding-disease/>

all the Acholi rules of war, killing people indiscriminately.” To overcome all these problems, they argued for a “district-wide cleansing by a priest to appease the spirits of the dead to relieve the town and its people.” But people did not just talk about priests and royal healers. In an effort to explain the role of royal messengers, some informants described them as people who “often monitored activities of the people and reported violations of taboos to the chief and the royal healer” that ensured cleansing, preventing “drought, infertility and other misfortunes.”²⁹⁷

Taken together, listening carefully to these stories, my informants focused their attention not on their chiefs as central figures capable of controlling their destiny, but on figures produced by formal regimes of training: priests, royal healers, war leaders and royal messengers as the key actors in the welfare of the Acholi chiefdom. Moreover, contrary to the portrayal of subordinate figures as detached from people in twentieth-century ethnographies, my informants portrayed these figures as closely connected to the people and as central to the functioning and welfare of the Acholi chiefdom. The many conversations that I engaged about the roles of courtiers tied courtiers to specific, significant rituals, such as annual feasts, planting and hunting rituals, and war ceremonies, all of which my informants mentioned repeatedly. To understand the roles of priests and priestesses, royal healers, war leaders and royal messengers, figures that Europeans encountered in the first decade of twentieth century, requires that we revisit these rituals. Such rituals offer unusual insights into these figures, especially their powers in the chiefdom, their followers in the chiefdoms, and their roles in mediating frictions and tensions between royal and commoners in the chiefdom.

The Roles of Pre-colonial Intellectuals: Priests and Priestesses

²⁹⁷ Muca Otika, interview, 12 July 2015; Opiro, interview, 12 July 2015; Oloya, interview, 12 July 2015.

Priests or priestesses were indispensable court officials in every Acholi chiefdom. Every chiefdom, regardless of its size or power, had priests or priestesses. They were among the healing experts. They were referred to as *la(lu)tum piny*, but often confused with *la(lu)ted jok*. In Acholi, the noun prefix *la-* (plural *lu-*) is a definite article. The root *-tum* is derived from a verb *tumo*. In the first Acholi dictionary he published in 1907, Kitching defined *tumo* as “to cut off, kill sacrificially.”²⁹⁸ *Tumo* describes the act of killing an animal for ritual purposes. Thus, priests were the people who slaughtered or killed animals for sacrificial purposes. The root, *ted*, on the other hand, is a verb, which means to “cook,” or prepare something as food.²⁹⁹ In p’Bitek’s opinion, *luted jok* were “cooks of *Jok*.”³⁰⁰ But, this rendering can be quite misleading. Though *luted jok* were cooks, they were not ordinary cooks. They were “cooks of *Jok*” and they performed other functions: they cleaned shrines, slaughtered animals, and collected blood from animals for sacrificial purposes. Cooking for *jok* was a ritual, and *luted jok* were privy to ritual knowledge. Hence, while *lutum piny* were priests and priestesses, *luted jok* were their assistants or co-celebrants.³⁰¹

The social status of the priests and priestesses was definitely above that of most commoners. They enjoyed the respect of their people, and, in most cases, they possessed more wealth than ordinary community members.³⁰² Their sources of wealth included offerings that people brought for the annual feasts and that supplicants to *jok* brought in appreciation of favors that *jok* would have granted them. Moreover, as Atkinson has shown, tributes that were paid to

²⁹⁸ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 62.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰⁰ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 67.

³⁰¹ Matteo Otema, interview, 15 October 2013. On *luted jok* see also Crazzolara, *The Lwo*, 228-9.

³⁰² p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 77.

the chief were distributed in the chiefdom, and we can imagine that priests and priestess received some of these gifts as rewards for their invaluable work.³⁰³ Finally, as p'Bitek pointed out, some priests and priestesses “combined priestly duties with divination.”³⁰⁴ This reveals that priests and priestesses, at least some of them, would have undergone specialized training to become diviners/healers. Because clients paid for divination, the combination of priestly roles with divination must have earned some priests extra wealth.³⁰⁵

The key to understanding the roles of priests and priestesses in the chiefdom, and eventually their knowledge, skills and followings, lies in an important Acholi ritual called *teero cam ki jok*, which surfaced many times in the course of my fieldwork. *Teero cam ki jok* was a national feast performed annually at the national shrine of each Acholi chiefdom. *Teero* is a verb which means “taking”, *cam* literally means “food” and *jok* is “spirit”. Thus, *teero cam ki jok* literally means “taking food for *Jok*.”³⁰⁶ Taking food for *jok* was, however, a multipurpose ritual. While some people used it to beseech *jok* to grant them a favor, others used it to thank *jok* for having granted them a prior request: it was at once an occasion of supplication and of thanksgiving.

The annual national feasts occurred in the dry season between December and February. p'Bitek explains that the feast occurred in the dry season because “it was easy for the congregation to reach the hills;”³⁰⁷ but given what we know about the Acholi annual cycle of work, this explanation is unsatisfactory. A more compelling reason for holding the ritual in the

³⁰³ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 92-93.

³⁰⁴ p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 83.

³⁰⁵ See, for example, p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 65.

³⁰⁶ p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 66.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

dry season must have been the absence of farm work during that season. Moreover, the dry season was a period of plenty, with newly harvested food and livestock and game animals that had thrived during the rainy season. The feast began with consultations between the priest and the chief. But before these consultations on when to hold the feast, invitations were sent out to subjects to come to the chief's courtyard. After agreeing with the chief on the date of the ritual, "the priest emerged from the enclosure, beating the [royal] drum," and setting off a flurry of excitement among the gathered subjects.³⁰⁸ The priest then announced the day of the ritual, paving the way for preparations.

That the priest used the royal drum to announce the date of the ritual is important. The royal drum was an important object. According to Atkinson, it was "the primary symbol of authority within the chiefdom and sovereignty in inter-polity relations." As a result, it was only kept in the chief's courtyard. Building on the Acholi traditions he collected in the 1970s, Atkinson established the functions and norms governing the use of the royal drum. The drum was "played only on special occasions." Because of its significance, there were restrictions on who could touch or sound the drum: "Only designated representatives from specific lineages were allowed to play, carry, or care for the drum." Any breach of these norms, Atkinson concluded, "brought supernatural punishment."³⁰⁹ The emergence of the priest beating the drum to announce the day of the feast gives us the first indication of some of the priestly roles, and of the priest's standing in the chiefdom. That the priest used the royal drum to announce the feast shows that the priest was as important as the feast was special.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 96.

The announcement of the day of the feast was then “taken up by members of ... [the clans] waiting at the gate, who then travelled to all parts of the chiefdom bearing the news.” In some chiefdoms, especially large ones, the royal messenger(s) carried this information to all corners of the chiefdom, inviting the people to participate in the event.³¹⁰ This prelude to the feast illustrates the leadership roles, duties and power that priests and priestesses exercised: the duty and power to initiate an important national event. More importantly, the fact that a priest could use revered political objects (like the royal drum) and important political figures (such as royal messengers) to disseminate national information is noteworthy. It underscores the immensity of the priest’s powers and highlights his coordination role within the chiefdom, linking the chief to his courtiers and subjects, and navigating the space between the chiefdom and *jok* for the collective welfare of the chiefdom.

The announcement and dissemination of the impending feast paved the way for preparations for the feast. Women brewed beer while men brought offerings of goats to the priests and priestesses to support the feast. Significantly, during these preparations, as p’Bitek tells us, all other chiefdom activities were suspended. “The chief[s], as it were, withdrew from the scene; [and] if they went to the village of the priest, they became private persons and lost their normal chiefly prerogatives.” Why, one might ask, did the chief have to surrender his power thus? This temporary handover of chiefly powers, p’Bitek explains, was “necessary, if the priests were to carry out their onerous and dangerous tasks effectively and with dignity and honor.”³¹¹ This temporary relinquishing of power by the chief demonstrates three facts: the immensity of the power that priests wielded, sometimes subsuming that of chiefs; the centrality of priests to

³¹⁰ Matteo Otema, interview, 15 October 2013.

³¹¹ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 82.

the collective well-being of their respective chiefdoms; and the reliance of chiefs on priests for the effective functioning of the chiefdom.

The annual feast began in the morning of the appointed day. Before then, the priest issued instructions, and ensured that everyone followed them. One of them concerned the dress code. According to p'Bitek, "Women dressed in the string skirt, *ceno*, and girls wore the bead skirt, *cip*." Men, on the other hand, "dressed in skins of *til*, *kob*, or *lajwaa*, *oribi*." Both men and women, p'Bitek concluded, were not "allowed to wear leopard skin or that of the waterbucks, *apoli*."³¹² I have been unable to establish any specific ritual meaning for the dressing of women, except that *ceno* and *cip* are markers of difference between women and girls respectively. But why were men not allowed to wear leopard or waterbuck skin? Ayiga, a contemporary priest in the Patiko Chiefdom and an informant of p'Bitek, provided a partly parabolic explanation: "When a child goes to his father to ask him for a favour he must be polite and friendly. The skins of *til* [kop] and *lajwaa* [antelope] show that we are peaceful and friendly, but the leopard skin and the waterbuck skin mean fighting and war."³¹³

Persuasive as the explanation sounds, it would be unwise to accept it too readily. We know that, throughout the region, leopard skins were reserved for royalty, which may also explain why commoners could not don them at all. Moreover, during the annual feast, even the Chief would have surrendered his powers to the priest, so that no participant was expected to portray himself or herself as more elevated than the priest. Regarding the impropriety of wearing a waterbuck skin, R. M. Bere, one of the longest-serving colonial officials in Acholiland, has

³¹² Ibid., 67.

³¹³ Ibid.

explained that waterbuck is “the totemic animal of several Acholi clans.”³¹⁴ As a result, chiefs ordered their subjects never to hunt it “nor to eat its flesh or wear its skins.”³¹⁵ The dress code was not the only command that the priest issued prior to the national annual feast. Priests also ordered “persons with unsettled disputes,” such as fights, theft and murder, to stay away from the venue of the feast,³¹⁶ apparently because they were not clean.³¹⁷ Failure to obey the priest’s orders was believed to result in punishment in the form of sickness or death of the culprit,³¹⁸ again highlighting the immensity of the authority that the priest exercised in the chiefdom.

Beginning on the morning of the annual feast, the congregation, appropriately dressed, gathered at the homestead of the chief. The priest then led the congregation to the shrine. In the throng that followed the priest were “men who assisted the priest ... Barren women and girls whose breasts had not developed ... [and other] men and women who wished to go to the shrine.”³¹⁹ The attendance of barren women and girls with undeveloped breasts reveals that the chiefdom shrine also served as a site where barren women sought fertility, and girls whose breasts had failed to develop sought the intervention of the spirits. Moreover, the fact that barren women would seek fertility at a public national feast suggests how chiefdom sought to harness the potential reproductive capacities of these women for the benefit of the chiefdom.

³¹⁴ Bere, “A Cuckoo’s Parting cry,” 99.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 67.

³¹⁷ On concept of cleanliness, see James Ojera Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Traditional-based Practices in the Acholi Region,” in *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from Experiences*, ed. Luc Huyse and Mark Salter (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2008), 85-121; Odongo, “The Luo,” 104.

³¹⁸ Loka Otto, interview, 1 November 2013.

³¹⁹ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 67-8.

Unfortunately, p'Bitek does not describe the "Other men and women who wished to go to the shrine;" neither does he tell us why they wished to go to the shrine. As such, we can only speculate about their identity and motivation. Because the congregation comprised "barren women and girls whose breasts had not developed," the other men and women could have been husbands, relatives, or in-laws, concerned with the conditions of their wives or daughters. Additionally, the other men and women could have included clansmen and women blessed with children and well developed bodies, and eager to thank *jok* for their good fortune, and to entreat *him* to protect them and their families from disease and any other misfortune. Thus, the crowd that the priest or priestess controlled and led to the shrine for the feast was made up different people in attendance for different reasons.

The feast continued with the journey to the shrine. p'Bitek, in his eye-witness account of one feast, describes the journey to the national shrine as follows:

As the party advanced towards the shrines an oribi would be found and killed. It was believed that *Jok* sent the animal on to the path of the congregation, and it became stupefied and was easily killed. Other animals were also killed, but the oribi was regarded as *Jok's* contribution to the feast. When Baka hill was about half a mile away, the goat broke the string and sped towards the shrine. And when the party reached the foot of the hill, they found the goat already slain by *Jok*. The "cooks" killed the chicken and the carcass of the oribi, the goat and the chicken were cooked at the same time....When the meat was ready the women present prepared the millet bread. Then the whole congregation gathered at the mouth of the cave. The barren women and the girls suffering from underdeveloped breasts knelt in front. Then the priest, surrounded by the assistants, took a small portion of the carcass of the goat, chicken and oribi, and threw it into the cave.... [A]s he threw the morsels of food into the cave..., the priest led the congregation in... prayer:³²⁰

This so-called prayer that p'Bitek recorded, which demonstrates how the early generation of the Acholi intellectuals approached this ritual, is significant because it throws light on both the mindset and the objectives of the participants in the ritual. The supplication goes as follows:

³²⁰ Ibid., 68.

Jogi tua	<i>Jok</i> of our chiefdom
<i>Jok</i> kwaro	<i>Jok</i> of our forefathers
Wakelliwu cam	We have brought food for you
Wakelo gweno ki dyel	We have brought chicken and goat meat
Wakelo gwen ki moo	We have brought termites and butter
Wan iwa leng	Our hearts are clean
Wakelo iwu cam ki leng ic	We have brought for you food with clean hearts
Camu	Eat it
Wakelo kitino-wu en	We have brought your children, here they are
Wabako dog-wa do	We beseech you oh
Weku kitino kunong nyodo	Let your children have childbirth
Gonyp ki titino mon	Untie the young women
Wek nyodo kupot I komgi	So that childbirth may fall on them
Kitino anyira en	The little girls are here
Wek gunong tunu	Let them develop breasts
Wun jogi tua	You <i>Joks</i> of our chiefdom
Weku cam kuceki	Let the crops yield
Kot kucwee ma ber	The rain fall peacefully
Weku kitino gubed ki yot kom	Let the people have good health
Two ma bino	The sicknesses that are coming
Owok ki teng	Let them pass far away ³²¹

The ritual petition contains explicit pleas for specific favors: fertility for barren women, normal breasts for young girls, good crop yields, rain that falls “peacefully”, and “good health.” Upon completing the general prayer, the priest requested individuals to come forward and ask for special favors from *Jok*. p’Bitek, in his eye-witness account, recalled that a “young wife who had given birth only to girls went nearer the cave” and made the following requests:

Baka miya nyodo	Baka give me childbirth
Amito latin lacoo	I want a male child. ³²²

Evidently, it is at the invitation, or with the permission, of the priest that an individual with a problem was able to communicate directly with *jok* and seek his intervention. This illustrates the organizational, directive and the mediatory roles of priests, who stood between the people, chiefs, and *jok*, rendering them indispensable to the welfare of individuals, families, clans and

³²¹ Ibid., 69-70.

³²² Ibid., 70.

the chiefdom. It is these roles that must have won each priest a large following of dependent, hopeful, thankful and reverent people. The completion of the individual requests paved the way for the priest to perform the final part of the ritual, which deserves a lengthy quotation as well.

The priest went to the bottom of the cave and scooped a gourdful of the sacred sand from the 'place where *Jok* slept'. Then he climbed out, helped by the assistants. The barren women and the girls suffering from underdeveloped breasts received a few grains of the sacred sand from the priest. The sand was put into the horn of a duiker and worn on the neck of the patients. When such a woman gave birth to a child, eventually, the horn was removed from her neck and put on the neck of the child. Likewise, when the breasts of a girl developed and she produced a child the horn with the sacred sand was transferred onto the neck of the child. From the time the congregation left home until the morsels were thrown into the cave for *Jok* no person was allowed to eat anything. *Jok* must 'eat' before anybody else, because, according to custom, the most respected persons eat first, and the women and children afterwards....It was after distribution of the sacred sand that the people began to eat. The congregation split up into clan groups and the carcass of the animal killed *en route* and also the goat and oribi were divided up among the clans and eaten. Then there followed a fierce mock fight. The men blew their horns and women shouted ululations and yodeled.

These acts—the mock fight, blowing horns and ululations—marked the end of the ritual, and the crowd started its journey back home. Generally, the mock fight is performed to symbolize the defeat of an enemy. In this case, it may well have signified triumph over the malignant forces responsible for the infertility of women and the soil, underdeveloped breasts, drought and disease. After the mock fight, the priest led his congregation home. As the congregation approached "the first village of the chiefdom, there was much shouting and blowing of horns. The people who had remained behind went to meet the congregation, and they staged a mock fight, feigning to resist their re-entry of the congregation. Then all the people marched together into the village. At the chief's courtyard, there was much dancing and feasting." It is at this point in the festival that the poet-musician must have played his most important ritual role in the chiefdom while at the same time entertaining the crowd. After the festivity, the priest performed one final role: "The priest distributed the sacred sand from the

cave to the clan heads for further distribution to barren women and girls with underdeveloped breasts. Then the different clan groups moved to the homesteads of their respective heads where feasting and dancing continued all night long. The people returned to their own homes the next day.”³²³

Taken together, these accounts afford us significant insights into the roles and general character of priests and priestesses, a fusion of ritual and political authority. More specifically, the accounts highlight the ritual knowledge, organizational and leadership skills, and authority that priests possessed and exercised. The priest’s importance derived mainly from his or her perceived ability to intercede with *jok* and avert various forms of adversity, such as illness, disease, barrenness, drought and famine. As such, priests served both individuals and entire chiefdoms. At the individual level, a priest could help a barren woman to conceive and beget children just as he could assist a wife without a son to beget one. At the chiefdom level, a priest performed chiefdom or national service when, for example, he averted adversity in the form of drought and disease. These roles solidified the status of a priest as an individual and a public healer in his chiefdom, and won him a large clientele of appreciative and hopeful followers. Thus, priests in Acholiland were no different from their counterparts in the Buganda Kingdom that Kodesh described as “sufficiently prominent to claim leadership over large numbers of people and to have... [their] claim accepted.”³²⁴ Yet, important as Acholi priests were, they did not monopolize all ritual functions in the chiefdom; and this brings us to another important category of ritual specialist at the chief’s court: the royal healer.

³²³ Ibid., 72-3.

³²⁴ See Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 130.

Royal Healers

The royal healer, called *ajwaka ker*, held a position of extraordinary ritual importance and power in the chiefdom. According to F.K. Girling, he was sometimes called the “father of the soil.”³²⁵ While most scholars have referred to the royal healers as royal diviners, I prefer to call them royal healers because their functions extended beyond divination. Each chiefdom, as Girling reminded us, had “one important *ajwaka*, medicine man or herbalist, whom the *Rwot* consulted about planting crops, hunting, sickness, and other matters.”³²⁶ Like priests and priestesses, royal healers emerged from commoners’ clans, specifically from “the lineage of the descendants of the autochtones in the area.”³²⁷ But, unlike in the case of priests and priestesses, each chiefdom had only one royal healer who wielded more power than priests. As Odongo has observed, royal healers exercised undisputable powers over the chief and his subjects.³²⁸ Yet, they still remain among the least understood courtiers in Acholi chiefdoms.

Ethnographers working in Acholiland in the mid-twentieth century provided just snippets of these figures. Most of the early generation of Europeans in Acholiland branded them as “wizards” or “witch-doctors,” deflecting attention from them.³²⁹ Much of the work that draws on the European sources has continued to ignore these figures. However, from the fragments of documentary information and the many conversations I had with my informants, I was able to piece together a portrait of these figures and their roles. The historian Ronald R. Atkinson,

³²⁵ Girling, *The Acholi*, 123.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

³²⁸ Odongo, “The Luo,” 64.

³²⁹ Anywar, “The Life of *Rwot* Iburaim Awich,” 78; see also; Wright, “Some notes on Acholi,” 198.

working in early 1970s, provided perhaps the best accounts of royal healers in his field notes.³³⁰ Atkinson's notes from his conversations with elders about the position of a royal healer reveal three crucial insights.

First, royal healers came from families with a long-term association with the spirit world. Implicitly, therefore, although they were of common origins, they possessed unique attributes that propelled them to their position. Secondly, a royal healer was always succeeded by his eldest son,³³¹ a statement that was confirmed by many of my informants from different chiefdoms. Finally, and most importantly, the major roles of royal healers were to preside over pre-hunting and pre-planting rituals, a norm that Girling had noted earlier.³³² Despite offering these insights, however, Atkinson's field notes leave several crucial details unexplained.³³³ For example, Atkinson's notes do not explain why a royal healer had to be the eldest son of his predecessor or how royal healers were selected and installed into office. An examination of the process by which royal healers were selected and installed sheds further light on the type of powers that royal healers held and their roles in Acholi chiefdoms.

The selection of the royal healer differed from that of the chief. In principle, chiefship, as Atkinson explains, always went to the "youngest son of the wife who had undergone installation ceremonies with the former *rwot* (the *daker*, or wife of the *rwotship*)."³³⁴ Divinership, on the

³³⁰ Atkinson, "Interviews of Ronald Atkinson in Acholi," 464.

³³¹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 90.

³³² Atkinson, "Interviews of Ronald Atkinson in Acholi," 464; see Anywar, "The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich," 78.

³³³ According to Atkinson, some of his respondents were uncooperative, see Atkinson, "Interviews of Ronald Atkinson in Acholi," 464.

³³⁴ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 90.

other hand, was offered to the “eldest son” of a deceased diviner.³³⁵ The pivotal question is: why the eldest son? The difference in the choice illustrates the perception of the two positions and their relative importance. That the royal healer had to be the eldest son of a deceased healer suggests that a royal healer had to be mature, knowledgeable and experienced in rituals and leadership. He had to be capable of mediating between the chief and his subjects. By contrast, the position of chief was filled by the youngest son of the formal wife of a deceased chief, implying that one did not have to be chronologically mature or particularly knowledgeable in order to become a chief. This was because chiefs were expected to have competent court officials, including a senior mother, capable of forming and maintaining political alliances in support of her son. Thus, one can conclude that the pre-requisites of becoming a royal healer were far more stringent than those of becoming a chief, which gives us the first glimpse into the importance of the royal healer. After all, even a child could become a chief.

The installation procedures of the royal healer accord us further glimpses into the importance of royal healers, especially the power they wielded over the chiefdom. As Odongo informs us, the new royal healer “was installed into the office with the Divine Regalia [which] consisted of ‘Kom *Jok*’ or Divine Stool; ‘La Kwac’ or Leopard Skin; ‘Tok Wic’ or Head Dress and, above all, a long stick called ‘Tal-Ker me Lok Paco’.”³³⁶ The four items of paraphernalia cited are identical in most chiefdoms’ histories, suggesting a high degree of uniformity in the rituals and regalia associated with the position of a royal diviner. Each of the four items of the royal healer’s regalia—the divine stool, leopard skin, head dress and long stick—affords us even a deeper understanding of the powers and importance of royal healers.

³³⁵ Atkinson, “Interviews of Ronald Atkinson in Acholi,” 464.

³³⁶ Odongo, “The Luo,” 65.

The first item, the divine stool or *kom jok*, was an important insignia of royal healers. The term *kom* simply means “a stool,” and *jok* refers to the spiritual power that governed the Acholi. Thus, *kom jok* literally means the “stool of *jok*.” This, however, was no ordinary stool. A code of etiquette surrounded this stool. Nobody apart from the diviner was allowed to touch it or sit on it. Failure to observe this prescription was believed to result in an illness that could debilitate the offender, render him insane or even kill him. This suggests that once a royal healer had been installed, no one could dethrone him.

The second item, the leopard skin, was another important insignia. Its significance has already been discussed in the preceding pages, and we shall only summarize it here. The leopard skin was reserved for royalty: commoners, except healers, were barred from possessing or wearing it.³³⁷ According to Onyango, the leopard skin served as a carpet on which the royal healer’s stool (*kom jok*) would be placed.³³⁸ That a royal healer, a commoner, could sit on the leopard skin, reserved for royalty, illustrates the standing of the royal healer.

The third piece of regalia was the headgear. Though Odongo mentions it as one of the symbols of office, he does not tell us what it was made of. However, in discussing the headdress of diviners and healers, p’Bitek noted that they wear “a striking head gear made from hornbill feathers and adorned with beads and cowry shells.”³³⁹ It remains unclear if the headgear of the royal healer was the same as that of any other healer. However, Loka Otto, a contemporary diviner in Acholiland, who by the time I interviewed him had been a diviner for forty years, explained to me that throughout Acholiland, healers, including royal healers, use hornbill

³³⁷ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 92. See also Girling, *The Acholi*, 95.

³³⁸ Odongo, “The Luo,” 65.

³³⁹ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 106.

feathers. “Hornbills,” he told me, “are the only birds that give auguries.” And when a healer has hornbill feathers, Otto explained, “the feathers link the healer with the bird, and they can communicate, informing the healer of any impending danger.”³⁴⁰ The beads and cowrie shells, Otto concluded, were to “demonstrate the healer’s preferred method of divination.”³⁴¹

Finally, the stick that constituted the fourth and last piece of the royal healer’s regalia appears to have been the most significant object, a kind of scepter, imbued with mysterious powers. Many of my informants claimed that the stick was the most powerful object without which the institution of chiefdom could not stand. As Otto recalled, “The stick was the most powerful [item]. It was used during planting rituals and meetings, and if the chief diviner, for whatever reason, pointed at you with that stick, you [would] die.”³⁴² While there is explicit evidence that this stick was used during planting and hunting rituals, there is no documentary evidence to support the claim that, when pointed at a person, the stick could kill. The closest documentary evidence to corroborate this claim comes from Odongo, who alluded to this belief when he wrote that in the Puranga Chiefdom, this long stick “was reverently treated as a magic wand which gave the ‘*Ajwaka*’ [royal healer] the esoteric power to control and conduct meetings of the ... [chiefdom].”³⁴³

An examination of the noun *tal-ker* offer some evidence in support of Otto’s assertion. The term *tal* translates as stick. *Ker* has already been defined: it simply means royalty. Thus *tal-ker* simply means a royal stick. But the term *tal* also has other meanings. In 1907, Kitching

³⁴⁰ Loka Otto, interview, 25 November 2013.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Odongo, “The Luo,” 65.

defined *tal* as to “dry [or] wither.”³⁴⁴ In 1971, p’Bitek defined the term *tal* as “the act of causing death by withering or wasting away,” adding, “The victim of *tal* withered away and died without suffering any physical defects: the cause of the death was not stomach ache or headache or any recognizable pain.”³⁴⁵ These scraps of evidence suggest that *tal-ker* was not an ordinary stick. It is likely, as Otto said, that people must have understood it to be imbued with powers that could kill and, therefore, to be a powerful object of the royal healer. The presentation of these four items to the royal healer-elect legitimated and completed his accession to power, conferring upon him extraordinary powers in the chiefdom. But what roles did the royal healers play?

Ethnographic sources point to three main roles for royal healers. First, they performed the pre-planting rituals.³⁴⁶ Secondly, they carried out pre-hunting rituals.³⁴⁷ Finally, they carried out judicial trials in the courts.³⁴⁸ Given the nature of historical evidence available to us, I explore only these three roles, beginning with the planting ritual. Exploring these rituals reveals the knowledge, skills and type of authority that royal healers possessed and exercised.

The planting ritual was an important annual event. Locally called *coyo kodi*, it was performed at the end of every dry season or, in Atkinson’s words, “just before the time to plant.”³⁴⁹ The ritual aimed to ensure a good harvest to feed the chiefdom. Unlike *tero jok*, which was performed by priests at the chiefdom’s shrine, *coyo kodi* was performed in the chief’s courtyard. Beginning on the morning of the appointed day, people gathered at the chief’s home.

³⁴⁴ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 67.

³⁴⁵ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 123.

³⁴⁶ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97. Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 189.

³⁴⁷ Anywar, *Acholi Ki Ker Megi*, 45-6; Girling, *The Acholi*, 97-98; see also Garry, “The Settlement of Pajule,” 11.

³⁴⁸ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97-98.

³⁴⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 150.

Women from each lineage brought sorghum and millet flour while men brought a he-goat for the ceremony.³⁵⁰ Attendance at the ceremony, as J.R.P. Postlethwaite, one of the first colonial agents noted in 1911, was compulsory for every man and woman.³⁵¹ The royal healer, with the assistance of the *luted jok*, slaughtered all the goats at the shrine in the home of the chief, but removed the “content of the goats’ intestines.” These contents, as Atkinson explained, “were sprinkled around the *Abila* [shrine], and on the nearby graves of previous *rwodi* [chiefs], and then on the chests of the people present.”³⁵² Missing in Atkinson’s work is an explanation for using “content of the goats’ intestines.” In Acholi thought, intestines were understood to have regenerative power which engendered human fertility and plant growth.

Having sprinkled the contents of the goats’ intestines around the shrines, on the nearby graves of previous chiefs, and on the chests of the people present, women prepared the slaughtered goats for the feast. The royal healer, accompanied by the chief, the clan heads and some other people, walked to the nearest garden and struck the ground with his *tal ker*. The historical sources available to us do not tell us what the royal healer, chief or the people present said in the garden. After the completion of the act, people returned to the chief’s courtyard to celebrate the beginning of the new agricultural season.³⁵³ It is at this point in the festival that the poet-musician must have entertained the crowd. But, according to Atkinson, some of the dances performed at the chiefs’ courts were not celebratory dances for the new season; rather, people danced “to encourage rain.”³⁵⁴ Immediately after this ritual, “people were permitted to begin

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ As cited in Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 190.

³⁵² Atkinson, *The Roots*, 150; see also Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 189.

³⁵³ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 150.

work in the fields,” preparing their gardens. But it was only “[a]fter the rain had fallen,” and after “the signal for cultivation to begin was given by the *rwot*” that planting began.³⁵⁵ The seeds that were planted were “distributed by *rwot*,” and were “mixed with soil from around the *Abila* [shrine].”³⁵⁶

The most significant act that deserves attention is the act of the royal healer striking the ground with his stick. There is no documentary source that explains this act, but some of my informants recollected that the ground or soil is regarded as the abode of pests and diseases. The act of striking the soil, one informant explained to me, was “to kill all pests and other creatures that could eat away the seeds of the chief.”³⁵⁷ That striking the ground with a stick could kill pests and other creatures tells us even more about the powers embedded in the stick of the royal healers, and it corroborates Otto’s earlier claim that the stick could kill a person when pointed at them.

Presiding at the pre-planting ritual was just one of the roles of royal healers. They also performed hunting rituals called *tedo tim* towards the beginning of every dry season. Hunting was just as significant as agriculture because it ensured a stable and balanced supply of food. There are several descriptions of this ritual, but Reuben S. Anywar, the second Acholi to publish a book, documented perhaps the best description of the hunting ritual. According to Anywar, it was mandatory for the owners of a hunting ground to call the royal healer to carry out the ritual prior to any hunting expedition.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 150.

³⁵⁵ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97.

³⁵⁶ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 78.

³⁵⁷ Martin Okello, interview, 10 November 2013.

[The] owner [of the hunting ground] arranges with *ajwaka* for blessing of the hunting ground. The owner goes to the *ajwaka* and briefs him on how he wants the hunting to be conducted. He also asks the *ajwaka* to prevent wild animals from attacking hunters. The procedure for this act requires the cooking of a white or stripped chicken and honey. The cooking is done in the hunting ground itself. Some of the food is given to the most remarkable feature in the hunting ground (a tree or mountain, or marsh). This process is known as ‘tedo tim’, meaning ‘cooking the hunting ground’. After it has been done the owner then informs the *rwot* [chief] that his hunting ground is ready for the hunt. The *rwot* then gives him permission to invite people to go for the hunt.”³⁵⁸

Like the pre-planting ritual, the pre-hunting ritual described by Anywar highlights yet another important role that the royal healer used to perform. The royal healer, and not the chief, was the main actor in regulating food production. The two rituals reveal without explaining the kind of knowledge and the skills that royal healers brought to the institution of chiefship, and the sort of followers they derived from performing these rituals. By organizing and performing pre-planting rituals, royal healers portrayed themselves, and were regarded, as the guarantors of good harvests, who protected crops from pests and diseases. Likewise, by performing pre-hunting rituals, royal healers depicted themselves, and were regarded, as the guarantors of effective hunting expeditions, who protected hunters from dangerous animals and animal spirits, and facilitated access to abundant game meat. All this ensured community wellbeing.

But royal healers performed other roles: they divined for their chiefs, advised their chiefs and, equally importantly, carried out judicial trials in the court.³⁵⁹ In 1913, a CMS convert explained to Rev. Fischer that the best healers in the land “belonged to the chief,” and they carried out trials “with water and fire” in the chiefs’ courts.³⁶⁰ Fischer, however, did not explore these trials. As a result, he does not give us any sense of the kinds of transgressions that led to

³⁵⁸ Anywar, *Acholi ki Ker Megi*, 93-4.

³⁵⁹ Girling. *The Acholi*, 97; Anywar, *Acholi Ki Ker Megi*, 45-6.

³⁶⁰ GB 0150 CMS/ACC84

ordeals; which other settings worked as courts; whether or not there was a hierarchy of courts and a process for deciding appeals, etc. In short, Fisher does not give us a richer sense of pre-colonial legal culture.

That the chiefs' courts were trial grounds is well known to scholars. Less known, however, is how these trials were performed and by whom. Because of the absence of royal healers in most discussions about conflict resolution in Acholiland, recent works portray chiefs as having presided over court trials. Yet, some of the nature of the conflicts (or trials) in question suggests that chiefs might not have been the principal judges. This is not to suggest that chiefs did resolve any conflicts. But as Grove noted, "in [complicated] cases where there are no witnesses or where the nature of the case does not admit of proof," chiefs were incompetent. Such cases were referred to the royal healer. In 1919, Grove recorded both water fire ordeals similar to that recounted to Rev. Fischer by the CMS convert. His account is particularly informative, and suggests that scholars have taken the role of chiefs in resolving conflict too literally. Grove's account deserves a lengthy quotation:

Suppose that one man has accused another of intercourse with his wife and that the other denies it. Both parties then go to the drinking place and the *Ajwaka* prepares two gourds of water in which he sprinkles his own preparation....The two principals then drink off the two gourds. If the accusation is false, the person accused will immediately be sick. The accuser on the other hand will begin to swell. A sheep is then hastily brought and killed and the undigested food from its stomach smeared over the man who is swelling. He is then also sick (not unnaturally) and on his recovery he has to pay a fine to the man he had slandered. If the accusation is true, the reverse process takes place. The accuser is sick and the accused cannot be sick and so swells. Sometimes this ordeal is carried out by proxy each man bringing his own chicken who are made to drink the *kwir* [poison]. In the ordeal by fire the two parties are struck by the *Ajwaka* with a red hot spear. The one who is burnt is guilty.³⁶¹

Grove's description of the ordeals illustrates the role of healers in conflict resolution. But, besides these kinds of trials, royal healers were also adept at employing oaths to resolve disputes.

³⁶¹ Grove, "Customs of the Acholi," 176

The use of oaths, Grove added, worked “much the same as the ordeals,” except that, to be effective, the oaths were usually taken on the royal spears of chiefs. According to Grove, “The man taking the oath calls on the spear to kill him if he is lying and then licks it three times.” The impact of these oaths, Grove explained, was immediate: “In a few days the man accused (if guilty) or his accuser (if innocent) will become ill and die, unless the proper measures are taken. The spear is said to have caught him.” The only remedy for the guilty person was: “As soon as he gets ill, he calls in the other party to the oath and pays him an appropriate fine (usually 15 sheep). A sheep is then brought to the sick man and killed with the weapon on which the oath was taken, on the spot where the oath was made. The sick man is then smeared with the food from its stomach, and the anger of the weapon is thus diverted into the body of the sheep.”³⁶²

These narratives convey the ways in which royal healers operated. Specifically, they played a central role in the judicial process of the chiefdom, a role that was beyond the ability of the chief to perform. They caught criminals, affirmed accusations and absolved the innocent, thereby restoring balance and harmony in the chiefdom. In the end, it seems that all transgressions that “where there are no witnesses or where the nature of the case does not admit of proof,” royal healers were involved. They carried out trials and administered oaths. But in cases where there were witnesses and proofs, they were negotiated by the chief and other courtiers.

Taken together, these accounts affirm the powers and the socio-political importance of the royal healers in pre-colonial Acholiland. The accounts demonstrate that royal healers played many roles, ranging from keeping the people materially safe and prosperous by performing pre-planting and-hunting rituals to restoring harmony by carrying out trials and administering oaths. Significantly, all of these roles that were beyond the purview of chiefs. Moreover, if people

³⁶² Ibid., 176-7.

believed that the royal diviner's stick was powerful enough to kill whoever it was pointed at, then the royal healer must have been the principal guarantor of law and order in the chiefdom. He invoked fear among the people, and neutralized the influence and pressure of subjects and people close to the chief at moments of crisis, thereby achieving balance and harmony, and thus strengthening the institution of chiefship. But ritual specialists (priests or priestesses and royal healers) were not the only courtiers responsible for the functioning of the chiefdom. There were other courtiers whose roles constitute the topic of discussion in the next sections.

Military Generals

The military general, locally known as *oteka*, was among the important subordinate officials in the chief's court. Like priests and royal healers, he did not come from the ranks of royalty. Rather, it was attained largely out of merit. Battle provided warriors with the opportunity to lay their claim to the position by demonstrating their knowledge of, and skills in, warfare, and thus pave the way for their election. But while a chiefdom could have only one royal healer at a time, it could have many military generals simultaneously, suggesting the imperative of numbers in matters of national defense.

To understand how generals fit in the court and, more importantly, their roles within their chiefdoms, we have to unravel the character and conduct of warfare in pre-colonial Acholiland. Focusing on the character and conduct of warfare helps us not only to unravel the roles of generals, but also to identify other key figures in ensuring a successful battle. Ethnographers working in Acholiland in the twentieth century have given us many snippets of warfare that have enabled us to recreate the nature of war and more specifically the role of different actors, including generals. All these ethnographers noted that the decades preceding colonization were

marked by frequent wars. According to Girling, for example, these wars rose from “competition for hunting rights in land, or for the acquisition of cattle and women,” or from the desire to avenge for lost battles.³⁶³ More importantly, all these ethnographers noted that although the generals fought wars, they could not declare war: this prerogative belonged to chiefs who, customarily, did not go to war. In 1949, an informant explained to Girling that chiefs never went to war, and if a war broke out, the responsibility of any of the subjects around the chief was to “place their *rwot* in a place of safety ... [because the] prosperity of the domain and the personal safety of the ruler were too closely associated to...risk injuring him in fighting.”³⁶⁴ That the generals who fought wars had no power to declare war suggests that the norm was most probably meant to control the powers of the generals.

But even declaring war was not an easy task for chiefs. Before declaring war, a chief had to consult with his court officials, especially the royal healer. Even in a chiefdom that had a military council, as J.B. Webster found, “The only check upon its military authority was the chief priest [royal healer] who could stop a military expedition by claiming that the national *Jok* had predicted military failure for the intended expedition.”³⁶⁵ A chief could not declare war without consulting the royal healer. It was only after the royal healer had supported the decision to declare war that the chief “summoned the men of the domain to his home, and he explained to them the matter under dispute.”³⁶⁶ Evidently, therefore, chiefs did not declare war unilaterally:

³⁶³ Girling, *The Acholi*, 104.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ J.B. Webster, “State Formation and Fragmentation in Agago.” in *The Central Lwo during the Aconya*, eds. J.M. Onyango-ku-Odongo and J.B. Webster (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 347.

³⁶⁶ Girling, *The Acholi*, 104.

they had to consult their royal healers. This illustrates the importance of royal healers and, more importantly, the presence of other actors in decision-making in the functioning of the chiefdoms.

Declaring a war paved the way for battle preparations, which introduces us to different historical figures and their roles in ensuring a successful battle. If the chief needed an alliance with a friendly chiefdom to fight the war, which was common in Acholiland, it was his role to seek the alliance. “The chief sent a delegation [led by the royal messenger] together with a girl, and a piece of stick, to the friendly chief. The girl and the stick were, together, called *lapii*. They were presented to the chief.” The royal messenger then explained the threat at hand to the friendly chief whose support was sought. The chief whose support was being sought then “examined the reasons for the fight,” and most likely consulted his royal healer. “If he took the girl and the stick this was the sign that he accepted the invitation to take part in the battle.”³⁶⁷ However, if he refused both the girl and the stick, it was understood that he found the war unjustifiable, which was also common.³⁶⁸ Thus, “war alliance was struck only after the chief, being asked for military assistance, had accepted the *lapii* of the requesting chief.”³⁶⁹ There are many instances of these alliances in Acholi military history.³⁷⁰

The description above begs the question why negotiations for a military alliance involved a girl. This question brings us to a common, yet little understood, practice of using girls in various rituals. Young girls were associated with fertility, and giving a girl was a gesture by one chief to another of the former’s readiness to compensate the latter for any eventual loss of the latter’s subjects in the war. Political alliances, or any pacts cemented by a girl, established a

³⁶⁷ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 151; see also p’Bitek, “Oral Literature,” 118.

³⁶⁸ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 164.

³⁶⁹ Ocaya-Lakidi, “Manhood, Warriorhood,” 151.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

more permanent relationship, making it less likely that the two polities would turn against each other in future. But, one might ask, whose daughter was used as a *lapii*? The girls normally offered in such cases were slaves. However, as Girling explained, there was “no objection to a *Rwot*’s wife being a slave girl, and he was often presented with women captured in fighting.”³⁷¹

Military generals, on the other hand, played their own roles. They engaged in preparations for battle. As Jim Ocitti has pointed out, generals took “charge of preparing the military for...attacks against [their] clan [or chiefdom] or for launching attacks against enemies.”³⁷² These preparations included issuing commands and ensuring that warriors followed the battle preparation procedures. It seems that there were many such procedures, but one that comes to us clearly is the rule on spears to be used for battle. Specifically, generals ordered and ensured that all the spears for a military expedition were placed in the shrine. Travelling through Acholiland in 1903 on an evangelization tour, A. B. Lloyd, a CMS Reverend, noted that spears were placed in the shrine, which he described as “one big hut, set apart to the favoured spirit of the tribe.”³⁷³ In Acholi thought, spears were placed inside the shrine to receive blessings from the spirits. It was believed that placing spears in the shrine rendered them effective in battle and hunting. Spears placed outside the shrine were believed to be ineffective and a liability to the users.

The main role of the general in the preparatory stages was, therefore, to issue commands and ensure that warriors followed the code of conduct governing battle preparations to ensure

³⁷¹ Girling, *The Acholi*, 108.

³⁷² Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 42.

³⁷³ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 178-9; see also p’ Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 92-3.

victory in battle.³⁷⁴ Besides issuing commands, generals also selected and deployed spies, which Kitching called *larot*, to locate the enemy for attack.³⁷⁵ No document has emerged on the spies, making it impossible for us to know how they were selected or their attributes. However, Girling noted that, in preparation for war, chiefs summoned men to the royal courtyard to explain the war plans, and we can speculate that the spies were selected from these men.³⁷⁶ The spies must have been some of the best-trained warriors, high-ranking wives or even established court officials such as royal messengers, who travelled relatively freely about Acholiland and beyond, and were intimately familiar with the geography of the region. These spies provided pre-war intelligence to the generals.

Pre-war planning constituted one of the initial tasks of generals. But on the night before the planned battle, the general mobilized warriors and brought them to the chief's court for an important war ritual. According to p'Bitek, the ritual "took place soon after sunset." Sunset was associated with cleansing. Early twentieth-century missionaries and travelers often recorded many invocations by elders; and their descriptions indicate that elders understood sunset as the time for cleansing the evils wrought by daylight. In this war ritual, p'Bitek explained, "The chief's mother, holding a leafy twig of *olwedo* tree, spoke. She repeated the reasons for the attack about to begin, stressing that her son's warriors would fight for the right cause." This act of the queen mother, he added, "was called *lam pa min Rwot*, the 'curse' of the chief's mother, and the supposed effect was that it made the enemy weak and easily beatable. It was believed that the *lam* of the side that was in the right neutralized the power of the *lam* made by the other

³⁷⁴ Odongtoo Okello, interview, 8 November 2013; Matayo Obol, interview, 8 November, 2013; Charles Okok, interview, 8 November, 2013.

³⁷⁵ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 89.

³⁷⁶ Girling, *The Acholi*, 104.

side.” The *lam pa min Rwot* introduces a new historical actor, and it illustrates that war was by no means an entirely male affair. It was during this ritual that warriors received war medicine from the royal healer. Unfortunately, no document tells us precisely what this war medicine was made of, or how it was administered.

In the course of my fieldwork, respondents recalled only one protective medicine called *Okweyo*, derived from a plant of the same name. The plant derives its name from the verb *kweyo*, which means “to cool something down.” *Okweyo* is commonly grown around the compound, but it also grows naturally in the bush. Lakop Ajok, a practicing diviner, explained to me that “warriors kept part of it on their bodies, and if they were on an expedition, they chewed some and spat it out before the battle.” The plant, she added, “cooled down the power of the enemy.”³⁷⁷ In short, the *Okweyo* was believed to ward off any harm and to protect its user from any danger.

There is further circumstantial evidence to suggest that *Okweyo* was a war medicine. Catholic missionaries working in Acholiland often recorded the metaphorical way in which the Acholi attributed their defeat in a war to the enemy having “cooled them down.” Read from this perspective, *Okweyo* might very well have been a war medicine. Today, as Ajok told me, *Okweyo* is sought most commonly by people having court cases: “The plant helps to tilt the case in your favor, making people reluctant to pursue legal proceedings against you because you would have ‘cooled’ them against you.”³⁷⁸ But *okweyo* was not the only war medicine. In the course of my fieldwork, my informants told me many stories about their famous war generals turning into strange creatures, and killing their enemies.

³⁷⁷ Lakop Ajok, interview, 13 November 2013.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

For example, Matteo Otto of the Bobi clan, near Gulu Town, narrated to me that Okello Mwoka, one of the most revered war generals in his clan and in Acholiland, could turn into a furious wild beast and kill his enemies at battle fronts. Because of his medicine that enabled him to turn into a creature, Otto added, “Okello was given the name Mwoka, which is derived from an animal called mwok.”³⁷⁹ In his 1932 dictionary, Kitching translated *mwok* as an “ant bear.”³⁸⁰ Similar stories have also been recorded by early Europeans. For example, Grove reported that he had heard of a man who had “the power of turning himself into a leopard and ... killing his enemies.” In another account, Grove recorded that some people had told him that people with such powers did “not actually turn themselves into leopards but that they have a charm which enables them to send ordinary leopards to do the work for them.”³⁸¹ Thus, success on the battlefield depended on much more than sheer superiority of arms and bravery. But the Acholi were not unique in this respect. As Neil Kodesh writes regarding the people of Buganda Kingdom to the south, success in battle “relied on more than superior technological resources and a well-trained fighting force.” War medicines were an equally significant part of the “technologies of warfare.”³⁸²

Immediately after this ritual, Grove informs us, a “notice was ... sent...to the enemy.”³⁸³ Although Grove does not tell us whose role it was to deliver the notice to the enemy, we know that delivering war messages or ultimatums was one of the roles of the royal messenger, and we shall discuss it in some detail later. According to Girling, conflicting parties sent notices to their

³⁷⁹ Matteo Otoo, interview, 15 December 2013.

³⁸⁰ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 54.

³⁸¹ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 178.

³⁸² Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 151.

³⁸³ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 164.

enemies as a way of “issuing of threats and the spreading of exaggerated accounts of their strengths”³⁸⁴ But Girling’s explanation is only partly true: there are two more compelling reasons for sending a royal messenger to alert an enemy about an impending attack. First, it was a tradition of military honor. In the Acholi tradition of military honor, like in that of the Yoruba noted by Sylviane A. Diouf, “the shame was on the victors who had won through ruse instead of valor.”³⁸⁵ Secondly, there was a belief that the spirit of anybody murdered in cold blood would be vengeful. It is, therefore, more probable that these two factors account for the norm of alerting an enemy to an impending attack. Taken together, the description of the ritual undertaken at the shrine of the chief offers us a rare insight into the Acholi preparations for war. More importantly, it introduces us to several different participants and their roles in ensuring the success of a military expedition. In sum, military victory was secured by many people performing different roles and rituals.

Upon completing all pre-war procedures, “[e]ach man was armed with a shield, four or five spears and a circular knife carried like a bracelet round the wrist,”³⁸⁶ and the war party set out. European writers have provided us with many descriptions of the roles of generals at the frontline.³⁸⁷ L. F. Nalder, a CMS traveler in the region, recorded perhaps the best description of the roles of generals. According to him, the general “commanded all the age classes and decided the place and hour of attack.” He adds, “The senior class [34-45] formed the first line, the second was formed by the middle class [23-35] led by the *otega* [Oteka], who encouraged his forces by

³⁸⁴ Girling, *The Acholi*, 155.

³⁸⁵ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Dreams of Africa in Alabama. The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47.

³⁸⁶ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 164.

³⁸⁷ Nalder, *A Tribal Survey of Mongala Province*, 164.

chanting verses of songs which the warriors chorused; the junior class [15-25] formed the third line, while the ‘reservists’ [45-55] guarded the village.”³⁸⁸ Nalder’s description of the activities of generals reveal that generals led warriors, made decisions, organized warriors and directed battle. Their main roles were organizational and directive.³⁸⁹

Irrespective of the result of the war, warriors and generals returned home and demobilized. Demobilization meant undergoing a ritual before they could return to their previous occupations such as farming and cattle-keeping.³⁹⁰ Demobilization rituals have been described copiously.³⁹¹ But they were essentially cleansing ceremonies aimed at exorcising from the warriors the spirits of the dead enemies and any other malignant spirits that the warriors could have encountered in the bush which was believed to be the abode of all dangerous spirits such as those of wild animals. These spirits were known to kill, debilitate or render an individual insane. Thus, warriors underwent this ritual to protect them from all sorts of threats. But any warrior who had killed an enemy, Girling noted, was during the demobilization rituals, “recognized by the presentation to him of a girl, in the same way as the *Rwot* received a girl on his installation. The new status was further confirmed by the assumption of a new name, by which he was thenceforward known in the domain and in surrounding groups.”³⁹² An additional name ending with the suffix—moi was given to him. As Opiyo Oloya explains, warriors would choose their names from among the many available names such as “Lutanya-moi, Lwanya-moi, Luker-moi,

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 145-6.

³⁸⁹ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 105.

³⁹⁰ Uzoigwe, “The Warrior and the State,” 43.

³⁹¹ See, for example, Girling, *The Acholi*, 103.

³⁹² Girling, *The Acholi*, 103.

Tweny-moi, Guru-moi and so on,” but “[w]hatever name he chose would end with *moi*.”³⁹³ So, what then was the significance of all these?

To be presented with a girl and allowed to assume an additional name was highly significant. It was the highest honor for individuals who excelled in war, suggesting that warfare had been professionalized, and that mechanisms had been instituted to motivate and reward warriors so as to ensure that the chiefdom was secure. These assumed names distinguished individuals from ordinary warriors; indeed, the new names could be said to have signified a transformed individualism, by augmenting reputation. But generals who consistently excelled received even a higher renown in Acholiland and beyond.

Clan histories provide examples of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century war leaders who rose to fame on account of their military prowess, and eclipsed their chiefs. For example, Keny Koropil, Okello Mwoka Lengomoi and Nekodemo Latigo often appear as larger-than-life figures in their respective chiefdom histories because of their military triumph over the soldiers that Sir Samuel Baker had left in Acholiland. The people of the Patiko Chiefdom, for instance, told p’Bitek that “Keny Koropil, a Pa-Cua war leader, was particularly feared. Keny was a deadly shot. It is reported that he could shoot an egg placed on a woman’s head from a distance of fifty yards. He had more chickens than anybody else in the chiefdom of Patiko and kites and wild cats did not touch his chickens.” According to p’Bitek, “The Patiko believed that if a kite caught [his] chick it would knock itself against a tree and fall down dead but the chick

³⁹³ Opiyo Oloya, *Child to Soldier: Stories from Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 122; Ngomlokojo, *The Acholi*, 53; Girling, *The Acholi*, 102-103; Heike, *Alice Lakwena*, 28.

would live. If a cat caught one of his chickens and ate it the cat would be found dead in the grass.”³⁹⁴

Similar stories about the extraordinary abilities of these war leaders frequently appeared in the course of my fieldwork. For example, in an attempt to explain the extraordinary powers of General Okello Mwoka, Matteo Otto told me that the general could not only turn into a furious wild beast and kill his enemies at battle fronts; he could also “throw three spears together, making him invincible in battle.”³⁹⁵ These accounts of the extraordinary prowess of Acholi war generals reveal the awe with which the military leaders were regarded, and they explain why they often acquired huge followings: they promised protection from violence wrought by slave traders and other enemies. Because of their unique abilities and perhaps because of the rumors that circulated in Acholiland and beyond, some war generals, in the decades preceding colonization, engaged in activities beyond Acholiland.

For example, in 1895, when the British intruded into Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom to the immediate south, the King, Omukama Kabarega, enlisted Okello Mwoka Lengomoi to lead his delegation to Sudan to seek the assistance of Mohammad Ahmad “who, beginning from 1881, had successfully led a Sudanese uprising against Egyptian troops occupying Sudan.” Okello Mwoka Lengomoi was one of the most revered Acholi war leaders from the Puranga Chiefdom.³⁹⁶ According to Lacito Okech, Okello Mwoka Lengomoi led a delegation of 200 soldiers from the Bunyoro Kingdom.³⁹⁷ Okech, however, does not provide details of this mission. He only notes that Okello returned to Acholiland after three years in Sudan, and he

³⁹⁴ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 129-30.

³⁹⁵ Matteo Otoo, interview, 15 December 2013.

³⁹⁶ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 61.

³⁹⁷ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58.

immediately abandoned Kabarega and joined Major Delme-Radcliffe, a British colonial agent, in the “pacification” of Acholiland. Okello later helped in arresting King Kabarega in Langoland. According to Okech, Okello became the first war leader to join the colonial state, later becoming a prominent colonial servant.³⁹⁸ These accounts reveal the caliber of men in first group of Acholi colonial servants. They were already established figures in their communities. Their roles during the transition, especially in the first decade of colonial rule in Acholiland, will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Royal Messengers

Besides priests, priestesses, royal healers and war leaders, various chiefdoms also possessed royal messengers, locally known as *la-or pa rwot*, or *lakwena pa rwot*. This was another significant position. According to the Verona missionary, Father J. P. Crazzolaro, a royal messenger, “was a kind of secretary or emissary mediator who represented the *Rwot*...with fully detailed instructions. He was supposed to be an able man (and he generally was), but he had absolutely no power of his own.”³⁹⁹ To distinguish royal messengers and enable them carry out their roles, they also, like royal healers, possessed legitimizing objects. They carried with them a short stick called *Olek* that Kitching, in his 1907 dictionary, described as a “loaded stick, knob-kerry.”⁴⁰⁰ According to some of my informants, it was by this stick that a royal messenger was identified and accorded easy passage wherever he went in Acholiland. But, according to other informants, the stick was not enough: in addition, a royal messenger had to carry a leopard skin,

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo*, 241.

⁴⁰⁰ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 65. Also, the term *Olek* is derived from the word *lek*, and it can be used as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it means “a dream”; and as a verb (*leko*), it signifies “to look after something”.

a symbol of royalty, to distinguish him and allow him to travel relatively unimpeded throughout the region.

Documentary evidence shows that, unlike all other courtiers, royal messengers lived in the chief's courtyard. According to Girling, royal messengers were the only subordinate officials who "lived in *Rwot's* household."⁴⁰¹ This claim is similar to what people told me during the course of my fieldwork. For example, in an effort to explain to me the residence of a royal messenger, Matteo Okot noted that "If he [royal messenger] was on a safari [journey], he [the chief] may be alone. If not, he [royal messenger] was in the court. He lived in the court with his chief"⁴⁰² But why were they granted residence in the chief's court?

On the surface, living in the chief's courtyard might appear like a simple thing, but it is significant. Though Girling did not provide any explanation for royal messengers sharing the same compound with their chiefs, two possible explanations come to mind. First, royal messengers were so vital to the functioning of the chiefdom that they had to be constantly in close proximity to the chief. This is because they were frequently required to update the chief with both public and confidential news, and to be ready to deliver information to the subjects and clan heads, and even to chiefs of other chiefdoms. Secondly, they were always in possession of so much vital information that it would have been foolhardy not to accord them special protection in the court of the chief. In 1925, a convert told a missionary that when someone committed a murder and ran to the court of the chief, the offended party could not follow him and revenge.⁴⁰³ That the offended party could not revenge at the chief's court reveals the sort of

⁴⁰¹ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97.

⁴⁰² Matteo Okello, interview, 19 September 2014.

⁴⁰³ Layibi Papers, Comboni Missionaries.

protection that the chief's court accorded to people, and may well explain why royal messengers resided there. Overall, the residence of royal messengers in the chief's court suggests their importance.

The roles of royal messengers were numerous, and sometimes complicated. Their primary role was to carry the *Rwot*'s messages "throughout the area."⁴⁰⁴ Girling and others did not tell us the kinds of messages that they carried. But the messages likely varied from vital chiefdom intelligence to intimate personal messages, and some would have been routine while others were occasional. Routine messages would have had to do with annual feasts or rituals, such as the planting and hunting rituals, and payment of tribute by clan heads and subjects. Less routine messages must have been exchanged between friendly chiefdoms; and occasional messages would have been delivered to friendly or enemy chiefdoms prior to war. It is equally conceivable that the royal messenger would sometimes deliver intimate family messages from the chief to his in-laws and back.

Carrying messages to their recipients may, at first sight, seem like simple work, but it was not an easy task. It was an onerous task partly because, in preliterate Acholiland, the messenger had to memorize the message in all its detail. Unlike royal messengers in literate societies who delivered letters, perhaps without knowing the content, royal messengers in a preliterate society relied on memory. They had to know, understand and commit the message to memory, and travel on foot, sometimes hundreds of miles, to deliver a message. Perhaps even more important, they had to couch the message in terms appropriate to the content and recipient. Sometimes this required translating the message into a different dialect or language. Therefore, the royal messenger had to be highly intelligent, possess a retentive memory and multilingual. Thus, Fr.

⁴⁰⁴ Girling, *The Acholi*, 97.

Crazzolaro was not far off the mark when he argued that the royal messenger “was supposed to be an able man.”⁴⁰⁵

Besides memorizing messages, royal messengers also committed to memory an extensive body of knowledge to facilitate their work. More specifically, they memorized *ongon*, legal precedents “which regulate[d] the relations of [a chiefdom’s] members with one another and their relations with other villages.”⁴⁰⁶ They memorized customs and laws, previous inter-chiefdom agreements and the taboos (or avoidances) of every chiefdom in the region because social order was maintained through adherence to these taboos. The customs and laws of chiefdoms determined the forms of tribute and gifts that messengers could deliver. For example, according to Girling, many chiefs did not eat elephant meat.⁴⁰⁷ If the royal messenger violated this taboo because of his ignorance, this could precipitate war between chiefdoms. This was because it was believed that an inappropriate or profane gift would annoy the spirits and eventually cause problems to the chief receiving the gift. Therefore, royal messengers mastered this vast body of knowledge of norms to facilitate their roles with different chiefdoms in Acholiland and other polities beyond.

In times of war, the roles of a royal messenger became even more complicated and delicate: he had to deliver information relating to impending hostility (as part of the Acholi code of military honor) or cessation of hostility. In times of war, royal messengers played two important roles. First, they acted also as diplomats upon whose performance depended decisions of war and peace. Secondly, as the bearers of news of impending war, royal messengers must

⁴⁰⁵ Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo*, 241.

⁴⁰⁶ Girling, *The Acholi*, 64.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

have doubled as spies of their chiefdoms. In short, the roles of royal messengers were as multifarious as they were vital to the functioning of the chiefdom.

However, the “diplomatic immunity” accorded to royal messengers, allowing them to move freely about the region, should not blind us to other specialized knowledge and skills they possessed: the royal messenger still had to protect himself and his entourage which occasionally included their chiefs. In 1949, Girling found out that “when the *Rwot* travelled abroad he was preceded in the path by the *oo* [the royal messenger] and [b]y slapping his thigh he [the royal messenger] pointed out stones and tree stumps which lay in the way and which might cause the *Rwot* to injure himself.”⁴⁰⁸ However, Girling did not explain fully why royal messengers preceded their chiefs; nor did he delve into the significance of “slapping his thigh.” “Slapping his thigh” intrigued me, and sent me back to review all the early ethnographies, dictionaries and Girling’s field notes in search for an explanation. But my search proved fruitless.

In the course of my fieldwork, I translated this portion of Girling’s text, and I read it aloud to the older generation of my respondents, with the hope that they might recognize this “slapping his thigh” and elaborate on it. As it turned out, many of my informants, indeed, recognized it; but because some of them claimed to be Christians, they were reluctant to discuss it fully. For example, a couple of Christian informants in their late eighties recognized the slapping of the thigh when I read it to them, but they dismissed it as “dirty things of the Acholi *Macon*.” *Macon* is a term that a Verona missionary, Father V. Pellegrini, used in his book to refer to the precolonial Acholi.⁴⁰⁹ When I asked the husband to explain to me why the slapping of the thigh was “dirty things,” the old man answered: “in our journey to become Born-Again

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁰⁹ See Pellegrini, *Lok pa Acoli Macon*, 1949.

Christians we pledged to give our lives to Jesus Christ and we cannot talk about anything that cannot help us now.” After terminating the interview, I later inquired about him and learned that he is a survivor of the war between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. This couple had lost all their nine children in the war and they have, since 2001, been living on a stipend from a Born-Again church. Given their exceptional bereavement, and their material dependence on their church, it is understandable why the couple chose to not talk about “slapping the thigh”: they probably feared being misconstrued as relapsed Christians, unworthy of their church’s financial assistance.

Fortunately, ten other respondents, including self-confessed Christians, were willing to talk about “slapping the thigh.” Donato Okello, a contemporary diviner who also claims to be a Catholic (and was in fact wearing a rosary), told me that he had been a diviner for thirty years, and he provided me with perhaps the best explanation of the act of slapping the thigh. Okello described a series of situations to enable me grasp the significance of “slapping the thigh”. According to Okello, “There were two types of omens. ... There were general omens which were understood by almost everybody.” The general omens, Okello added, included, for example, “If a woodpecker cries before one’s journey, or one hits one’s left leg before a journey.” In such a case, Okello told me, the only solution was for everyone to return home. But, he continued, “There were other omens that only specialists like me could interpret. If, for example, a bird landed on your head, this was very rare. If you unexpectedly find a dead animal in your house, this is strange.” To Okello, such events “are the ones that required an explanation from a specialist. No one could explain them unless one was trained in augury.”⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ D. Okello, interview, 4 December 2014.

Okello and the other nine elderly men and women who discussed the “slapping the thigh” with me agreed that it was a form of augury used to perceive immediate strange happenings and ward off impending danger. Generally, all the ten informants explained that “slapping the thigh” was performed to interpret any bizarre incident or object that a royal messenger thought might affect a journey, so as to protect himself and his entourage which sometimes included his chief. According to the same informants, the “stone and tree stumps” that Girling mentioned were metaphorical. They refer to anything, including rainfall, which could affect the royal messenger’s safety and that of his chief on a journey. Thus, apart from “diplomatic immunity,” carrying *Olek*, and sometimes a leopard skin, the ability to “slap his thigh” was an additional attribute that the royal messenger relied on for protection and safety in the course of duty. Augury was an essential part of his arsenal.

This array of knowledge and skills, including augury, may partly explain why prominent, literate and Christian ex-royal messengers and historians, such as Okech, refrained from delving into the specifics of their pre-colonial training and roles. They must have been wary of compromising their Christian credentials and colonial careers, and thus their socio-economic privileges, by chronicling all aspects of their knowledge and skills. And yet, it is this array of knowledge and skills that gave the royal messenger an independent power base in his chiefdom and beyond. In sum, the knowledge and skills that royal messengers possessed, coupled with the roles they played, may largely explain why royal messengers lived in the chief’s court. They did not only act as intermediaries between centers and peripheries of political power within their respective chiefdoms, they also ensured the safety of chiefs by immediately interpreting any strange incident as it occurred, including dreams.

Conclusion

European missionaries, colonial officials and the first generation of literate Acholi, who published Acholi histories did not leave us with enough constructive sources on these subordinate figures. The documents that emerged on these figures, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, are either shallow or biased. These writers have, however, left us with a fairly abundant literature on chiefs. As a result, scholars who have relied on the works of these European missionaries and colonial officials have produced works that have continued to portray chiefs as the only category of chiefdom leaders worthy of attention, relegating subordinate figures to oblivion. Consequently, some of the roles of these subordinate figures have been falsely attributed to chiefs. However, the many conversations that I engaged in about these figures in the course of my fieldwork did not only reveal their significance in the chiefdom, they also provided a lens through which to reread the early ethnography and reconstruct these figures.

Taken together, this chapter and the preceding one have given us at least a sense of the importance of these overlooked Acholi leaders prior to colonial rule. More generally, this chapter has enabled us to establish the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century baseline from which to understand the generation of Acholi leaders whose positions were eventually unsettled by the imperial conquest beginning in the late 1890s and who transitioned into the colonial era. The encounter of these subordinate leaders with missionaries, and the role they played in the missionary project, constitute the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The Pre-colonial Intellectuals in the Missionary Projects

On a February afternoon in 1903, a five-man delegation from Acholiland, led by somebody only known as Ojigi, arrived in the Bunyoro Kingdom. Their mission? To invite the CMS missionaries to Acholiland. The delegation had been sent by Chief Awich, one of the Acholi chiefs, who had heard about the works of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Bunyoro to the south of Acholiland. Upon arriving at the King's court, the delegation met with King Andereya [Andrew] Duhaga, already a Christian convert himself and literate. The report gives no indication of the language used during the meeting, but one of the men in Ojigi's delegation must have spoken Lunyoro, the language of Bunyoro Kingdom.⁴¹¹ Shortly after the meeting, Duhaga wrote a brief note in English to Rev. A. B. Llyod, the leader of the CMS in Bunyoro, to introduce the delegation. The king then handed over the note and the delegation to his royal messenger, to take them to Lloyd. As the delegation, "with one of King Andereya's men leading them," approached the CMS compound, Lloyd witnessed an unfamiliar group of people walking in single file toward him and he was terrified. "I wondered who they were, and what brought them to me," Lloyd later recounted. On meeting Lloyd, King Andereya's royal messenger gave him the letter which read⁴¹²:

Sir,—These men have come from far away, from the great country called Ganyi [Acholi], to the north of Bunyoro, across the Nile. They are sent by their King Awich, and they have come to see you. They are a warlike people, but their message is one of peace, they want to be taught about God. They say they heard how we in our country have received teachers and helpers, and why should they not have the same help. See these men and then, my friend, decide what you will do.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ This language is sometimes referred to as Runyoro. I have chosen to use Lunyoro in this work.

⁴¹² Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 160.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

Lloyd's account does not tell us what unfolded in his compound with the "warlike people." Although Lloyd did not know it at the time, he had just met either an Acholi royal messenger and his entourage or a group of Acholi royal messengers sent to invite the CMS to begin work in Acholiland. However, Lloyd's account tells us that just a few weeks before the arrival of the Acholi delegation, Nuwa Nakiwafu, Lloyd's "faithful native helper," had challenged him to send missionaries to Acholiland. Addressing Lloyd, Nakiwafu had mused, "Why should we not send help to the Ganyi [Acholi] people across the Nile to the north? They are fine people and they surely need our help."⁴¹⁴ These two requests, however, did not immediately inspire Lloyd to visit Acholiland. Instead, after Ojigi's delegation had left, Lloyd decided to send Nakiwafu instead, instructing him to "go, and see what possibilities there are, and find out if the Ganyi people will receive you as a friend." However, Nakiwafu's mission failed because he "met with so many serious difficulties before he got to the Nile—famine and sickness being the chief—that he was obliged to return, and his mission had failed."⁴¹⁵ Nakiwafu's failed attempt, and the invitation on the table, forced Lloyd to go to Acholiland himself.

But before Lloyd could embark on the journey to Acholiland, he continued inquiring about the country and people. "I visited the king of Bunyoro and several of the big chiefs, seeking their advice," Lloyd recounted. The king encouraged Lloyd, telling him, "Go to these people, and you will find friends." To further convince Lloyd to go to Acholiland, the king narrated his personal experiences. "Years ago," Duhaga told Lloyd, "I was taken to this country

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

[Acholiland] by my father Kabarega⁴¹⁶ [who was escaping capture for resisting British rule], and there I was left with many of my brothers and sisters, and the Ganyi people were kind to me.” This story possibly persuaded Lloyd. “[A]fter much careful thought and many preparations,” he wrote, “I decided to start off for a two months’ journey,” which began on August 5, 1903.⁴¹⁷

On his first journey to Acholiland, Lloyd “took with him as an interpreter a young teacher who was by birth an Alur, whose name was Sira Donge.” On the second trip to establish a mission station, Lloyd added Matayo [Mathew] Adimola, another Alur. But, as M.M. Louise Pirouet correctly points out, none of these assistants is “even mentioned by name in Lloyd’s account of the Journey.”⁴¹⁸ While Donge was already a convert, Adimola was not. Lloyd’s trips and choice of assistants, which included a non-convert, raise important questions: Who exactly were Donge and Adimola? Why did Lloyd choose Alur assistants instead of Banyoro converts? What roles did these assistants play in the missionary project?

On the surface, these assistants may seem like ordinary porters, the type that were a necessary feature of every European expedition; however, these were no ordinary helpers. Most missionaries, including Lloyd, were not humble, honest or perceptive enough to portray these local assistants in their true colors. The missionaries certainly did not highlight the critical role of their local assistants in the evangelization project. As Stephen C. Volz noted in Botswana, the CMS were perhaps unwilling “to admit their weaknesses and unlikely to portray themselves as

⁴¹⁶ Kabarega is sometimes written in documents as Kabalega, or even Kabrega. All these refer to the same person.

⁴¹⁷ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 161-162. For more on the journey see A.B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Journal* V, 1 (1904): 8-12; A.B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Journal* V, 2 (1904): 18-22; A.B. Lloyd, “Acholi Country,” *Uganda Journal* V, 3 (1904): 31-34.

⁴¹⁸ See, M.M. Louise Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 277. See also, for example, “The Commencement of Work in the Nile,” 821.

peripheral to the spread of Christianity.”⁴¹⁹ Whatever the motivation of the omission, however, it has served to conceal the contributions of these locals to the missionary projects in Acholiland. This chapter argues that the first group of Acholi evangelists, who were largely precolonial intellectuals, played crucial roles in the evangelization project in Acholiland, especially in translating, reading and interpreting the Bible, preaching, and persuading fellow Acholi and non-Acholi to convert to Christianity.

This chapter, therefore, focuses on the roles of these unacknowledged and unsung locals in the missionary project in Acholiland. These locals not only include the Alur people that Lloyd and other missionaries brought with them to Acholiland but also the Acholi precolonial intellectuals, like the royal messenger(s) who brokered the invitation to the CMS, and war leaders and healers that the missionaries found on the ground. Unfortunately, scholars who have studied the CMS missionary project in Acholiland have focused exclusively on the activities of Europeans, ignoring even the significance of the manner in which the CMS arrived in the region.⁴²⁰ That the CMS were invited by royal messengers suggests that the decision to invite them must have been keenly discussed at the court, and that each courtier would have tried to manipulate the CMS to their own advantage. Yet these courtiers are peripheral in the missionary accounts of the evangelization of Acholiland. They have all but been reduced to mere bystanders or receptors of missionary knowledge, skills and faith. Because of their marginalization, the roles and contributions of these courtiers to the CMS projects have not been clearly understood.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Stephen C. Volz, “Written on our hearts: Tswana Christians and the ‘word of God’ in the mid-nineteenth century,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38, 2 (2008): 114.

⁴²⁰ The only exception is M. Louise Pirouet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda, 1891-1914* (London: Collings, 1978), including Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 1968.

⁴²¹ The works of Pirouet focuses largely on Alur and Banyoro. There is less insights on the specific roles of the Acholi evangelists.

Scholars have continued to overemphasize the role of missionaries in the evangelization of Acholiland.⁴²² This group of scholars has ignored the peculiar challenges of Acholiland at the time: the region had no colonial state presence, not even a colonial station, and the missionaries were ignorant of the physical geography and socio-political set-up of Acholiland, its leadership and language. In short, the missionaries were vulnerable and in need of help from locals. Therefore, while the missionaries certainly played an important role in the evangelization of Acholiland, the complementary role of their assistants was no less crucial. Put simply, without the support of their Alur and Acholi assistants, the CMS missionaries could not have proselytized Acholiland.

This chapter is partly in response to the call, almost a decade and half ago, by Derek Peterson and Jean Allman, urging Africanists to “talk meaningfully and at the same time about both [the] coerciveness of missionary discourse on the one hand and the intervention and creativity of African Christians and their missionary interlocutors on the other.”⁴²³ However, the task of talking meaningfully about the roles of these African figures in the missionary projects is a daunting one, and not without reason. These figures and their contributions are difficult to locate in the traditional sources. European writers often gloss over these figures. Moreover, unlike in other regions of Uganda where early converts wrote copiously about their experiences, in Acholiland this is not the case, most probably because there was no printing press in the region.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Most recent works on northern Uganda have continued to gloss over the activities of the Acholi in evangelization. See, for example, Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 2008; Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 1999.

⁴²³ Derek Peterson and Jean Allman, “New Directions in the History of Missions in Africa: Introduction,” *Journal of Religious History*, 23:1 (1999), 7.

⁴²⁴ The works of the first generation of literate Acholi were published in Kampala.

However, the very European documents which dominate the CMS archives, and that so often ignore African missionary assistants, contain some useful hints on the contributions of the latter to the missionary project. A consideration of the forms of language used in the CMS publications, the quality of translation of the first Acholi Bible and the CMS descriptions of the first converts and their pre-Christian lives suggests that the Alur and Acholi missionary assistants played vital roles in the evangelization of Acholiland.⁴²⁵ Apart from participating in virtually every CMS missionary activity, the local assistants had already accumulated different kinds of knowledge, skills, followers and legitimacy in their respective communities, and they put all these assets at the service of the missionary project in Acholiland in ways that have not been previously understood by scholars of the region. In the next section, we recap the changing political and social situations from the 1850s to 1903 to help us contextualize the arrival and settlement of the CMS, partly by portraying the sort of Acholi leaders that the CMS found on the ground. This context is important because it will help us to better understand the caliber of leaders that the CMS found on the ground and that mediated between the missionaries and the local population. Once this larger context is established, the limitations of the existing works, especially the relative misrepresentation of the roles of the missionaries and their local assistants in the evangelization project, will become all the more apparent.

Acholiland from the 1850s to 1903

In 1903, Rev. Lloyd arrived in Acholiland and encountered an Acholi society organized in a four-tier hierarchal order: family, lineage, clan, and chiefdom. The chiefdom was the largest political and social unit. Estimates put the number of chiefdoms at the beginning of the twentieth

⁴²⁵ Cooper, *Evangelical Christians*, 117.

century at 36.⁴²⁶ Although these chiefdoms varied in size and strength, each, no matter its size, was independent and headed by its hereditary chief, called *rwot* (plural *rwodi*).⁴²⁷ Below the chief, there were subordinate officials, who performed different roles and ensured the functioning of the chiefdom. These subordinate officials included priests or priestesses, royal healers, royal messengers and war leaders, figures whose making and roles we have already covered at length in the preceding pages. The exact number of subordinate officials in each chiefdom is difficult to determine, and estimates in personal recollections and chiefly traditions vary from one polity to another. It would appear, though, that the larger a chiefdom was, the more priests or priestesses, royal messengers and war leaders it had. But, irrespective of size, each chiefdom had only one royal healer (*ajwaka ker*); and sometimes chiefdoms did not fill all their titled positions. Below the subordinate officials, there were lower-level leaders who helped in the administration of the chiefdom at various levels.

Acholiland had undergone some momentous transformation prior to the advent of the CMS in the region in 1903. Beginning in the late 1850s, Arabs had infiltrated the region, initially as traders; but when the slave trade was abolished, Sir Samuel Baker brought back some Arabs as soldiers of Equatoria Province. As a result, Arabs stayed in Acholiland for over three decades, interacting with the Acholi. According to the leading scholars of Acholiland, the Arab presence did not have much effect on Acholi views of the world or religious practices. For example, p'Bitek argues that the Arabs did not have any meaningful impact in the region because “the relationship between the Acoli and the Arabs, and by extension, all those who hold the Muslim

⁴²⁶ See, for example, Chris Ocowun, “Acholi Chiefs Ban new Chiefdoms,” *The New Vision*, March 6, 2012, accessed March 19, 2016 http://www.newvision.co.ug/print_article/new_vision/news/1300241/acholi-chiefs-ban-chiefdoms?print=true

⁴²⁷ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 78; Nyeko, “The Acholi,” 4.

faith, was marked by general hostility,” due to the latter’s involvement in the slave trade.⁴²⁸ For his part, Atkinson suggests that the relationships between the Arabs and the Acholi were “based primarily on trade.”⁴²⁹

Though there has been no meaningful study on the impact of Arabs in the region, both p’Bitek and Atkinson have focused too narrowly on the commercial agenda of the traders⁴³⁰ and downplayed the impact of the Arab presence in the region for over three decades. Even worse, they have ignored the agency of the local people. However, by 1870, Islam and other aspects of Arabic culture were already visible among the Acholi people, especially among chiefs and their subordinate figures. Descriptions of the courts of chiefs reveal the impact of Arab traders and soldiers in some chiefdoms. Indeed, while few Acholi converted to Islam, European accounts indicate that many more adopted the Arabic dress code and acquired Islamic names and, even more significantly, learned Arabic and became interpreters.⁴³¹

Most of the people who learned Arabic and adopted other aspects of Arab culture were not ordinary people. Trade and other forms of collaboration between Arabs and Acholi mainly involved Acholi chiefs and their subordinate figures. Most of these subordinate figures were royal messengers or war leaders. They learned Arabic to mediate between their chiefs and the Arabs; and, in doing so, they acquired knowledge not only of Arabic but also of other aspects of Arab culture, including Islam. Moreover, the encounter between the Acholi and the Arabs led to the establishment of centers of trade in the Acholi chiefdoms of Padibe, Patiko and Pabbo. These

⁴²⁸ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 134-7; see also Atkinson, *The Roots*, 268.

⁴²⁹ Atkinson, *The Roots*, 268.

⁴³⁰ The only study is a BA thesis, see F. K. Uma, “Acholi-Arab Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century,” 1971.

⁴³¹ See Girling, *The Acholi*, 148; Pasha, *His Life and His Work*, 69-70; Uma, “Acholi-Arab-Nubian Relations,” 76.

centers became the storehouses for various trade goods, and the abode of many Arabic interpreters, which further facilitated the spread of Arabic culture and ideas.

Existing sources cite a long list of pioneering interpreters who were familiar with both Arabic and other aspects of Arab culture. The list includes Ywa Gimoro, Omara Anyamu, Obwona Acholi, Keny Koropil, Obwot Rengomoi, and Okello Mwoka. As I have already stated, these men were not “ordinary” people. For example, both Keny and Gimoro, who served as Sir Samuel Baker’s interpreters in Acholiland, were generals from Patiko Chiefdom.⁴³² Obwot Rengomoi and Okello Mwoka were also war leaders from Puranga Chiefdom⁴³³ while Obwona Acholi was a royal messenger of Patiko Chiefdom. As these pioneering interpreters mediated between the Arabs and the Acholi, especially in trade matters, they and their chiefs derived considerable material benefits from their activities, and their reputations soared. As a result, more chiefs sent their royal messengers and war leaders to the Arabs to learn Arabic and become interpreters, thus further spreading Arabic and other aspects of Arab culture in Acholiland.

Genealogical records show that some of the first CMS converts were sons of the pioneering interpreters who had attended Koranic schools. For example, Muca Ali, the first CMS convert in Acholiland, was the son of Gimoro,⁴³⁴ Anderea Olal was the son of Okello Mwoka, the military general of Puranga Chiefdom, and Lacito Okech, another Christian convert, was “the son of [a prominent] interpreter,” “Omara Anyamu, who served under the Arabs and the Nubians.”⁴³⁵ Interestingly, Muca [Musa] Ali retained his unmistakably Islamic/Arabic surname

⁴³² Okech, *Tekwaro*, 5 & 9. See also more information on Keny in p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 130; Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo*, 245, 248, 250 & 252. See more on Gimoro in p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 136.

⁴³³ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58; see also Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 29-30.

⁴³⁴ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 25; see also Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 286.

⁴³⁵ Uma, “Acholi-Arab Nubian Relations,” 76.

even after he became a Christian. One source shows a case in which the son of a pioneering interpreter attended a Koranic school before becoming a CMS convert. Anderea Olal, the seventh CMS convert and an informant of M.M. Pirouet, explained to her that his father took him to the “Koranic school in Nimule, under a Dinka teacher,⁴³⁶ Ibrahim, [and] he learned the religion of Islam” before “he became a young recruit to the CMS School at Keyo.”⁴³⁷ Though we have no information that links converts like Ali and Okech to any Koranic school, the case of Olal suggests a pattern that might have been common, though not always recorded.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that regardless of whether they had attended a Koranic school or not, many of the pioneering CMS converts in Acholiland had been exposed to Islam and other aspects of Arabic culture through their interpreter-fathers. Prior to their conversion to Christianity, then, many of the pioneer converts had already been exposed to foreign ideas through their parents, by their schooling in Nimule, or by their work as royal messengers, war leaders or healers in their chiefdoms. Moreover, Lamogi, where the first CMS mission station was established in 1904, lies adjacent to both the Pabbo and Patiko Chiefdoms, which had become major Arab centers, with many interpreters. Therefore, by the time the Arabs withdrew from Acholiland in the late 1880s, a thriving group of Acholi interpreters had already been firmly established. It was a multifarious group, composed of men who held titled positions in their chiefdoms, and possessed corresponding specialized knowledge and skills, for example as royal messengers, healers or war leaders. Many of them, especially the royal messengers, were veritable polyglots: they spoke Arabic and various languages of the region, and they had

⁴³⁶ The Arabs established this school and, after conversion of locals, it appeared they gave the school to be managed by locals and that might explain why Olal claim he studied under a Dinka teacher.

⁴³⁷ Tom Watson, “A history of Church Missionary Society High Schools in Uganda, 1900-1924: The Education of a Protestant Elite” (PhD diss., The University of East Africa, 1968), 449-50.

exceptional mastery of the geography and power configuration of the region. The presence of the Arabs, however, was just one of the major factors that had transformed Acholiland prior to the arrival of the CMS.

Acholiland witnessed a brief interlude without foreign interference from the time the Arabs evacuated the region in 1888 until 1895. In 1896 the British began their efforts to persuade Acholi chiefs to sign treaties effectively placing their respective chiefdoms under British colonial rule, and some chiefs complied while others refused. From 1897, British colonial agents began to wage war on chiefs that had resisted signing treaties with the colonial state. By 1901, the colonial state had completed “pacifying” Acholiland. Yet, the colonial state did not establish a permanent station in the region. But the pacification wars had already unsettled many chiefs and their subordinate figures.

It was in this aftermath of violence that the CMS arrived to establish its first mission station in Acholiland. Before examining the contributions of local assistants in the proselytization project, I first turn to Rev. Lloyd’s response to the invitation he received from Acholiland, beginning with a focus on the Alur interlocutors that the missionaries took with them to Acholiland. This examination will flesh out the larger context for the work of the CMS in Acholiland and, in particular, the role of Acholi interlocutors in the evangelical efforts of the CMS in the region.

Establishment of the Mission Station in Acholiland

Though Lloyd’s account is not as detailed as we would have liked, he still paints a vivid enough picture to enable us grasp the CMS response to the invitation he received from Acholiland, and to appreciate the vulnerability of the CMS missionaries at the time. The journey

to explore the region began on August 5, 1903. Lloyd picked some people who appear in his narratives as mere porters.⁴³⁸ Together, they travelled from Hoima, crossed the Nile, and arrived in Acholiland after several weeks. “My chief aim in this journey,” Lloyd noted, “was to reach the capital of the biggest chief, whose name is Awich, for he it was who had sent urgent messages to me begging for teachers, and for a visit from myself.”⁴³⁹ This remark shows that Awich’s decision to send a delegation to Lloyd must have conspired with Lloyd’s familiarity with the centralized kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro to give Lloyd the false impression that Awich was the paramount Acholi chief. But there was no such thing as “the biggest chief” in Acholiland. Each chiefdom, no matter how small, was independent.

Lloyd found himself in unfamiliar surroundings upon his arrival in Acholiland. The flora, the fauna, the buildings and the people were different. Most of all, Lloyd was struck by the difference between the language of the Acholi and that of the Banyoro, in spite of the spatial contiguity of the two peoples. “Their language is quite different from the Lunyoro,” Lloyd penned his surprise and frustration. “[Acholi] is not a Bantu language at all.”⁴⁴⁰ This reveals that Lloyd had not anticipated Acholiland having a different and unrelated language, most probably because the delegation from Chief Awich had spoken to him in fluent Lunyoro, and given him the impression that it was their mother tongue. This was perhaps Lloyd’s first challenge: to his surprise (and almost certain irritation), Lloyd must have realized that he would have to start by learning the language of the Acholi in order to be able to proselytize, and this would slow down his work. All the same, Lloyd went on to paint a picture of a friendly encounter. “[E]very day

⁴³⁸ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 162-5; 168-170.

⁴³⁹ *The Church Missionary Intelligencer: A Monthly Journal of Missionary Information* (London: Church Missionary Society, Slaibury Square, 1904), 821. This is also found at the Makerere University Library, African Department, MUA: AF 276.761, 821.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

crowds of people came to visit me, many from long distances, and all wanted to be taught. From early morning till late at night they sat around my tent, men, women, and children, perfectly friendly and in real earnest about learning to read.”⁴⁴¹ The impression Lloyd gives us here is of friendly people, eager to be taught.

In all, Lloyd spent six weeks in Acholiland, a sojourn long enough for him to conclude that he liked the region and wanted to learn as much as he could about the possibility of a new site for a mission station. He must have returned to Bunyoro a happy man, confident in the belief that the Acholi would eagerly embrace Christianity. The major task ahead of him, however, was to persuade his superiors in Buganda about the aptness of establishing a new station in Acholiland. Perhaps to interest his bosses, Lloyd added sensational details to his report, portraying the people he encountered as “disparate.” The trip, he concluded, “made one feel ashamed to think that for all these years they [the Acholi] had been neglected and left to their own idle superstitions and Heathenism, when all the while many of them must have longed for something better.”⁴⁴² Lloyd’s report struck a chord with his superiors, and it elicited a quick response. The “story that Lloyd had to tell on his return from Acholi last year,” Dr. Albert Cook explained, “made the Bishop anxious to investigate for himself the openings presented.”⁴⁴³ Lloyd’s report was published by different journals and magazines in both Uganda and England, and some published it several times.

About five months later, on March 8, 1904, Bishop Tucker, in the company of Dr. and Mrs. Cook, left Mengo for Acholiland. Two weeks later, they arrived in Hoima and Lloyd joined

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 211; A.R. Cook, “Missionary in the Nile Valley,” *Uganda Journal* 5, 8 (1904): 114.

them to lead the way to investigate the possibility of opening a new station in Acholiland.⁴⁴⁴ Upon reaching Acholiland, the team toured the region, consulted chiefs and gave medical treatment to many people. More importantly and specifically, Tucker chose the “site for the first mission station among the Nilotic tribes,”⁴⁴⁵ and Dr. Cook treated “nearly 4,000 patients.”⁴⁴⁶ After the tour, Lloyd did not return to Bunyoro with his bosses: they asked him to remain behind and open the mission station. “I was now left alone in Acholi with instructions to push forward the construction of a station upon the site selected by the Bishop.”⁴⁴⁷ That the location of the first church was in Lamogi is important because Lamogi is adjacent to the major centers of the Arab traders: Patiko and Pabbo. The latter two chiefdoms were, therefore, home to many Acholi who not only spoke Arabic but were also Moslems or at least exposed to Islam; and many of these were destined to be among Lloyd’s first recruits.

In June 1904—about three months into Lloyd’s stay in Acholiland—Bishop Tucker relocated A.L. Kitching, a brilliant linguist working in Toro Kingdom, to help Lloyd with the task of translating the Bible.⁴⁴⁸ Born in England in 1875, Kitching attached himself to the Church at an early age. He went to Highgate School, a free charity school, after which he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He was eventually ordained at the age of 24, in 1899. The CMS sent him to Uganda in 1901, and he began his first posting in Buganda Kingdom, later moving to

⁴⁴⁴ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 211; for details of the journey see A.R. Cook, *Uganda Memories, 1897-1940* (Kampala: Uganda Society, 1945)-187-204.

⁴⁴⁵ The Church Missionary Intelligencer, 825.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 827.

⁴⁴⁷ Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 221.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 227-8.

Toro Kingdom and then Acholiland.⁴⁴⁹ Like Lloyd before him, Kitching must have been frustrated to discover that the Acholi language was not related to either Luganda or Lutooro, the two Bantu languages in the region with which he was already familiar.

Kitching's first task was to learn the Acholi language. Evidence of his learning is apparent in his collection of word-lists which formed the basis of the 1907 Acholi dictionary.⁴⁵⁰ After six weeks, he claimed he had already learned the language, and after five months in Acholiland, he boasted that he had made a lot of progress with the translation, claiming "a reading sheet of one hymn, parts of morning and evening prayers, the first catechism and half of St. Mark's Gospel."⁴⁵¹ Missing in his letters is a clear clue as to who taught him the Acholi language, who helped him to compile the word-list, and who worked with him during the arduous task of translation. One likely possibility is that Muca Ali and Lakobo Ameda, the first Acholi whom Kitching instructed and eventually baptized in 1905, taught Kitching the Acholi language and assisted him with the translation work. Another possibility is that Sira Donge and Matayo Adimola, the two Alur who accompanied Lloyd from Bunyoro, assisted Kitching, as the Alur speak a dialect of Luo that is mutually intelligible with Acholi.

The ability of the missionaries to bring their own helpers produced a complex mix of local men on the ground, and it had a direct impact on the Kitching's translation works (that we will come to later); and it is to these men that we now turn to. Of the two Alur assistants of Lloyd, Donge appears a lot more in the documents than Adimola does, and it is thus easier to recreate Donge's biography. Donge's background reveals the kind of knowledge, experiences

⁴⁴⁹ "Obituary: Rt. Rev. A. L. Kitching," *The Times*, October 26, 1960, p15.

⁴⁵⁰ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 1907.

⁴⁵¹ As quoted in Pirouet, "The Exploration of the Church of Uganda," 285.

and skills that local assistants brought to the CMS project. Donge was born round 1880 in Anyuza in Alurland, near Lake Albert.⁴⁵² Nothing is recorded of his parentage. But we know that Donge was the third and last born, following two sisters. His mother language was Alur, one of the mutually intelligible Nilotic languages of Uganda. As a child, he endured a hard time. His father died before Donge was born. Little wonder that he was called Donge, meaning “what has remained,” the only male offspring.⁴⁵³ A few years after the death of his father, his mother also died of smallpox.⁴⁵⁴ But these deaths were not the end of his childhood misery. Because his village was located in a kind of borderland, with no established political authority, it was regularly raided by the army of Bunyoro Kingdom. In one of the raids, “Donge and two of his sisters, Katuku and Anyumba, were captured. They were taken to Bunyoro by a man called Bakarunga. Bakarunga noticed Donge’s exceptional intelligence and assiduity, and made him his gun-bearer, taking Katuku as wife;” Donge’s other sister, Anyumba, died in captivity because of the rigors of slavery.⁴⁵⁵

Donge changed masters four times from 1899 to 1901, moving from one place to another before settling in with Lloyd in Acholiland. His first master, Bakarunga, did not keep him for long because he “owed a debt of ten guns to Enoka Mutalabwa, a Muganda, which he was not able to meet.” Thus, “when Mutalabwa began to press his claim, Bakarunga settled the debt by giving him Donge as a slave.”⁴⁵⁶ His second master, Mutalabwa, took him “to Buganda [where he] came into contact with Christianity for the first time, ... began to attend reading classes, and

⁴⁵² Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 11.

⁴⁵³ Godfrey Donge, interview, 11 April 2014.

⁴⁵⁴ Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 277; see also see Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 12.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 278; see also Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 13.

learnt Luganda.”⁴⁵⁷ Despite attending classes, Donge was not baptized, perhaps because his third master, “Jemusi Miti, a Muganda, [who] was sent to chieftaincy in Bunyoro,” did not allow him to complete his classes. According to Rev. T.L. Lawrence, when Donge returned to Bunyoro, he “found work as a houseboy with Mr. Fathering, a C.M.S. missionary in Hoima.” He then “abandoned his third master, and [re]joined the baptism class.”⁴⁵⁸ Miti did not pursue Donge perhaps because the latter had been taken in by a C.M.S missionary, and White missionaries enjoyed government protection and power.

It was, therefore, at Fathering’s that Lloyd found Donge. Before that time, Donge had no formal or Christian education, although he was already exposed to Christianity and he spoke Alur, Lunyoro and Luganda, which made him an asset. Given his background and experiences, it is understandable why Donge must have eagerly embraced the opportunity to join the CMS: for an orphan and a former slave, it was a rare chance to prosper.

As already intimated, unlike Donge, Adimola is not sufficiently covered in available literature to allow us to recreate his trajectory, especially his formative years and his pre-Acholiland experiences. All we know is that he was also an Alur, handpicked from Hoima by Lloyd, and taken to Acholiland on Lloyd’s second trip. Nonetheless, the fact that he was found in Bunyoro is significant. It suggests that his background may have been similar to that of Donge, and that, as the latter, he may have been a slave. More striking, however, is that Adimola had not yet been baptized when he reached Acholiland, though he immediately joined the Baptism classes, becoming, according to CMS records, the third person to be baptized after Muca Ali and

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

Lakobo Ameda, in 1906. Why, then, did Lloyd recruit a pagan boy to do missionary work in Acholiland? Or had Adimola been meant to work as a houseboy?

We cannot answer these questions with certainty. However, there are three possible explanations. First, given the mutual intelligibility of the Alur and the Acholi languages, it is possible that Donge, on his first trip, performed exceptionally well as a translator, leading Lloyd to find another Alur, even a non-Christian one at that, to supplement Donge's work. Secondly, it is highly probable that Donge and Adimola knew each other while in Bunyoro, and that Donge could have convinced Lloyd to recruit his friend and fellow tribesman for the second trip to Acholiland. Finally, it could have been Fathering, the CMS missionary, who recommended Adimola to Lloyd. Whatever the reason, Adimola somehow joined Donge in Acholiland, and the two left major imprints on the CMS project in the region.

Thus far, we have identified two types of what missionaries called "native assistants": the Acholi, who were already exposed to Islam and Arabic, and the Alur who were already exposed to Christianity and Luganda or Lunyoro. Although both groups were either bilingual or multilingual, the linguistic versatility of the Alur group was initially limited to regional languages (mainly Alur, Acholi, Luganda and Lunyoro) while that of the Acholi group extended beyond regional languages to include Arabic. Similarly, both groups had already been exposed to a foreign religion prior to the arrival of the CMS missionaries in Acholiland. However, while the Alur group had been exposed to the religion of Europeans, Christianity, the Acholi group had been acquainted with the predominant religion of the Arabs, Islam. Together, these two groups of locals became key "middle figures" in the CMS project. Their contributions constitute the theme of the next section.

Translation of the Bible

To proselytize effectively in Acholiland, the CMS had to translate the Bible into the local language, Acholi. And so, immediately upon settling in Acholiland, Kitching started learning the language and creating matching lists of Acholi and English words. He carried out the translation of the Bible as he learned Acholi. By his own account, Kitching translated the Bible at a very fast pace, and alone. In just under five months, Kitching announced that he had completed translating several documents that included: “a reading sheet of one hymn, parts of morning and evening prayers, the first catechism and half of St. Mark’s Gospel.”⁴⁵⁹ These works were printed in Kampala and made available in Acholiland.

However, neither Kitching nor any of the pioneering missionaries in Acholiland gives us a detailed account of how he accomplished this feat.⁴⁶⁰ A somewhat useful piece of information comes from Canon Lawrence, who worked in neighboring Langoland with Sira Donge, whose biography he compiled. Donge recounted to Lawrence part of his role in the translation of the Bible into Acholi.⁴⁶¹ The only hint that Kitching offers is that he often sat “with a pencil and notebook,” and with “one or two members of the [Acholi] tribe..., and if available, someone [Alur] who speaks the new dialect and also some language you yourself know [Lunyoro].”⁴⁶² Though Kitching does not say so explicitly, his remark implies that his translation efforts benefited from the input of some Alur and Acholi people. The Alur assistants acted as “middle figures” between Kitching and the Acholi. Kitching communicated in Lunyoro to the Alur

⁴⁵⁹ As quoted in Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 285.

⁴⁶⁰ The best insights is half a page document in Rev. Fisher’s papers. See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-1.

⁴⁶¹ Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 16-17; see also Bible Society Archives (BSA), Cambridge University Library, England, B.F.B.S/E.S.C. Minutes Cards. Vol.1: ABBA1 to BWA1DOGA.

⁴⁶² Kitching, *On the Backwaters*, 128.

assistants who would then translate to the Acholi informants, and the feedback would follow the same channel, until Kitching would have attained basic knowledge of the Acholi language.

The story of Christianity in Acholiland focuses too narrowly on Europeans and their roles in evangelization, ignoring the roles of Africans, especially Acholi converts.⁴⁶³ Scholars have continued writing what one Africanist has called “heroic mission histories.”⁴⁶⁴ To date, many aspects of Christianity in Acholiland still remain unexplored, and they include the translation of the Bible, the poor start of Christianity, and the role of Acholi leaders in the spread of Christianity in the region. For example, while existing works suggest that Christianity spread rapidly from the time it was introduced, especially after 1911, my findings differ considerably. This section attempts to address these underexplored issues, beginning with the roles of locals in the translation of the Bible. What impact, if any, did the locals have on the translation of the Bible? And how can we unearth their contributions to the CMS project?

One way of discovering the hand of the local assistants in Kitching’s translation of the Bible is to analyze his Acholi version of St. Mark’s Gospel, the most elaborate translation done during the early months of the CMS presence in Acholiland. The translation is important because the CMS used it to pretest their work so as to be able to produce better versions. However, Kitching does not tell us why he or the CMS chose to begin the translation of the Bible with the Gospel of St. Mark.

Over the course of my fieldwork in Acholiland, I engaged in many discussions with respondents after introducing to them the first translation of the St. Mark Gospel. When I told

⁴⁶³ The only exception here is Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 1968.

⁴⁶⁴ Wendy Urban-mead, “Dynastic Daughters: Three Royal Kwena Women and E. L. Price of the London Missionary Society, 1853-1881,” *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 49.

them that I had the first version of the gospel, translated in 1904, this generated a lot of interest in the text. Although some people simply wanted to see how it looked, the majority wanted to read it, mainly because they were either Christians or Muslims; and at least 5 were actually Bible translators in their own right. As a result, I made 15 copies of the translation and gave them to the respondents who wished to read it. Thereafter, I arranged a separate interview with each of the respondents to get feedback. After completing these interviews, I realized I had ignored most of the older people who could not read or write because they are either illiterate or visually impaired. This prompted me to carry out focus group discussions. However, my focus group discussions were conducted only in Lamogi, where the CMS established the first church in Acholiland. In all, I held three focus group discussions with 19 respondents (14 men and 5 women), and the participants' ideas reinforced most of my initial impressions of Kitching's first translation the Gospel of St. Mark.

The question why Kitching chose to begin with translating St. Mark's gospel received many similar responses, especially from some Bible translators. Samuel Opira, a translator working on a current Bible translation project in Acholiland, had perhaps some of the best insights. According to Opira, Rev. Kitching may have started with the Gospel of St. Mark because "from my experience, the gospel is unique. It is the shortest gospel, relatively the easiest, and the one with the widest coverage." "Most of the material found in it," he added, "is not in the other gospels, such as the parable of the seed growing secretly [Mark 4:26-29], the fact that Jesus was a carpenter [Mark: 6:3] and the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida [Mark 8:22-26]."⁴⁶⁵ Other translators also gave me similar explanations, all related to the Gospel's limited

⁴⁶⁵ Sam Opira, interview, 26 February 2014.

length, relative simplicity or extensive coverage. Irrespective of the reason, St. Mark's Gospel, a 71-page document, became the first part of the Bible to be translated into Acholi.⁴⁶⁶

So what does the translation of the St. Mark's Gospel tell us about the role of local assistants in the translation exercise? There is abundant evidence of the contribution of Kitching's local assistants to this translation. The personal feedbacks from respondents who had read photocopies of Kitching's first translation, the more general discussions that I participated in during my fieldwork, and my personal reading, revealed many borrowed words from different languages and dialects. That these words appear in the Acholi Bible should prompt us to ask how Kitching had come by them. As I dug deeper, it became apparent that Kitching must have worked with many people, with different linguistic and dialectical backgrounds, whose identities and specific contributions are lost to us. But, considering the significant social transformation that had already occurred in Acholiland prior to the arrival of the CMS, the figures that the CMS found on the ground, and the caliber of figures that missionaries brought with them to Acholiland, I began to gain glimpses into the roles of locals, some of whom I have covered at length in the previous pages.

The first group of borrowed words in the gospel is Arabic. Upon reading the translation both my respondents and I were struck by the high frequency of easily identifiable Arabic terms. For example, Kitching used the Arabic (Muslim) term *Alla* for the word God, instead of *Jok*, the Acholi supreme being that the Verona missionary, Father J. P. Crazzolaro, noted "was most fit to stand for 'God'."⁴⁶⁷ Likewise, he borrowed "Anabi," another Arabic word, for prophet, and used the name "Ica" (Isa = abbreviation for Isaiah) for Jesus. Similarly, he used the term "cultan

⁴⁶⁶ These copied have all been archived at the Bible Society in Cambridge University, England.

⁴⁶⁷ See J.P. Crazzolaro's comment accompanying A.C.A. Wright's article: "The Supreme Being among the Acholi of Uganda," *Uganda Journal* 7 (1940): 134.

[Sultan]” for “chief priest.” The salient question is: Why did Kitching opt for Muslim (Arabic) terms, especially *Alla*, for the name of the Christian God? According to him, he chose to use these words because “the [Acholi] people have no word for ‘God’” and other Christian terms.⁴⁶⁸

Kitching does not, however, tell us where and from whom he got these Arabic (Muslim) words. But we do know that Kitching (and his Alur assistants) did not speak Arabic on their arrival in Acholiland. Although Kitching did not speak Arabic when he arrived in Acholiland, it is conceivable that he already knew the Arabic terms but did not foresee any problem with using them. Moreover, we also know that the first CMS church was located in Lamogi, near two major centers of Arab traders: Patiko and Pabo. According to Lacito Okech, the pioneering Acholi historian, these centers had the second highest number of interpreters in the region, after Padibe.⁴⁶⁹ This suggests that, prior to the arrival of the CMS, some locals were already exposed to Islam, were Muslims and able to speak Arabic. It is among these people that the CMS established its first church in Acholiland. It seems that after the arrival of the CMS, these interpreters, seeking similar opportunities to the ones they had had with the Arab traders, showed up at the CMS mission, sought work with Kitching, and were drawn into translation.

As we already know, Acholi who spoke fluent Arabic and had deep knowledge of Islam were mainly courtiers, especially royal messengers and war leaders who had mediated between their chiefs and Arabs and sons of prominent interpreters. Thus, it is likely that, as Barbara Cooper has argued about Christians in Muslim Sahel, Acholi who turned-up at the CMS station came to “think of [the Christian] God in ways that were strongly influenced by Islam even

⁴⁶⁸ As cited in p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 49.

⁴⁶⁹ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 13-4.

though they might not be Muslim.”⁴⁷⁰ Taken together, although the inclusion of these terms in the translation does not *necessarily* show that he was working with Acholi translators who knew Arabic, it does still illustrate how the earlier presence of Muslims in the region facilitated the work of Christian missionaries.

That Kitching might have worked with, or even relied on, some Acholi translators who knew Arabic become somewhat clear after the translation of the St. Mark’s Gospel. It appears that as Kitching continued to learn the Acholi language and the history of Islam in the region, especially its association with violence, gain a better understanding of the culture and, perhaps, consult widely, he began to question the semantic authenticity of some parts of “his” translation which he immediately started revising. Perhaps the most important revision that Kitching made, which illustrates dialogues between him and other assistants, was to replace the noun *Alla* with *Ruhanga*. The CMS’s decision to substitute *Alla* with *Ruhanga*, a noun they had used in Bunyoro Kingdom, for the Christian God, begs two questions: Why did Kitching accede to the change in name? Why did he decide to borrow a term from Lunyoro? And why did then adopt *jok* “as the name for the devil.”⁴⁷¹

This revision reveals that Kitching eventually became aware of the incongruity of using *Alla* for “God” in the initial translation, and he wanted to correct the error immediately. Drawing on Cooper’s analysis of evangelical Christians in the Sahel, it appears that Kitching realized that his use of the word *Alla* in the Bible was not only implicitly associating Christianity with Islam, and thus rendering the former unpopular, it was also probably propagating Islam.⁴⁷² This mistake

⁴⁷⁰ Cooper, *Evangelical Christians*, 124.

⁴⁷¹ p’Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 49.

⁴⁷² Cooper, *Evangelical Christians*, 132.

arose either because of Kitching's dependence on interlocutors with an Islamic background and his limited grasp of the Acholi language or because of his independent choice of Arabic words. Thus, the term *Alla* was dropped from subsequent editions of the Gospel of St. Mark.

Sometime after 1906, Kitching explained that he chose the noun *Ruhanga* because there was "no word for 'God' ... the Lunyoro word 'Ruhanga' was adopted."⁴⁷³ The term *Ruhanga* however was already "in Acoli and Lango before the missionaries arrived."⁴⁷⁴ According to Crazzolaro, who arrived in Acholiland in 1910, the term *Ruhanga* had "spread to the northern Lwoo (Alur, Acooli [Acholi] and Lango)."⁴⁷⁵ But rather than resolve the initial problem (to express the idea of High God), the recommended term—*Ruhanga*—placed the CMS in a dilemma because it could not be used as Kitching had assumed. As Bishop Cyprian Kihangire, the first Uganda Catholic Bishop in Acholiland and himself a native of Bunyoro Kingdom (1918-1990), has explained, the challenge with using *Ruhanga* was that "the Acoli and Lango converts did not have the aspirate "h" in their language." They therefore could not even pronounce the term correctly. Instead of saying *Ruhanga* they will say *Rubanga*, yet *Rubanga* was an inferior spirit in Bunyoro Kingdom. As a result, the CMS abandoned *Ruhanga* but, according to Kihangire, "they adopted the already existing name *Rubanga*,"⁴⁷⁶ and they decided to elevate it "to the level of God the creator, the Almighty Father of Jesus Christ, Lord of All," for the Acholi.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷³ p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 49.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ See Crazzolaro's comment accompanying Wright's article "The Supreme Being," 135.

⁴⁷⁶ p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 49.

⁴⁷⁷ p'Bitek, "The Concept of *Jok*," 27.

But the new term—*Rubanga*—also had semantic problems, and it could not be used in its original form. The term *Rubanga*, as p'Bitek and other writers have pointed out, was also known in Acholiland before the arrival of the CMS in the region. The name, however, was associated with one of the *Joks* (spirits of the Acholi), called *Jok-Rubanga*. This *Jok*, unlike others that were responsible for such attributes of human wellbeing as health, prosperity and protection, was highly feared because it was understood as “the spirit responsible for tuberculosis of the spine.”⁴⁷⁸

Over the course of my fieldwork in Acholiland, I engaged in many conversations about the disease. In general, the disease was, and still is, understood to break people’s backs. Those who were suffering from the disease were “thought of as useless,” because they did not have backs”⁴⁷⁹ Thus, given the morbid connotations of the term *Rubanga*, it presented the CMS with another problem. But rather than abandon the noun—*Rubanga*, the CMS missionaries tinkered with it. Because “R” and “L” are phonetically “interchangeable” in some Bantu languages, the CMS replaced the first letter of the word, “R,” with “L,” changing the term from *Rubanga* to *Lubanga*.⁴⁸⁰ Thus, the term *Lubanga* was coined by the CMS to designate God. But the decision to drop the first letter of the noun was not fortuitous. Rather, it was a deliberate choice. Here, we can glimpse into the role of the Acholi assistants. They must have explained the meaning of *Rubanga* to the CMS, prompting the latter to want to draw a clear line between their God and the spirit that causes the tuberculosis of the spine, and renders people “useless.”

⁴⁷⁸ p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, 117.

⁴⁷⁹ Petero Okot, interview, April 28 2014.

⁴⁸⁰ See Crazzolarà’s comment accompanying Wright’s article “The Supreme Being,” 135.

The Roman Catholics who arrived in 1913 from Sudan, where they had had problems with the term *jok*, decided to adopt the term *Rubanga* for their High God and force it on their converts. According to Crazzolara, the leaders of the Catholic mission rejected *jok* because, while in Sudan, one “chief professed reason was that it was very inconvenient that *jok* should be used for ‘God’ as that word made part of the word for *la-Jok* meaning black magician.”⁴⁸¹ Taken together, this brief examination of the challenges of translating “God” into Acholi give us a glimpse into the critical roles of Acholi and Alur assistants during the translation of the Bible. To use Birgit Meyer’s words, these Acholi and Alur interlocutors must have searched for, collected, supplied, explained and even advised Kitching “on what term to choose and which to avoid in translation.”⁴⁸² But these local interlocutors did much more than that.

After the Arabic terms, Alur terms form the second most significant set of words in the Acholi version of the gospel. While Alur and Acholi are dialects of the same Luo language, and are therefore mutually intelligible, Alur differs from Acholi in some aspects of vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. A critical reading of the Acholi version of St. Mark’s Gospel reveals many Alur words. Examples of the Alur words include: *Pirangwen* [forty], *Oayi* [left], *Eayi* [went out], *Gidaro* [to come] and *Aciel* [one]. How did these Alur words find their way into the Acholi Gospel?

Unlike the trajectory of Arabic words in the Acholi Gospel, the source of the Alur terms is not difficult to trace. For example, we know that Kitching, on his arrival in Acholiland, did not speak either Alur or Acholi, and that Lloyd, the first missionary to arrive in Acholiland, brought with him two Alur assistants who acted as “middle figures” between him and the Acholi because

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁸² Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 59.

of their ability to speak both Lunyoro and Acholi. Thus, because Kitching did not speak either Acholi or Alur, but relied on Alur informants, he ended up using Alur words, supplied by the Alur informants, instead of more specifically Acholi words. Ultimately, the presence of these Alur words in Kitching's Acholi version of the gospel is eloquent testimony to both Kitching's limited knowledge of the Acholi language and the critical role played by local interlocutors in the translation of the Bible.⁴⁸³

In addition, the role of local interlocutors in the translation of St. Mark's gospel into Acholi finds expression in the simultaneous existence of two Acholi dialects, the Lamogi and the standard Acholi dialects, in Kitching's Acholi version of the gospel. The Lamogi dialect was (and still is) spoken by a small community that the CMS settled in. The dialect has unique words, with distinct accents, that differentiate it from the rest of the Acholi dialects. However, there are fewer Lamogi words than standard Acholi ones. During my fieldwork, focus group discussion participants, and others informants who read the translation of St. Mark, easily identified the uniquely Lamogi words, such as *oryame*, *koni-koni* and *banyere*. For example, Chapter 4:5 reads: "And immediately the spirit drove him into the wilderness." Kitching translated this verse as: *Koni-koni cwin[y] oryamme* [italics mine]. Translated into English, the adverb *koni-koni* means "immediately;" but in standard Acholi, the equivalent synonyms are: *cut-cut* and *I wang cawa meno*. Similarly, the infinitive verb *oryamme* in the Lamogi dialect means "to chase" or "to drive out;" but in standard Acholi, the equivalent verb is *oryeme*. Because Kitching arrived in Acholiland without any knowledge of the language, and settled in Lamogi, one would expect Lamogi terms to dominate the translation; but this is not the case. The existence of both dialects in this translation suggests that Kitching relied on a variety of informants with different dialects,

⁴⁸³ Derek Peterson, "Translating the Word: Dialogism and Debate in Two Gikuyu Dictionaries," *The Journal of Religious History* 23, 1(1999): 39.

and this makes perfect sense considering that the majority of the converts were from Patiko, Payira and Koch rather than Lamogi.

Besides all the clues already pointed out, there are other pointers to the role of local assistants in the translation of the Bible. One of these pointers is the inconsistency in the overall quality of the translation, with some chapters being translated clearly while others are unclear. In the course of my fieldwork, my informants who read the translation pointed out the inconsistency in many parts, betraying the shallowness of Kitching's knowledge of the language he claimed he had already learned. In the final analysis, the shoddily translated chapters appear to be those that Kitching must have failed to articulate for his local interlocutors. A telling illustration of this inconsistency is to be found in Chapter 4: 1-9, on the parable of the sower, and in Chapter 9:1-13, on the transfiguration of Jesus. I quote the two extensively to illustrate the inconsistency in question. The Acholi version of Chapter 4: 1-9 reads as follows:

4. 1. Cing mor okwongo ponyo dok nam. Lwak madwong gicoke bote, mumiye en kwang i yeya, kun obedo i nam, lwak ducu gitye wi tura dok nan. 2 Oponyogi lok nadwong i matal, owaco nigi i ponyo mere nike. 3 Wuwin. Nen, lacoya kato nicoyo. 4 Nwong ocoyo, kodi mukene porto nget yor, winyo gibino gicame: 5 mukene porto i porto I pata, ka me pet ye ki ngom madwong, koni koni otwi, keno ngom pe tut: 6 nwong ceng oryeng oner: keno pe tye ki lyake otwor. 7 Mukene porto i okuto, nwong okuto olot odiye, oketo nyjge bongo. 8 Mukene porto i ngom maber, oketo nyige olot ki odongo, ocek nior piradek ki pirabiciel ki mia. 9 Owaco nike Ma tye ki ite ma winyo owin

Chapter 9:1-9, on the other hand, reads:

9 1 Owaco nigi nike Adadar awacowu Gitye moro kin ji ma gicungo kan, ma gibibilo kor nitor matidi mor, nior ka gibineno ker pa Alla kun obino ki tek. 2 Nino kato abiciel Ica otero kwede Petero ki Lakobo ki Lakana, oito kwedgi wi got Mabor i mung kengi: nwong oloke i nyiIngi: 3 ginarukane gidoko tar, kun gileng twatwal m pe lalwoko ma tye pin twero lonyogi kameno. 4 Ginen botgi Eliya ki Muca, kun giloko kud lca, 5 Petero nvwong odok ye owaco ni lca nike Rabi, ber wan nibedo kan: watadi adek, aciel meri, aciel pa M uca, aciel pa Eliya. 6 Keno nwong pe ngeyo ma edok ye: keno nwong gilworo twal. 7 Nwong bino lwoic omonyogi: dwan oayi nike En Latin mera ma amito: wuwinye. 8 Nwong gilworo wanggi yot, pudi gineno kor dano ducu, keno Ica kene kudgi. 9 Kun giloro got, oconogi gi wek waco dano gin ma gineno, kono Latin pa dano ka bicer i ji mutur. 10 Nwong gikano lok, kun gipenye kengi nicer i ji mu tor bedo ningning. 11

Nwong gipenye, giwaco nike Lucoya giwaco nike Eliya myero ne nikwongo bino. 12 Owaco nigi nike Adadar Eliya kwongo bino, edwok ducu: nwong gicoyo ningning kom Latin pa dano orem gin mapol ki gicaya? 13 Ento awacowu nike Eliya nwong obino, gin nwong gitiye pame nwong tye kwedgi I yeya mugati aciel nono.

In comparison, there is a remarkable difference between the translations of these two passages. While the translation of the first passage on the parable of the sower is very clear, and many of my informants did not have any problems understanding it, the translation of the second passages was very difficult for many of my informants to decipher. Several informants admitted that they could not understand Kitching's translation. How do we account for these obvious differences between the two translations emanated from the same translator who claimed to have already learned the Acholi language?

The precise reasons for these apparent variations are not obvious or evident to an ordinary reader, but a reader versed in Acholi culture can easily perceive the hand of Kitching's interlocutors in the variations. It seems to me that the parable of the sower in the first passage spoke directly to the knowledge and experiences of the local assistants as farmers and, as a result, it was easier for them to understand and translate, making the translation highly lucid. By contrast, given the worldview and practical experiences of the local assistants, the transfiguration of Jesus was a nebulous idea that they could neither relate to nor comprehend. The resultant foggy translation reveals Kitching's limitations: he did not know the language well enough to achieve a clear translation of aspects of the Bible that his local assistants could not comprehend. He was merely writing what the informants were telling him, trusting that they were rendering the best translation. As a result, the passage, unlike the earlier one, is hardly comprehensible.

Finally, some of the contributions of the interlocutors were rather circumstantial, yet very important. In one interesting case, Canon Lawrence, in Donge's biography, recounts a strange story which reveals both the challenges of the CMS and role of locals. He notes that Donge told

him that while they were translating the gospel, he and Kitching had failed to find a term for repentance. “They had wanted a word for ‘repentance.’ They had asked many people but they could not get it.” But “one day,” Lawrence wrote, “Sira’s dog ate meat which was being roasted near the fire-side. Sira beat it very much so that it would know that it was bad to steal meat.” As Sira was beating the dog, Lawrence recorded: “The dog cried very much. Somebody who was passing by heard the dog’s cries and told Sira, ‘leave it, it has repented.’ When Sira heard the word for repentance he knew that that was the word they had been looking for. He ran to Kitching and told him what he had heard and also told him the meaning.”⁴⁸⁴ Strange as the story might sound, it does illustrate some of the limitations of the CMS missionaries and their Alur interlocutors. More importantly, the story also illustrates the reliance of the missionaries on their local assistants in the translation of the gospel. These are some of the countless local interlocutors who provided apparently minor but important information for translation. However, many of them remain unknown and unappreciated.

Ultimately, whatever the magnitude of Kitching’s role in the translation of St. Mark’s Gospel, it is clear that, contrary to existing works, including Kitching’s own writings, that do not give sufficient weight to the role of Africans in the translation of the Bible, Kitching was not the sole brain behind the translation project. Rather, the translation was the product of a collaborative effort, reflecting the diversity and limitations of the cultural, linguistic and empirical backgrounds of the collaborators, especially of the local assistants. However, many of these interlocutors, especially the Acholi ones, were not ordinary people. By the standards of the time, they were “cosmopolitan,” with good knowledge of Arabic and Islam, or Luganda and Lunyoro, before their encounter with the Christian gospel. Therefore, their contribution to the

⁴⁸⁴ Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 16-17.

Bible translation project was at once colored and limited by their multifaceted Arabic, Islamic Acholi and Bunyoro backgrounds. Besides their role in translating the Bible, the local interlocutors performed other important roles. In particular, the Acholi ones among them also “fought hard to [establish the church, attract converts and] keep the fires of religion burning,” and it is these roles that we now turn to.⁴⁸⁵

The Expansion of the Church, 1904-1908

The completion of the first phase of the translation of the Bible, especially the Gospel of St. Mark and other documents, such as hymns, prayer books and a reading sheet, made it possible for the CMS to begin teaching locals how to read and write. The CMS’s plan was that the first group of locals to attain the required level of literacy would receive baptism and then the Church would use these converts to teach others, and sow the seeds of Christianity in Acholiland.

Thus, 1905 saw the beginning of the first phase of the CMS expansion in the region, with missionaries attracting people to the station to teach them the word of God.⁴⁸⁶ Literacy became mandatory for everyone wanting to become a Christian.⁴⁸⁷ The duration of the training, and the target audience, at the beginning of the CMS mission in Acholiland have remained unclear. But after 1913, a prospective convert underwent two to four years of training, the exact duration depending on how fast one learned to read. Likewise, we only know the target group of the CMS after 1913. F. K. Girling has emphasized that the CMS did “not baptize and admit to membership

⁴⁸⁵ Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 294.

⁴⁸⁶ Bishop and Ruffell, “A History of the Upper Nile Diocese,” 12.

⁴⁸⁷ A.L. Kitching “Work in the Nile Province,” *Uganda Notes* 5, 8 (1905): 9.

of their church until the age of about 14 for boys, slightly older for girls.” According to Girling, “The protestant claim that they demand a higher standard of knowledge of their tenets before baptism is permitted.”⁴⁸⁸

However, it has been clear from the beginning of the work of the CMS in Acholiland that those who successfully completed reading formalized their conversion through Baptism, and they were given Christian names, besides their respective surnames.⁴⁸⁹ But giving people a new name for an accomplishment was not new in Acholiland. Prior to the arrival of missionaries, people who had distinguished themselves in a particular field were given names ending with a suffix “moi.” The Christian names, like the “moi” names, were all makers of difference. While the Acholi names were given for one’s prowess in a particular field, Christian names were given for one’s mastery of both reading and the tenets of Christianity.

In January 1905, Kitching noted that “Regular reading is now proceeding twice a day as at other stations in Uganda, and there is an average attendance of some 40 men on weekdays, while on Sunday our congregation usually reaches about 80.”⁴⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the names of most of these 80 people do not feature in the records, and thus they remain unknown. But this number is important: it shows a significant level of willingness on the part of the Acholi to join the CMS.

The beginning of the teaching, however, did not mean that everything was running smoothly for the missionaries. They had challenges. For example, Kitching recorded in 1905 that

⁴⁸⁸ Girling, *The Acholi*, 188.

⁴⁸⁹ See, for example, Russell, *Men without God*, 31.

⁴⁹⁰ Kitching “Work in the Nile Province,” 9. See also Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 286.

“during the hunting and digging seasons,” the learners left the school to attend to these tasks.⁴⁹¹ In the preceding chapters, we have seen the importance of such tasks in the life of the people. They were occasions when young men were expected to demonstrate their ability, and climb up the ranks to become warriors or war leaders. Thus, Kitching is correct to note that these preoccupations reduced the number of learners at the CMS school. But hunting and digging were not the only sources of Kitching’s problems. That same year, Kitching had other complaints: “So far we have not had any women reading here,” adding, “The children too, as yet, have not attended in any numbers.”⁴⁹²

Of the about 40 people that Kitching reported to have begun reading in January 1905, only two were baptized. On November 26, 1905, Kitching christened Ali and Ameda. This meant that Ali and Ameda received instruction for less than a year. Ali was christened Muca (Moses) and Ameda became Yakobo (Jacob). The background of these figures have been covered in Chapter One. But it is important to reiterate their societal roles here, however briefly. Ali was the son of Ywa Gimoro, one of the first cohort of Arabic interpreters and, more importantly, Sir Samuel Baker’s interpreter in the 1860s and 1870s.⁴⁹³ Interviews and fragments of documentary sources suggest that he was healer. Ameda, on the other hand, was a royal messenger in Patiko Chiefdom.⁴⁹⁴

The baptism of Muca Ali and Yakobo Ameda meant that these two Acholi joined the CMS missionaries and Donge to teach other people reading. Kitching tells us that, from the very

⁴⁹¹ A. E. Pleydell, “Acholiland,” *Uganda Notes* 7, 12 (1906): 185.

⁴⁹² Kitching “Work in the Nile Province,” 9.

⁴⁹³ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 25; see also Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 286.

⁴⁹⁴ Nekanori Lukwiya, interview, 18 March 2014.

beginning, Ali was very hard-working and, more importantly, “a bright and steadfast character, who will, we trust, prove a true soldier of the Cross.”⁴⁹⁵ Kitching’s assessment of Ali suggests that the missionary foresaw a bright future for the new convert in the service of the church.

In 1906, Kitching baptized 12 more men, including 2 Alur, Matayo Adimola and Lakana Kija [Kiiza].⁴⁹⁶ However, in 1907, there was no baptism. It was not until February 5, 1908, that the CMS baptized 5 more people. The individual background of all these figures have been covered in Chapter One. But it is important to restate that these converts were prominent courtiers, sons of chiefs or otherwise prominent men, and there are a few we have no information on. That most of these converts were from prominent or elevated socio-political backgrounds is attributable to two factors. First, we know that upon arriving in Acholiland, Rev. Lloyd personally called upon chiefs to send their children to the CMS school.⁴⁹⁷ Thus, the high number of sons of chiefs among the converts was a result of Lloyd’s efforts and the chiefs’ cooperation.

But not all the chiefs sent their sons. As Donge recounted in his biography, “some of the Rwodi [chiefs] agreed to send their children and others refused because they said...these Europeans might go away with our children, we fear.”⁴⁹⁸ Therefore, they sent their courtiers, instead of their sons. Moreover, it is also possible that the very first two converts, Ali and Ameda, may have been equally, if not more, instrumental in attracting sons of prominent men in their respective communities to the CMS school, given their social standing and significant responsibilities in the chiefdom. Actually, it is even likely that Acholi chiefs and “big men”

⁴⁹⁵ Kitching “Acholi,” *Outpost of the Uganda Mission*, 129.

⁴⁹⁶ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 26.

⁴⁹⁷ See, for example, Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 15.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

deliberately maneuvered to monopolize the opportunities of CMS training so as to protect and enhance their already prominent positions.

Yet, on February 25, 1908, Bishop Tucker withdrew his missionaries from Acholiland, bringing the work of the CMS to an abrupt end. The first years of Christianity in Acholiland were, thus, not an unqualified success. Between 1904 and 1908, the CMS attracted only 17 converts. Moreover, these converts were mainly from ruling families or holders of leading chieftdom positions. More strikingly, these very prominent men did not do much to attract converts to Christianity even when Lloyd made personal attempts to reach out to them for support. The only convert who appears to have worked hard to support the CMS was Muca Ali.⁴⁹⁹ However, beginning in 1911, when the CMS missionaries returned to Acholiland, the initially inactive leaders became active proselytizers, receiving high praise from the missionaries stationed in Gulu. Why were ordinary Acholi and chiefs reluctant to associate with the CMS? What accounts for these changes of fortune in the CMS project in Acholiland? In this section, I address only the first question before addressing the second one in the next section.

Several scholars, relying on the CMS archives, have explained the lackluster performance of the first CMS mission as a product of a conspiracy of many factors. M.M.L Pirouet, in particular, has advanced several explanations, ranging from the inclement weather that led to the CMS station at “Keyo Hill [being] struck by lightning three times” and the death of Chief Obwona who had given land to, and supported, the CMS, to a controversy over “some

⁴⁹⁹ Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 370. For more see Heike, *Alice Lakwena*, 106-112; Russell, *Men without God*, 26.

cinematograph and phonograph records.⁵⁰⁰ Perhaps Pirouet's last point needs a bit of explanation.

The missionaries, Pirouet argued, were the first Europeans to introduce "cinematograph and phonograph records" in Acholiland. According to her, the CMS missionaries had "expected the pictures to be a great success" in entertaining people. But the entertainment had a strange impact on the people as it coincided with the Acholi ritual of *mako tipu*, a special ritual dedicated to *ajwaka*, an Acholi spirit medium. *Mako tipu* is associated with recapturing the "violent spirits" of the dead. In the ritual, the spirit medium invites the spirit of the dead and asks it to address its living relatives and explain why it had been causing illness and even death. In the ritual, the spirit medium also appeases the violent spirit, pleading with it to stop tormenting the living.

So, one night, the missionaries began entertaining the people; but when the crowd heard the voices and saw motion pictures for the first time, Pirouet noted, they "were appalled and terrified ...[and] ... they imagined the white man was practicing [witchcraft] on them." Coincidentally, after this event, Pirouet added, "lightning struck Keyo Hill," where the CMS church was located, three times "and illnesses attacked the missionaries." She concluded the Acholi must have seen in this coincidence of events "the confirmation of their fear that these foreigners were evil."⁵⁰¹ As a result of their fear of the missionaries, people deserted the CMS station, and the missionaries evacuated Acholiland.

Persuasive as these explanations are, they ignore the transformations that were taking place in Acholiland in the decades preceding the arrival of the CMS, and the caliber of men the CMS found on the ground. The CMS certainly arrived in Acholiland during a period of

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 289-290.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 290.

significant transformation, when Acholi leaders were repositioning themselves for maximum advantage following the colonial conquest of 1896 that upset them. Chiefs and their men, those that I call precolonial intellectuals, were maneuvering to regain lost power and influence through an alliance with the CMS. They were seeking to reap from this alliance in the same way some of them had reaped from their earlier collaboration with the Arab traders. The CMS had not landed in an empirical void; and the chiefs and intellectuals were not slow learners.

Thus, upon the arrival of the CMS, these chiefs, expecting to build alliances and benefit from the missionaries, complied with the appeals of the CMS and they sent their sons and courtiers to the CMS school to learn how to read and write, and adopt the Whiteman's religion. They would later help the CMS to translate the Bible and other Christian texts. Many of these sons and courtiers were already well versed in Arabic and Islam. But when the chiefs, their sons and prominent men saw no tangible material benefits accruing to CMS literacy and conversion, they began to withdraw from the missionaries. For example, in 1905, it had become clear to Kitching that "Awich and some of the others [chiefs], seem really anxious to learn, but at present do not evince any interest in the gospel story, or desire to leave their old customs and drink for a Christian profession."⁵⁰² In 1907, Pleydell added, "the district of Patiko is at present thinly populated owing to the nomadic habits of the people, and readers are few as a consequence." Even more importantly, he adds, "It is difficult to maintain a boarding school owing to the unwillingness of chiefs and others to support their boys."⁵⁰³

Kitching and his CMS team had obviously failed to understand Chief Awich's motives in sending a royal messenger to invite them to Acholiland. Though issues like polygamy, the love

⁵⁰² As quoted in Pirouet, "The Expansion of the Church of Uganda," 286.

⁵⁰³ A.E. Pleydell, "Uganda, Patiko" CMS/ Annual Letter/1907-1908, 239.

of alcohol, and many others that Pirouet put forward could have served to keep the chiefs and other Acholi away from the CMS, they were by no means the most important issues. The men who learned how to read and write, and “converted” to Christianity, were not doing anything fundamentally new: many of them had already mastered Arabic and “converted” to Islam before mediating between the Acholi and the Arabs. Their efforts at the CMS school and church were thus not theologically or spiritually motivated: they were simply calculated to impress the missionaries, win their favor and hopefully access whatever attendant material benefits their efforts would yield. But when no such benefits were forthcoming, many converts deserted the CMS and perhaps dissuaded fellow Acholi (followers) from associating with the White men. In this respect, the Acholi who converted to Christianity were comparable to the Tumutumu converts in Kenya that Derek Petersons writes about: the Tumutumu converts “engaged with the Christian religion as experimentalists, not as believers transferring their faith from one relation to another.”⁵⁰⁴

In the end, the first Acholi converts, largely composed of courtiers and influential men, frustrated the CMS project: they made no effort whatsoever to attract converts apart from fellow subordinate figures and sons of chiefs. Their “conversion” to Christianity was motivated by mundane rather than spiritual considerations. Worse still, as if to ensure that the CMS did not return to Acholiland, immediately after the CMS missionaries withdrew from the region in 1908, Acholi men destroyed their church, beat up the remaining converts and burnt all the bibles and

⁵⁰⁴ Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004), 59-60.

catechism and hymn books.⁵⁰⁵ These acts of arson could not have been carried out without the knowledge and support, if not command, of the local Acholi leaders and their chiefs.

The Second Phase of the CMS's Expansion

In the previous section, I have argued that it was the kind of leaders that the CMS found on the ground, and their purely material intentions, that frustrated the evangelization efforts of the missionaries. Unexpectedly though, when the CMS missionaries returned to Acholiland in 1911, and tried again to spread Christianity among the Acholi, the same Acholi leaders and converts who had initially been passive or reluctant participants in the CMS project became vigorously and creatively involved in the expansion of Christianity beyond courts. Why this sudden change of heart?

The answer to this question lies in one significant change that occurred after the evacuation of the CMS in 1908. In 1910, the colonial state arrived and established a permanent administrative center at Gulu, in the heart of Acholiland, after almost 14 years without any station, but with an intermittent presence.⁵⁰⁶ In the same year, the state invited the CMS to return to Acholiland. Since 1910, Fisher tells us, “The government has urged that the work should be resumed.”⁵⁰⁷ But the government did not just invite the CMS back; it also promised material support for the missionaries. As Fisher adds, “They have already given an excellent site in the capital of Guru [Gulu], and have promised any help in their power.”⁵⁰⁸ Why would the state

⁵⁰⁵ Russell, *Men without God*, 24.

⁵⁰⁶ For establishment of Gulu, see: CO 536/ 12271 Opening of Gulu as an Administrative Centre.

⁵⁰⁷ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-I.

⁵⁰⁸ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-II.

invite the CMS, allocate it a site and pledge to support the society with “any help in their power”?

The state needed the CMS to produce literate manpower to implement colonial rule. By inviting the CMS, offering it a site at the colonial administrative center of the region and promising additional support, the state offered the CMS the protection the missionaries needed but had lacked during the first phase of their work in Acholiland. This *de facto* alliance between Church and State had important consequences for the evangelization of Acholiland and the eventual entrenchment of Anglicanism as the *de facto* state religion. Besides the protection that the missionaries and their employees were accorded to do their work, conversion to the CMS religion also became a pre-requisite for ascension to the position of chief in colonial Acholiland. As Heike Behrend notes, “Being an Anglican was a prerequisite of acquiring a position of a chief.”⁵⁰⁹ Therefore, unlike during the first phase of Christian expansion in Acholiland, when conversion to Anglicanism had no attendant material benefits for the convert, during the second phase, conversion paved the way to formal chiefship for traditional chiefs and their subordinate officials. As a result, chiefs and their subordinate officials became more actively supportive of the CMS and its evangelization work. Therefore, the functional alliance and interdependence between the CMS and the colonial government played an important role in the spread of Christianity in Acholiland. But the CMS had also changed its policy.

During the first phase, the CMS did not pay its employees; but, in the second phase, the Society began paying its local evangelists, further increasing the socio-economic benefits of conversion and rendering attractive the position of Evangelist.⁵¹⁰ Therefore, this change in the

⁵⁰⁹ Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 106-112.

⁵¹⁰ Russell, *Men without God*, 26.

CMS's local employment policy combined with the conflation of politics and religion to boost the evangelization of Acholiland by creating socio-economic structures and opportunities for converted traditional chiefs and precolonial intellectuals who were initially unenthusiastic about CMS reading. Because historical narratives have so far focused almost exclusively on the CMS missionaries, the role of Acholi agency in the spread of Anglicanism has been overlooked. The rest of this section examines the role of Acholi figures in the spread of Anglicanism in the region.

The imposition of colonial rule on Acholiland did not radically alter the indigenous pre-colonial structures on the ground. The colonial state co-opted traditional chiefs who, for the most part, were illiterate and therefore unqualified for appointment as formal chiefs: the colonial state simply employed them to lend a veneer of legitimacy to colonial administration, and thus facilitate the transition to colonial rule. To make up for the chiefs' inability to read and write, the colonial state made it a policy to employ literate clerks;⁵¹¹ and a clerk received a monthly salary of five rupees, equivalent to 10 shillings at the time.⁵¹² Therefore, the first generation of literate Acholi, who did not derive any material benefits from their conversion and literacy in the first phase of Christian expansion, were now afforded the opportunity they had craved. In essence, therefore, this policy of employing literate clerks served a dual purpose: it facilitated the transition to colonial rule by enabling colonial administration to function in spite of the illiteracy of the chiefs, and it indirectly boosted the proselytizing work of the CMS by rendering

⁵¹¹ J.R.P. Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri Opono Rwodi Gan' me Lobo Gulu* (Instructions for Acholi chiefs in Gulu District) (Entebbe: Government Printer, 1916), 3.

⁵¹² Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri*, 3.

conversion and literacy materially attractive. As one missionary noted, “The school [provided] great possibilities of hastening the spread of the Gospel in the Gang [Acholi] country.”⁵¹³

In the years immediately after the return of the CMS and the re-opening the school, chiefs were still given the power to choose who could go to school because the British did not consider sons of commoners fit to govern.⁵¹⁴ In their attempt to solidify their rule during the colonial era, chiefs continued to send to school their sons or favorite subordinate officials. The first group of people who received education and baptism after the return of the CMS did not differ much from those in the first phase of Christian expansion. The learners continued to mirror the earlier group of men: they came from privileged backgrounds or held some position in their chiefdom. According to the CMS records, the men who joined the CMS school included Lacito Okech, who was already working as a royal messenger in the Koch Chiefdom, Nekodemo Latigo, who was already a general in Payira Chiefdom and, according to Andrew A. Adimola, “became well-known to the readers of the *Acholi Magazine* for his interesting accounts of inter-tribal wars in ancient time,”⁵¹⁵ and Kalokwera Bartolomayo, who was a healer before becoming a CMS evangelist. The first group of post-1910 learners also included several sons of chiefs and prominent men from various chiefdoms.⁵¹⁶

In January 1914, Fisher wrote to Manley, a CMS administrator in Buganda Kingdom, telling him that many sons of chiefs had joined the school and other “chiefs have promised to

⁵¹³ See Paper of Rev. A.B. Fisher: GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-III.

⁵¹⁴ Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri*, 1-10.

⁵¹⁵ Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” 166.

⁵¹⁶ Nekanori Lukwiya, interview, 18 March 2014. For more on Kalokwera’s biography see Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda,” 398. See Okech, *Tekwaro*, 26-7, for various names of the post-1910 converts.

send their sons and to give some little help with the building”⁵¹⁷ In April 1914, Fisher reported: “The first batch of boys [sons of chiefs] were eleven in number, but the school has been steadily growing, and today there are thirty-five boys in residence. They come for three months at a time and then they have one month at home and so on.” But there was a big problem, he added: “some of the boys have brought two wives each and were rather grieved when I told them that a boy’s boarding school was no place for young wives.”⁵¹⁸

Perhaps because these sons of chiefs and other titled men were already aware that literacy and conversion to Christianity constituted the new key to socio-economic advancement, they persevered; and many of them went on to play significant roles in the expansion of Anglicanism in Acholiland. For example, Fisher boasts of an “increasing number of believers,” although he does not specify the numbers. Even more revealing is a report in the CMS records, according to which Fisher recognized some men as “outstanding church leaders.” Without saying why they were outstanding, he names them as Muca Ali, Bartolomayo Kalokwera, Culoman Okelokoko, Yosiya Okelomwaka and Lacito Okech.

Why did some locals emerge as “outstanding church leaders”? To answer this question, we have to reflect on the caliber and community status of these figures, especially given that they had already perceived the role of CMS education in social advancement in Acholiland. At one point, Fisher noted, “Bishop Willis paid us his first visit since the opening of the station in September and confirmed the first six Gang converts, five of whom are at work in the district and the sixth is Andereya Lugara [Lagara] a grandson of the Historical Chief and himself a leading chief in Gulu.” In all, Fisher concluded, “Over 1000 people came out to greet the bishop on his

⁵¹⁷ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-II.

⁵¹⁸ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-II.

arrival.”⁵¹⁹ Given the relatively low total population numbers at the time, “over 1000” coming out to greet a Bishop was no ordinary event, and it reflected the growing influence of the CMS in Acholiland. What remains unclear, though, is whether the people were persuaded (or even forced) by their leaders to welcome the bishop, or turned up voluntarily. Fisher attributed the magnitude of the welcoming crowd to the work of his evangelists, the “outstanding church leaders.” These “outstanding church leaders” appear to have earned Fisher’s admiration on account of their role in bringing so many people to the church. But what Fisher failed to realize is that the “outstanding church leaders” may not actually have evangelized the “over 1000 people” who came out to greet the bishop: more likely, the crowd was mobilized by the “outstanding church leaders” to boost the latter’s standing with the CMS.

Perhaps as a result of their outstanding roles as evangelists in the expansion of the Church in Gulu, and because of the limited number of missionaries in Acholiland, the CMS records tell us that these figures were posted to neighboring Langoland to evangelize among the Langi. The CMS wanted them to establish Christian missions among different people. “One of the first [to be posted to Lango] was Muca Ali.” He was followed by Andereya Olal. These two were later followed by others, including “Erasito [Lacito] Okech and Yosiya Okelomwaka and his wife.”⁵²⁰ But why did the CMS post these figures to spread Christianity beyond the boundaries of Acholiland so early in the evangelization mission? That these Acholi evangelists were posted to new fields of evangelization outside their homeland would appear to suggest that, in a short span of time, the Acholi evangelists had distinguished themselves as effective evangelizers within Acholiland itself. They were now deemed capable of opening new CMS

⁵¹⁹ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-II.

⁵²⁰ Bishop and Ruffel “A History of the Upper Nile Diocese,”16.

stations beyond Acholiland on their own. What Fisher and his CMS colleagues may not have realized is that the evangelization success of the “outstanding church leaders” in Acholiland relied more on their pre-Christian social standing and influence than on their CMS learning and connections. Actually, it was their pre-Christian social standing and influence as leaders that lent legitimacy to Christianity in Acholiland and enabled them to win converts to Christianity.

The next major task of spreading Christianity in Langoland, it seems, was initially difficult, although it appears to have become easier later on. Right from the start, the evangelists faced challenges similar to those the initial evangelists from Bunyoro had encountered in Acholiland: resistance from the local people. They were not all welcomed. For example, as A.M. Bishop and D. Ruffell noted, “These teachers [posted to Langoland] were only able to work in government centres, but they did make converts among the government servants and the police, but very little impression was made on the Lango themselves until a wonderful thing happened—no less a person than a Country chief or Rwot [Odora] was converted and gave a lead to his people.”⁵²¹ More specifically, in Donge’s biography, Rev. Lawrence refers to inter-tribal conflict as having probably contributed to the bad reception of the Acholi evangelists in Langoland. Colonial reports on the period also refer to tribal conflicts between the Acholi and Langi during the same period.⁵²² But after the conversion of Chief Odora, one of the most prominent chiefs in Langoland, the Acholi evangelists appear to have been allowed into the community, and they attracted more Langi converts. According to one report, “689 people registered in three months.”⁵²³ Perhaps because of their roles in establishing missions both in Acholiland and

⁵²¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵²² A/16/2: Shuli (Acholi) Correspondence Inward Vol. 2.

⁵²³ AR/CMS/98/2: Minutes of the Upper Nile Mission, Gulu.

Langoland, these Acholi figures became an important part of the CMS church, and won promotions within the local CMS hierarchy.

For example, Donge was ordained deacon in 1917. Muca Ali was earmarked for a similar role, but he “died suddenly on safari.”⁵²⁴ But not every Acholi evangelist was happy: their major grievance was lack of pay or underpayment, and it led most of the evangelists who played important roles in both Acholiland and Langoland to leave the CMS. For example, after serving as an evangelist for only six months, Lacito Okech left the CMS and joined the colonial state as a clerk. Similarly, Matayo Adimola, one of the figures that Rev. Lloyd had brought with him from Bunyoro, also resigned his role. According to Bishop and Ruffell, Adimola “left the Church to work for government and ended by being promoted to the position of the Saza [County] Chief at Gulu.”⁵²⁵ In addition to these two, Andereya Olal, one of the first Acholi converts, and one of the most prominent evangelists, also left to become a chief.⁵²⁶ Finally, even Sira Donge, consistently recognized as an outstanding evangelist, initially decided to leave because of lack of pay, but was convinced to return and continue the work. According to Rev. Lawrence, it was the King of Bunyoro Kingdom and Fisher who convinced Donge to stay: “the Omukama of Bunyoro talked to him [Donge] and said ‘My child, it is not good for you to leave God’s work. He called you to work for him and it is not good to leave it because of the trouble people give you.’ The King added, ‘As a Mukama [King], and as your friend, I would have given you a post of a chief but I don’t want to because you are the messenger of King who is above all kings as you often tell in

⁵²⁴ Pirouet, “The Exploration of the Church of Uganda,” 304.

⁵²⁵ Bishop and Ruffell, “A History of the Upper Nile Diocese,” 16.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

the Church.’ Later, Fisher, who had known his work, recalled him and Sira returned to the work of God.”⁵²⁷

The lack of regular and adequate pay was one of the problems that plagued CMS’s Christianizing mission in the region, often frustrating local evangelists and hindering the spread of Protestant Christianity. As a result, most of the evangelists abandoned their work and joined the better-paying colonial state. But, according to Bishop and Ruffell, most of these figures that left the CMS continued “to do much to help the church.”⁵²⁸ While Bishop and Ruffell do not tell us what these former evangelists actually continued to do to help the church, Fisher provides perhaps the best account of the role of these figures in supporting the church. In his account, Fisher describes a school-opening event in 1913, where we hear the voices of these figures and see their roles in the spread of Christianity in ways which the CMS missionaries could not. Fishers’ account deserves a lengthy quotation:

A new C.M. School was opened at Gulu, in the Nile Province on July 3rd by the District Commissioner Mr. P.T. Hannington. The building will accommodate about 400 pupils, and it was well filled on the occasion, most of the leading Chiefs in the capital at the time, turning up to support the Commissioner. Mr. Hannington was received at 3 p.m. outside the School by a guard of the Gulu Church Lads Bridge with their band in charge of Instructor *Muca Ali* [italics mine]

The proceedings opened with the singing of a native hymn, and prayer, after which the Rev. A.B. Fisher made a short statement as to the cost of the building, and expressed his hopes, and plans for the future. Specimens of the work done by the pupils were then submitted by Mrs. Fisher who is in charge of the school. Mr. Hannington expressed some surprise at the progress made in three months.

The Commissioner then addressed the Chiefs and the pupils reminding them of the country a little time ago and of the great change that had taken place amongst them owing to settled government. He pointed out that unless they took advantage of the school and learned to read, write, study industrial trades, and the wisdom that comes from God they would not be able to help each other, and take their full part in the future progress of their country. He urged the Chiefs to send their sons to the Gulu Boarding School that in time they may be able to assist them and later succeed them in the

⁵²⁷ Lawrence, “Life of Sira Dongo,” 19.

⁵²⁸ Bishop and Ruffell, “A History of the Upper Nile Diocese,” 16.

government and control of the districts. A vote of thanks to Mr. Hannington was proposed by Andereya Lugara [Lagara], grandson of the historical Acholi friend of Baker and Emin, and was seconded by Achara in the absence of his brother, Owic [Awic], one of the leading Ganyi [Acholi] Chiefs.

Kelomwaka [Okello Mwoka] the friend of Mulanglanga (Col. Delme-Radcliffe) and the only native who has seen the coast [of East Africa] also spoke in support. The native speeches were most characteristic—full of proverbs and illustrations. The Chief Kelemwaka evidently felt that privileges of the school were primarily intended for their sons, and not wishing for himself and his fellow Chiefs to be left out, remarked: - “Whoever heard of a father sending his son out single handed to kill an elephant. We seniors want to go with our children that we may learn wisdom and things of God together. The proceedings concluded with a collection which amounted to Rs. [Rupees] 250, including a generous donation from the D.C. of Rs. 100.⁵²⁹

Fisher’s description of the event reveals the close collaboration between the CMS and the colonial state in Acholiland, and, even more importantly, the benefits that the CMS evangelization mission derived from that collaboration during the early colonial period. Okello Mwoka, whom Fisher called Kelomwaka (and whom we will meet in the next chapter), was initially a war leader and had already been made a colonial interpreter and was earmarked to become a chief by the colonial state for his role in helping Col. Delme-Radcliffe in the “pacification” of Acholiland. In this passage we can hear the voice of Okello Mwoka as a colonial chief, persuading locals to support the church. It was the high esteem in which they were held by fellow clansmen and women on account of their pre-Christian social status, and their attendant ability to persuade fellow Acholi and attract local support for the CMS that made the first generation of Christian converts vital to the CMS mission in Acholiland. And when Fisher states that the “native speeches were ...full of proverbs and illustrations,” he implies that he and his CMS colleagues could not understand fully, let alone control, all that the local leaders told their people about, or in support of, Protestant Christianity. The above passage also reveals some of the subtle ways in which the colonial state boosted the fortunes of the CMS: by employing

⁵²⁹ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-I: C.M.S Gulu School Opening.

chiefs, their sons and former subordinate court officials, and thus giving them a stake in the new dispensation, the colonial state made these Acholi men willing to draw on their status, knowledge and oratory skills to drum up support for the CMS. Ultimately, it was the ties which different Acholi leaders had with their communities that won the CMS acceptance in the early colonial period.

From around 1916, a new form of expansion occurred in the church. This expansion occurred largely as a result of restructuring, after the colonial state had been firmly established on the ground. In this restructuring, illiterate and underperforming traditional chiefs were dismissed, creating opportunities for men without royal backgrounds to become chiefs. Even before 1916, some exceptional non-royal men, like Okech, had already been made chiefs. The ability of leaders from non-royal backgrounds to become chiefs significantly affected the spread of Christianity. In 1917 alone, a remarkable “five hundred baptisms [were] recorded in the year,”⁵³⁰ and the new converts were not all sons of chiefs or of prominent men. As Andrew Adimola, the son of Matayo Adimola, who had gone to Acholiland with Rev. Lloyd to Acholiland in 1904, noted, “the newly-created demand for these skills [literacy] and Christianity grew simultaneously and missionaries felt that they must satisfy both demands.”⁵³¹ As many people joined the CMS school, they also became converts. In this way, the interdependence between the CMS and the colonial state continued to play an important role in the spread of Christianity in Acholiland. Perhaps even more importantly, those who became converts were no longer exclusively sons of chiefs and prominent men.

⁵³⁰ See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-III.

⁵³¹ Adimola, *The Development of Primary Education in Acholi*, 10.

The demand for CMS education became so great that the Society could no longer afford to provide it free of charge, and introduced school fees. Commenting on the tuition fee policy introduced in 1918, Rev. Lees, the school administrator, wrote: “The high school boys pay a fee of Rs. [Rupees] 15 or £1 a year for their education; we were not sure at first whether they would be able to afford this; however, they have all managed so far to get this sum together. We believe they appreciated more what they have to pay for than which is given to them for nothing.” However, and perhaps unknown to some of the missionaries, the tuition fee had an adverse impact on access to CMS education, alienating many potential learners, especially commoners who could not afford the fee. For example, that same year, Lees recorded: “When I was on an itineration in the Kitgum district, I came across one boy who said he was very anxious to come to our High School but had no rupees to pay the school fees; so I said to him ‘what about goats’ ‘Oh!’, he said, ‘I have several goats, ‘Very well, then’ I said ‘you bring me seven goats and I will give you the necessary rupees.’ I left his village the next day to continue my itineration, but a month or so afterwards this boy turned up at Gulu, goats and all, and has been doing very well as a scholar since.”⁵³²

The ability of the CMS to provide education proved very useful in evangelization, especially in the decade after the establishment of colonial rule. But it appears that most of the Christian converts were more interested in the secular education at the CMS school and its attendant material rewards than in Christian spirituality. As Adimola aptly comments, “it is doubtful whether their motives were often high or spiritual bearing in mind the number of Christian chiefs and other similar privileged men who readily fell back to polygamy once their

⁵³² See GB 0150/CMS/ACC84/Gulu-III.

aim was achieved.”⁵³³ In his last days in the region, J.K. Russell, a CMS Bishop in Acholiland, remembers: “In Acholi, perhaps more than in any other part of Uganda, *dini* [religion] was welcomed for what it could give: entry to the new world. That part of *dini* which was connected with arithmetic and learning to speak English was of obvious and immediate practical value. That part of it connected with saying your prayers and singing hymns—and not marrying more than one wife—was of doubtful value but accepted as part of the whole.”⁵³⁴ But, even though most Christian converts may have been motivated more by material considerations than by spiritual ones, the conflation of politics and religion in the region did help the CMS to spread Protestant Christianity. However, contrary to what some scholars have suggested, the spread of the religion was a slow process.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the roles of local assistants in the founding and consolidation of the CMS activities in Acholiland. It has revealed that the CMS missionaries relied heavily on local assistants that included Alur, Banyoro, and, most importantly, Acholi converts. These people performed a variety of roles. First of all, the Acholi and the Alur interlocutors taught the CMS missionaries and non-Acholi evangelists the Acholi language. Secondly, and more importantly, they helped in the translation of the Bible and other Christian documents, identifying and explaining the meanings of what they considered to be the most appropriate Acholi words for Bible translation. Inevitably, not all the words they suggested were Acholi: some were Alur, some were Lunyoro, and others were Arabic, reflecting not only the ethnic

⁵³³ Adimola, *The Development of Primary Education in Acholi*, 10.

⁵³⁴ Russell, *Men without God*, 37.

diversity of the interlocutors but also the earlier imprint of Islam on Acholi culture through Arab traders from the north. These findings challenge existing literature which has largely portrayed Kitching (and the CMS) as solely responsible for the translation of the Bible into Acholi. Indeed, this chapter, like Derek Peterson's work, shows that the translation of the Bible "was usually accomplished through the combined and consultative work of both African and missionary linguists."⁵³⁵ There was no way Kitching or any of his colleagues could have done it alone.

But translation was not the only task that local assistants performed. This chapter has shown that locals played the important role of laying the foundation for the reception of Protestant Christianity. More specifically, it has revealed that the initial Acholi assistants and evangelists were no ordinary Acholi. They were individuals with high social positions in the community and because of the alliance between the CMS and the colonial government, they drew on their knowledge, skills, reputations and networks to attract fellow Acholi to the Church, and retain them there. Their roles as evangelists or chiefs lent vital legitimacy to Protestant Christianity, attracting more converts. In appreciation, the missionaries promoted some of them to relatively high positions in the church. But, because the CMS did not pay the evangelists well enough or at all, most of the initial evangelists abandoned CMS service for better remunerated jobs in the colonial state, thereby slowing down the spread of Protestant Christianity. However, even as colonial state servants, some of the former evangelists, especially those who became chiefs, continued to support the church, largely because of the alliance between the CMS and the colonial government. Ultimately, the conflation of politics and religion in Acholiland helped the CMS in spreading Christianity. In the next chapter, we focus on the role of these figures in the colonial state and in the conflicts that emerged in colonial Acholiland.

⁵³⁵ Peterson, "Translating the Word," 39.

CHAPTER 5

Precolonial Intellectuals and the Colonial State

On February 17, 1914, four years after the establishment of a formal colonial office in Acholiland, Okello Mwoka Lengomoi, arguably the greatest war leader in the second half of the nineteenth century and early colonial Acholiland, lay spread-eagled in his own pool of blood, near a small spring.⁵³⁶ Okello had been assassinated by a group of eight people, led by Opiyo Maroum and somebody only known as Okello. The killing was well orchestrated, and it all started “in the afternoon during the hunting tour, [when] word reached [Okello] Mwoka that a buffalo had been killed in another location of the hunting forest, and that he was required to perform the traditional ceremony before the skinning of the animal commenced. He was also asked to help with [the] distribution of the game meat among the hunters who were said to have speared the animal.” Because Okello “had done... [the ceremony] countless times before,” wrote Jim Ocitti, Okello’s biographer, he “saw nothing sinister in being asked to perform this particular ritual.”⁵³⁷ He therefore took his spear and left for the ritual. This, however, was “a ploy to trap him by isolating him.” Thus, as Okello “made his way to the non-existent scene of the non-existent buffalo, [he]...was viciously speared at a place called Atega” and he immediately died from multiple spear wounds.⁵³⁸

The following morning, when the news of his death reached his employer, J.R.P. Postlethwaite, the District Commissioner (DC), the latter described the death as “a great loss to

⁵³⁶ See Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 88.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

myself and to the district.”⁵³⁹ The DC’s description is not misplaced given Okello’s role in the colonial state, beginning in the late 1890s. Eager to know what exactly had happened to his servant, Postlethwaite “proceeded hot-foot to the site of the crime and then there [he] commenced a long and weary hunt for the murderers.” After a “lengthy enquiry,”⁵⁴⁰ Postlethwaite noted, he “captured seven of the eight ring-leaders.” The last suspect, Okello, escaped. “I could not catch him [Okello],” the DC recalled. “I tramped the length and breadth of the district, including in many a night march, but always arrived just behind the prey.” Okello evaded the colonial police for three weeks because, as Postlethwaite later found out, some people “did their best to help Okello and kept him well informed of my movements.” Realizing that the manhunt was not going to deliver Okello to him, Postlethwaite recalled, “I decided to try putting a price on his head.” The price was “several head of cattle,” and it was significant.⁵⁴¹ Cattle symbolized wealth and power. Thus, the number of cattle staked suggests the gravity with which Postlethwaite regarded the crime, and the value he attached to the victim.

This strategy worked. After addressing one large public gathering, and as he walked back to his house, Postlethwaite “was surprised at being asked by an Acholi follower of my own, named Arun, a somewhat raw old native whom I employed as a gun bearer, whether he would get the cattle if he assisted in Okello’s capture.” Postlethwaite recalls: “I, of course said yes, and thought no more about it.” Thereafter, Arun went and persuaded Okello that Postlethwaite would forgive him, if he, Okello, surrendered himself to Postlethwaite. A few days later, Postlethwaite recollected, “I was woken up early one morning by Arun, with the unexpected information that

⁵³⁹ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 63.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Okello was on the verandah of my house. Jumping out of the bed, I very soon called the guard and had my friend Okello under arrest.” This arrest completed the capture of all the eight murder suspects. Postlethwaite tried “these murderers, sentencing four to a long term of imprisonment and four to death.”⁵⁴² The four men were hanged outdoor, in an open field in Gulu Town.

In the late 1960s, an informant of the historian John Dwyer explained what happened. On the day these men were hanged, the informant began, people were forced to attend the event. “Before the hour of seven [7 AM]Thousands had gathered near the boma [headquarters] in Gulu to be on hand for the hanging.” Before the hanging started, Postlethwaite addressed the crowd and said: “Those people who killed Okellomwaka [Okello Mwoka], the friend of the government [will] die today!” And after his speech, the execution started. “The four men were kept in a small hut [and]...were brought out one at a time.” As soon as one was hanged, “The man would then be examined by a doctor,” to ensure he was dead.⁵⁴³ Thereafter, the bodies were dragged into one mass grave, just a few meters from where they were hanged. The sight of hanging was, no doubt, a traumatic event for the locals. The ordeal was compounded by the fact that the Acholi rituals of death to appease the spirits could not be performed, adding to the pain of the people.⁵⁴⁴

In sum, the murder of Okello and the response of the colonial administration were important events during the early years of colonial rule in Acholiland. As we have seen, the people who orchestrated the murder were well known, and they were all apprehended. However, their motives have never been known. For any individual with Okello’s knowledge, skills,

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 175-176.

⁵⁴⁴ For the Acholi rituals of death see Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 198-199; see also Okumu, “The funeral rites in the Acholi tradition and the pastoral problems they arouse,” 173-180; Opoka “The funeral rite of the Lwo Acholi,” 165-172.

experience and, above all, contribution to his chiefdom to be murdered by his own clansmen begs the question: What exactly did Okello do to deserve such a brutal death, and at the hands of his own people? That people tried to conceal Okello, the ring leader, suggests that Okello Mwoka's murder had the support of many more than a few individuals. Indeed, this tragic story suggests a bigger conflict within the chiefdom; and it smacks of a careful, collective plot to eliminate Okello Mwoka. That is why the actions of the natives and the response of Postlethwaite raise vital questions: Who, indeed, was Okello Mwoka? Why did his own people turn against him at the dawn of colonization? Why did the colonial state choose to hang his murderers in public? And what exactly did Postlethwaite mean when he said that the death of Okello Mwoka was "a great loss to myself and to the district"?

Existing works on Acholi colonial history have largely focused on the military heroics of the British in Acholiland. They paint a picture of British military triumph over Acholi chiefdoms, and imprisonment of uncooperative native leaders, in a wave of colonial violence that culminated in the colonization of the Acholi.⁵⁴⁵ This chapter provides a counter argument to these works. I argue that while British colonial violence, public executions of rebellious Africans, and the political manipulation of Africans through the policy of "divide and rule" might have frightened and weakened the Acholi, violence alone does not adequately explain the institutionalization of the European colonial enterprise in Acholiland. The Acholi who became colonial employees brought with them significant knowledge, ideas, and a sense of legitimacy, all of which also contributed significantly to the entrenchment and functioning of the colonial administration, a contribution that has escaped the attention of scholars.

⁵⁴⁵ Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 1972; Odoi-Tanga, "Politics, Ethnicity and Conflict in Post Independent Acholiland," 106-111; Assa Okot, *A History of Africa: African Societies and the Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1800-1915* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2006), 194.

By and large, the Acholi perceived these precolonial figures, even after they had become colonial servants, as the right people to govern them. Their interactions within different chiefdoms during the old order, their marriage relations with different clans, and their societal norms gave them considerable leverage across the region. I contend that wherever the colonial regime posted them, the native colonial servants were accepted not simply because they were colonial servants, but largely because they embodied the qualities of leadership that the Acholi recognized as legitimate, qualities they had acquired in the precolonial order. Unlike scholars who portray the colonial era as a break from the Acholi past, I see it as partly a continuation of precolonial Acholi political ideas and personalities during which some aspects of the precolonial era continued to inform people's ideas of power and legitimacy.

In the early years of colonization, the British met stiff resistance from some chiefdoms, and deposed sitting chiefs, replacing them with missionary-educated figures, some of whom went on to flourish in the colonial world. Who were the employees who flourished? Why did they flourish? And why did some fail? European documents do not provide adequate answers to these questions. They do not capture the internal histories, especially the precolonial experiences, of these early colonial servants. However, a careful reading of these documents reveals that the Europeans noticed the contributions of some of the precolonial intellectuals, although they acknowledged these contributions only in passing, and relied heavily on them.

This chapter explores the roles of Acholi figures in the colonial state and the conflicts that emerged among the Acholi leaders as a result of the implementation of colonial rule. Specifically, it focuses on a group of precolonial intellectuals to highlight their contributions to the colonial state. It delves into the precolonial era and identifies the knowledge, skills, values, perceptions and experiences that these individuals deployed in the service of European

institutions. The chapter asks: What did the transitional intellectuals bring from their precolonial experiences to the colonial era? How did they contribute to the implementation of colonial rule? And what sort of conflicts emerged within the Acholi community as a result of the implementation of colonial rule? In attempting to answer these questions, the chapter hopes to expand the discussion about the contribution of African institutions and ideas to the colonial state.

The Acholi Colonial Employees

The British annexed Acholiland in June 1896, making it part of the Uganda Protectorate.⁵⁴⁶ The addition of the region to the British colonial territory did not, however, result in the immediate establishment of a formal administrative center that year. In 1899, after Major Macdonald's failure to fully pacify the region, another military expedition was arranged. The second expedition, led by Major Delme-Radcliffe, began in 1899.⁵⁴⁷

Upon his arrival, Delme-Radcliffe focused on chiefs who had refused to sign treaties of submission with Macdonald. It was from this time that Acholi men began to join the colonial state in the "pacification" of the region. Although some men joined the state to mediate between their chiefs and the new establishment, others, according to the historian John Dwyer, joined the colonial state out of their own "foresight:"⁵⁴⁸ they wanted to bolster their own positions in the new world. Whatever the reason, many Acholi men participated in the "pacification," but Major Delme-Radcliffe does not acknowledge all of them. The only active Acholi participant in these

⁵⁴⁶ Nyeko, "The Acholi," 12.

⁵⁴⁷ Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History," 7.

⁵⁴⁸ Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 98.

expeditions who features in the colonial documents is Okello Mwoka, the central figure in the story with which I began this chapter. We are told that the British relied on him and “received much help” from him.⁵⁴⁹ Surprisingly, although they conquered, and secured treaties with, all the Acholi chiefs, the British did not take advantage of this outcome to establish a firm presence immediately.

From 1901, after the departure of Major Delme-Radcliffe, to 1910, the colonial state left Acholiland on its own, with only a brief presence in 1906. It was not until 1910 that the British established an administrative center in Gulu.⁵⁵⁰ To facilitate efficient administration of this vast region, the colonial state did two things. First, it opened another administrative center in 1912, about one hundred miles to the north of Gulu, at a place called Kitgum, near the border with South Sudan. Secondly, the state encouraged the participation of local people in the administration of the region. They did this in two ways: by retaining the existing structures and co-opting existing chiefs, and by creating new positions within the colonial administration for literate locals. But this strategy was not exclusive to Acholiland: due to lack of personnel, the British adopted the same strategy in almost all their other colonies.

Traditional chiefs were the first group of leaders to be co-opted as the British took hold of the region. Their co-option was strategic: the British wanted to use the chiefs’ legitimacy and political and social knowledge to facilitate the implementation of colonial policies. The roles of the co-opted chiefs were to collect taxes, recruit laborers and soldiers, and ensure cultivation of

⁵⁴⁹ Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History,” 7.

⁵⁵⁰ CO 536/ 12271: Opening of Gulu as an Administrative Center; see also Okech, *Tekwaro*, 14.

cash crops. That is why, from the very beginning, the co-opted chiefs had to attend monthly meetings, *baraza*, in Gulu Town to report on their performance of those roles.⁵⁵¹

The leaders who had occupied what Girling has called “lowly positions in the traditional political hierarchy” were initially neglected because the colonial state did not regard them as useful. However, the co-option of traditional chiefs was not devoid of problems. The chiefs lacked the most essential requirement of colonial administration: literacy and multilingualism. This presented the state with a dilemma, but because the British knew that successful colonial administration hinged on working with traditional chiefs, they created a new position to support the chiefs who could not read or write: that of the Clerk. The requirement for this position was literacy, and every chief was mandated to “employ a clerk who must be paid regularly five rupees per month.”⁵⁵² This precondition gave many of the people who were in *lowly positions in the traditional political hierarchy* and had become literate, the chance to enter the colonial service. Most of them, however, were not posted to their own chiefdoms, and had to work with chiefs other than their traditional ones.⁵⁵³ The roles of the clerks were to work with chiefs and collect taxes, disseminate tax information and compile tax records for the colonial state, making them, to use Nancy Rose Hunt’s term, significant “middle figures” between the Europeans and Acholi society.⁵⁵⁴ But this was not the only position the state created.

The colonial state created another layer of functionaries under the chiefs: the Police. “Each chief,” the 1913 law reads, “should employ one policeman for each government gun,

⁵⁵¹ Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri*, 3.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵³ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 32.

⁵⁵⁴ Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual*, 7-8.

[and] these men should be permanent.”⁵⁵⁵ We know very little about the qualification requirements and other characteristics of these policemen. Since each chief was required to recruit his police force, it is most likely that these men were drawn from the warriors or generals that enforced chiefly orders in the precolonial era. Their roles were largely to help chiefs and clerks in the collection of taxes and to guard the administration post in the chiefdom. In all, the colonial state introduced many positions that, in turn, brought people with various types of backgrounds, knowledge and skills, ideas and experiences into the colonial service.

The colonial state continued creating new positions and recruiting more people, depending on the needs on the ground. But the positions of these co-opted chiefs and other employees were not perpetual. None of them had their jobs guaranteed. Moreover, while these jobs had attendant opportunities for upward mobility, they also entailed risks of demotion and even dismissal. For example, by 1914, some traditional chiefs had been dismissed partly because of poor performance and partly due to their unwillingness to serve the colonial state, or resistance against colonial rule. They were replaced by literate Christian converts, some of whom had served their chiefs in various roles in the old order.⁵⁵⁶ This upward mobility of literates created resistance in some places (which I will discuss at length later in the chapter).⁵⁵⁷ The Acholi coined the term *Rwot Kalam* (*Rwodi Kalam*-plural). *Rwot* is, of course, the title of a chief, and *Kalam* is a corruption of the Arabic term *Qalam* which means “pen” or “pencil”. Thus, the term *Rwot Kalam* was used to denote an appointed chief as different from a traditional one.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri*, 3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 103.

⁵⁵⁸ Although the term had pejorative connotations, it also embodied a positive development: the opportunity for upward mobility, especially for those who became literate and excelled at their colonial jobs.

Ultimately, the colonial state introduced many positions that, in turn, brought people with various types of knowledge and skills, ideas and experiences into colonial service. Some of them became far more prominent colonial servants than the traditional chiefs whom the British had relied on in the first three decades of colonial rule. Yet, existing works do not pay sufficient attention to the precolonial lives of these transitional Acholi figures. Scholars who have mentioned them often gloss over their pre-colonial backgrounds; they are simply portrayed as colonial chiefs. Moreover, they are often depicted as products of European institutions, especially CMS schools and the colonial state. Yet, while some of these Acholi joined the CMS schools, which further enhanced their possibilities by making them literate and colonial employees, these figures were products of both worlds, and to neglect their precolonial experiences as most scholars have done, is to ignore the complexity of their lives.

Royal Messengers, Healers and War Leaders as Colonial Servants

That Acholi from different backgrounds joined the colonial state and became its employees should now be fairly obvious. But the advent of the colonial rule did not open space for everybody as most scholars have argued. People who had held leadership positions in the precolonial setting were better equipped to join the colonial state. In the previous chapters, especially in Chapter Two, I have argued that the path to leadership in pre-colonial Acholi society followed a fairly clear route, with specific criteria that an aspiring leader had to meet. The identification of children with outstanding potential was partly “the work of *jok*” and partly the work of parents and guardians. Those identified would then undergo a long and complex training process before they could qualify as experts in a variety of fields, becoming courtiers or other influential figures, such as healers. But it was only the most powerful figures in the

different professions that were regarded with awe, consulted frequently, and became valued political actors in their polities and in the lives of ordinary people. In contrast, those who failed to impress by their efficacy had neither power nor following.

Upon the establishment of the colonial state, many of these royal messengers, healers and war leaders joined the colonial state along with their chiefs, attempting to manipulate colonial officials to their own advantage. However, existing sources do not tell us enough about these colonial employees. They are often portrayed as homogeneous, although they came from different chiefdoms and backgrounds, and had different levels of seniority and often different interests. Neither do the documents tell us how individual Acholi leaders perceived themselves or were perceived by other Acholi. As a result, we cannot fathom the delicate balancing acts that these Acholi leaders had to perform as they mediated between the Acholi and European worlds. But the mere fact that some of these leaders commanded large followings suggests that they were highly regarded in their communities, but in ways that European observers could not have grasped or documented. How, then, can we begin to fathom the operations of these precolonial leaders turned colonial servants wherever they were posted?

Over the course of my stay in Acholiland, I held discussions with several individuals and one group of five elders about the Acholi concept of leadership and how elders perceived their colonial Acholi leaders. I was particularly interested in people's perceptions of their leaders during the colonial era. In these discussions, I encouraged my respondents to recount their experiences with the different chiefs, clerks and policemen in the area. More specifically, I wanted to know how people had reacted to the Acholi leaders appointed by the colonial state, and why they had accepted, or resisted, some of these leaders. These discussions largely took place in the homes of my respondents.

The group discussion I had with five elders had not been planned as such. Initially, I had arranged for a one-on-one interview with my host, but when I intimated to him the subject of our planned discussion, he decided to invite his village peers to come and share their experiences with me. Besides asking the elders about their experiences, I also took the opportunity to ask them if they had personally known, or at least heard of, some of the leaders, like Lacito Okech, Okello Mwoka, Nekodemo Latigo and Ojok Adonyi, who featured frequently in the colonial state documents, and were often referred to as outstanding. In the group discussion, Obol Otema, an 86-year old man, related the following personal experience:

We paid taxes under our chief in [Awer], which was our clan headquarters. I started paying taxes in the late 1940s. The appointed colonial chief was called Okot Ajwaka. He was called *Ajwaka* because he was a healer. Okot was a fairly old man when he arrived here, perhaps in his early fifties, but he was a very good person. After work, he would be in the community treating people with his medicine. He was a very popular healer in the whole of this place, and yet he was not from here. He was from the Payira Chiefdom, but the DC [District Commissioner] posted him here. Initially when he arrived here, people had resisted him, which was common, because he was from a different chiefdom. But when he started working, people liked him very much. Besides treating people's ailments, Okot would never imprison anyone if they did not have money to pay tax. He would ask you to go and *dig in his garden or in that of our traditional chief* [italics mine], and he would then exempt you from tax for that month. That was a very good initiative which helped those who were in the tax age bracket but did not have a job or property to sell and earn money to pay taxes.⁵⁵⁹

Petero Otema, another elder in the group, had an equally interesting experience to share:

In 1945, I was 19. That was the first time I paid taxes. I lived in Cuda which is also my home village. We were under Lacito Okech. Okech was one of the people who worked for our chief before the Europeans arrived, but he became an appointed chief during colonial rule. The Whiteman appointed him because of his ability to speak many languages and because of his knowledge of the traditions of many chiefdoms. They would call him to tell them about the Acholi ways of life. But on the whole, Okech was a very good man who knew how to work with people. Okech did not want anyone he knew to be imprisoned for not paying taxes. By 1945, he was not the chief of this place but on the day of paying taxes, which was the last Friday of every month, he would come and sit around. When some people reported that they did not have money, Okech would bail them out. When I was 19 years, I did not have a job, but the government wanted me to

⁵⁵⁹ Obol Otema, interview, 13 January 2015.

pay taxes. Because I was young and did not have money, *Okech paid for me and asked me to go and work on his farm for two days* [Italics mine]. Thereafter, Okech advised me to look for a job because I was going to be arrested next time. After working for two days in his farm, I asked him if he could give me a job. Okech took me to Gulu High School, a CMS school, and they gave me a job there. I became a cook, but I did not like the work because cooking was traditionally for women, not for men. I was tired of my peers mocking me. After several months, I asked the school to allow me to supply them with firewood, and I became a firewood supplier for about five years. This is the little I remember about Okech. He was a man of versatile skills: he knew the tradition [history] of every clan and wrote the first book. He spoke many languages and he was also the best orator I have ever met. Today when younger people tell me about Nobert Mao's [a prominent Acholi politician] oratory skills, I tell them it is very sad that most of them did not hear Okech.⁵⁶⁰

Unlike Obol Otema and Petero Otema, Alija [Charles] Ojara had a different experience to share:

My story is a story of violence. This scar you see on my back [he took off his shirt to show me the scar] is a result of failure to pay my tax at one time in either 1955 or 1956. I cannot remember the exact year. But when I failed to pay my tax, I was treated badly. I was arrested by policemen sent by the chief, and I was taken to *gangkal* [colonial administration center]. I was beaten badly on the orders of our chief called Apollo Mwaka, a very young boy who had just finished Gulu High School. I was not arrested alone. Many people in my village were arrested. But when our traditional chief, who was sort of powerless because he had been deposed, heard about our problems, he came and paid our taxes. We were immediately released. When we arrived at home, our village rose up against this young boy who did not know how to work with people. We beat him up and took the case to the colonial office in Gulu Town. The next month, Apollo Mwaka was replaced with Okello Anywar, an old man who was very much liked by the people. Okello was from Atyak and had worked with his chief, Olya, as a royal messenger before the Europeans arrived. Okello, however, worked for only a few years here and retired, I think around 1959 or 1960, before Uganda got independence. He went back to his home in Atyak, where he had come from. But we liked him very much. The problem with the younger chiefs was that they assumed too much power and wanted to demonstrate their power to people. The young chief did not even like our traditional chief, and he complained many times to the DC [District Commissioner] that it was our traditional chief who was causing all the problems in the chiefdom, like instigating people to refuse paying taxes. But when Okello arrived, he immediately improved the relationship between the colonial government and our chief, and everyone ended up liking him until his retirement.⁵⁶¹

Finally, Okello Oryema offered a similar story of violence:

⁵⁶⁰ Petero Oryema, interview, 23 January 2015.

⁵⁶¹ Alija Ojara, interview, 13 January 2015.

People around this place were under Chief Matayo Obol and his men. According to my father, Obol was a very bad man. Whenever Obol got pressure from the DC [District Commissioner] he turned the heat on the people in his area. My father told us that if you did not pay your taxes, Obol would tell you that he was going to bewitch your eyes [*yiro wangi*] so that you become blind, and he would be able to exempt you from paying taxes. So, my father's generation of men feared Obol very much. They worked so hard; they looked for any kind of job so that they could pay taxes. For a long time, my father worked as a cook and sweeper. Are these good jobs? No. They were not. But my father had to do them because he feared being sent to jail and because he also feared being bewitched by Obol. Because of his ability to hurt people, yet he could have used his healing knowledge for proper ends, there was nothing people could do against him. Everyone just feared him. My father told me that when Obol died, people refused to bury him. That was how bad a man he was. Our people refused to mobilize men to carry his body back to his village, Amar, because he did know how to work with people.⁵⁶²

While these recollections did not offer any precise details into all that transpired during the transition to colonial rule, they did offer glimpses into the sorts of experiences not covered in the documentary records. In particular, these stories provided several insights into the lives of colonial servants. First, these recollections reveal that the colonial servants were multifunctional, combining their official roles as chiefs, clerks or policemen with some of their other roles as healers and socio-political mediators. Secondly, these recollections illustrate how the imposition of colonial rule resulted in the deposition of some traditional chiefs. Contrary to the impression gleaned in colonial documents, however, the traditional chiefs did not entirely disappear from the scene. Thus, appointed chiefs often found their positions increasingly constrained by traditional chiefs whom they had replaced, and whom they had to appease constantly. Quite frequently, an informant told me that his appointed chief “would ask you to go and dig in his garden or in that of our traditional chief.” This must have been one of the many ways in which appointed chiefs appeased the deposed traditional chiefs, and thus contrived to rule as appointed chiefs.

Thirdly, I gained important insights into people's perceptions of these transitional figures. I began to see that my interlocutors perceived power, leadership and legitimacy in much broader

⁵⁶² Okello Oryema, interview, 18 January 2015.

terms than I did. That they used terms such as “young boys” to describe youthful appointed chiefs whose only qualification for leadership was literacy, testifies to some of the ways in which precolonial concepts of leadership, power and legitimacy continued to inform people’s assessment of their leaders in the colonial era. Finally, becoming Christian converts, and eventually colonial servants, did not mean that converts rejected their old ways, knowledge or skills. Rather, precolonial intellectuals retained and deployed their knowledge and skills in two ways. On the one hand, they used them to enhance their colonial authority by building a new community of followers around them even as colonial servants. The story of Okot Ajwaka is just one example. On the other hand, they deployed their knowledge and skills to respond to their challenges in the colonial state. The story of Chief Matayo Obol’s perceived ability to bewitch people shows how some precolonial skills could purportedly be harnessed (somewhat diabolically) in the service of the colonial state.

Taken together, these recollections give us glimpses into how some appointed colonial leaders were perceived by other Acholi, how they used their knowledge and skills to buttress their positions in the colonial era and, most importantly, how they established control over people in the colonial era. Armed with these insights derived from oral histories, we have perhaps reached an appropriate moment for focusing on specific figures so as to begin exploring the unique ways in which these leaders contributed to the colonial project. However, I should make it clear that, in these biographies, I outline only the career trajectories of the leaders. In a subsequent section, I shall discuss at length the knowledge and skills that they brought to the colonial era, to explain why some of these intellectuals had stellar careers in the colonial state.

Precolonial Intellectuals and their Dual Roles in the Colonial Era

As I have already stated a few times, beginning in 1896, when colonial rule began, many chiefs and other titled men were upset in their chiefdoms. Although some chiefs and their subordinate figures had resisted the colonial takeover, the majority had not.⁵⁶³ But because the colonial state lacked personnel, and it had signaled its willingness to work through the existing Acholi administrative structures, many men who had occupied what Girling called “lowly positions in the traditional political hierarchy” joined the state. Therefore, from 1896, Acholi men (many of whom we will never know because of incomplete documentation) began joining the colonial state, and they played vital roles in the pacification and treaty negotiations that eventually led to the transition from the precolonial to the colonial eras and the institutionalization of colonial rule.

This section draws on the life histories of a few Acholi leaders whose lives spanned the pre-colonial and the colonial eras. It focuses on the lives of Okello Mwoka Lengomoi (a war leader), Lacito Okech (a royal messenger) and Ojok Adonyi (a healer). A biographical approach, outlining the career trajectories of these figures, is useful because it provides clues to the contribution of specific Acholi figures to the entrenchment of colonial rule in the region in ways that Europeans did not understand. The biographies demonstrate that colonial violence alone does not adequately explain the institutionalization of the British colonial enterprise in Acholiland. The Acholi who became colonial employees brought with them significant knowledge, ideas, societal norms and a sense of legitimacy that contributed significantly to the entrenchment and functioning of the colonial administration.

Though the careers of the figures that I focus on may seem exceptional, they were not unique: many other Acholi leaders were as accomplished as them and perhaps even more

⁵⁶³ See, for example, Anywar, “The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich,” 1948; Bere, “Awich—A Biographical Note,” 1946.

influential. These figures were chosen because they became colonial servants from various precolonial professions and, more importantly, because of the availability of literature and oral information on them. During my fieldwork in Acholiland, I traced the descendants of the men who feature in the European documents, and I interviewed many of them. In some instances, I even got access to some private documents in their residences. This section draws on these documentary and oral sources, beginning with the biography of Okello Mwoka Lengomoi.

Okello Mwoka Lengomoi

In the last several decades, Okello Mwoka Lengomoi has gained the attention of several scholars, but not because he was the only war general who joined the colonial state: there were other precolonial war generals, such as Okot Amola, Opiro Lameny and Nekodemo Latigo, who served the nascent colonial state with distinction.⁵⁶⁴ Actually, Nekodemo Latigo is also reported to have become a famous author of war stories in the *Acholi Magazine*.⁵⁶⁵ However, we do not have enough information about all these other war generals-turned-colonial agents to recreate their lives in sufficient detail. So, who was Okello Mwoka Lengomoi?

Okello was born in Puranga Chiefdom, one of the most prominent chiefdoms in Acholiland. Although we do not know the exact date of Okello's birth, we do know that it was in the late 1850s, a tumultuous period in Acholiland. This was a unique period in Acholi history because it was the beginning of a phase of prolonged violence in the region, the period in which the Arab traders arrived, established themselves in the region, and began capturing or buying natives and selling them into slavery. That Mwoka Lengomoi was named Okello is significant.

⁵⁶⁴ See, for example, Girling, *The Acholi*, 1960; Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda," 1972; Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 2010.

⁵⁶⁵ Adimola, "The Lamogi Rebellion," 166.

As we have already seen in Chapter Two, the personal name “Okello” signifies that the bearer was born immediately after twins, and was thus of special birth and associated with *jok*, the “supreme being” that governed the lives of Acholi. Thus, right from birth, Okello was understood to have a close connection with *jok*.

His other two names, Lengamoi and Mwoka, were not given to him at birth. They came rather late in his life (and I will come back to them at an appropriate moment). Okello was born in Bobi, Puranga Chiefdom, where he grew up, which provided the setting of his early life. There is no information on Okello’s mother, but we have information on his father, Obwot Rengamoi.⁵⁶⁶ The name Obwot is circumstantial, and it means that “his mother escaped danger during pregnancy, enabling the baby to survive.”⁵⁶⁷ Thus, Obwot simply means “the child that narrowly survived.” The name Rengamoi, on the other hand, is an honorific title which came later in his life. The suffix –moi designates a skillful person who excelled in military-related service in his chiefdom. As Jim Ocitti confirmed, “Obwot was...a military leader of the Bobi Clan.” But “he was also, for his generation, a highly successful farmer.”⁵⁶⁸ This implies that he was a wealthy man. The names of Okello’s father suggest that Okello came from a strong military background.

However, Obwot did not live to see his son, Okello, grow up into a man. As Lacito Okech explains, “Obwot was tragically gunned down at a place called Yito Duny near Okunge by a Nubian Arab trader [called] Adum.” The reason, Okech elucidated: “Adum wanted to forcibly rob Obwot of food and other agricultural produce that he usually kept in the many

⁵⁶⁶ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 27-8.

⁵⁶⁷ Matteo Otoo, interview, 15 December 2013.

⁵⁶⁸ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 30; see also Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58-59.

granaries dotting his compound.”⁵⁶⁹ The murder of Okello’s father by an Arab trader reflects the turbulence that characterized the era in which Okello grew up. Though Ocitti and Okech do not mention the age at which Okello lost his father, the impression they create is that Okello was below fifteen years, but old enough to have begun undergoing military training.

There is no way we can reconstruct the exact content of Okello’s military training. But the training of warriors, which Okello underwent, must have been similar to that of all the other Acholi war leaders, and it has already been reconstructed in Chapter Two. But it is important to note that in normal situations, Okello, like other young boys, would have been introduced to basic “military” skills from an early age. Young men learned the skills of using spears, bows and arrows, and the science of battle formation. But more importantly, they also learned “the virtues of endurance, courage, and resourcefulness, the quality of co-operation and the sense of community effort and mutual help.”⁵⁷⁰ The completion of the training enabled one to prove himself on the battle front; and proving oneself on a battle front meant winning a battle. Those who performed well at the battle front were recognized and given different honorific names to distinguish them from other warriors. Okello was given the name “Lengamoi,” indicating that he had demonstrated superior warfare knowledge and skills, and thus won the confidence and admiration of fellow warriors.

The name Mwoka is equally significant, although none of the authors who have written about Okello explains the significance of the name. During my extended period of fieldwork in Acholiland, several informants explained to me the meaning of this name. It derives from an

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁷⁰ Ocitti, *African Indigenous Education*, 50-1.

animal—Mwok- that Kitching, a CMS pastor, translated as an “ant bear.”⁵⁷¹ Mwok is recognized throughout Acholiland as a nocturnal animal with very strong sensory abilities, sharp claws, and potent legs. More importantly, it is known for its fierce retaliation when attacked by predators. Its claws are remembered to have been used as protective talisman.⁵⁷² According to one of my informants, “he [Okello] could turn into a *mwok* and destroy his enemies.”⁵⁷³

This kind of story is by no means unique. In the course of my fieldwork, several informants told me similar stories about war leaders who could turn into other furious wild beasts and kill their enemies at battle fronts.⁵⁷⁴ The ability to change oneself into a beast was attributed to war medicine or to some other extraordinary powers. Early Europeans have also recorded similar stories about Acholi people other than Okello. As I have already stated in Chapters Two and Three, E.N.T Grove recorded similar stories which involving people turning into leopards.⁵⁷⁵ War leaders with such reputations became at once revered and feared by both their fellow clansmen and other Acholi people. The ability to inspire reverence and awe was a major precondition for effective leadership. As a result, such war leaders won followers and legitimacy as leaders throughout Acholiland.

From the time Okello became a general, his many military accomplishments within and outside Acholiland, especially in Lango country, earned him the respect of the people and leaders in Acholiland and beyond. Perhaps the biggest leader that got to know him and eventually use

⁵⁷¹ Kitching, *An Outline Grammar*, 54.

⁵⁷² Matteo Otoo, interview, 15 December 2013.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ Grove, “Customs of the Acholi,” 178.

him was the King of the Bunyoro Kingdom.⁵⁷⁶ In 1896, Kabalega commissioned Okello to help him fight off the British intrusion in Bunyoro. But prior to this, Okello had already established contacts with Kabalega. The relation became even stronger as Kabalega began looking for external support to help his decimated army to defeat the British and regain Bunyoro's independence. In 1895, after Kabalega had been ousted from his kingdom, Lacito Okech tells us, the king arrived in Acholiland to seek temporary refuge and, more importantly, to mobilize support against the British. He passed through Bobi, the home of Okello, and took Okello with him to Atyak Chiefdom, along the border with Sudan, to plan a revolt against the British.⁵⁷⁷

For Kabalega, the only way to regain his kingdom was to organize external military support to defeat the British. According to F.A. Knowles, a British colonial officer in Bunyoro, Kabalega had heard rumors while in Acholiland that “there was a Mahati [Mahdi] or big Chief who was able to fight white men [British in Sudan]” and might be of help to him.⁵⁷⁸ Because he had already been ousted in 1896, Kabalega “put together a formidable team [of 200 men] to take his request to Mahdi.” These men were largely Kabalega's army, but Jim Ocitti tells us that Okello also “offered some of his best fighters to accompany the team” and, more importantly, he led the delegation to Sudan.⁵⁷⁹ Though Okech and Ocitti do not tell us why Kabalega chose Okello to lead the delegation to Sudan, it was likely because of a combination of Okello's knowledge of the region, his ability to speak Lunyoro (and communicate with Kabalega's army),

⁵⁷⁶ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 46-7.

⁵⁷⁷ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58; Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 60.

⁵⁷⁸ See F.A. Knowles, “Notes about Kabarega's Embassy to Mahdi in 1897.” However, this writing was included after an article by Sir John Milner Gray. To find it, see this article Sir John Milner Gray “Kabarega Emissary to the Mahdist in 1897,” *The Uganda Journal* 19, 1 (1955): 94. For more on the trip, see A.R. Dunbar, *Omukama Chwa II Kabarega* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1965), 33.

⁵⁷⁹ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 62.

and most importantly, his military reputation in the region. “At the head of a delegation which might have numbered over a hundred, Okellomwaka [Okello Mwoka] made his way to the vicinity of Khartoum in the hopes of meeting the Mahdi himself.”⁵⁸⁰ The delegation left Acholiland for Sudan in 1896. But, according to Sir Milner Gray, another colonial official, the delegation “did not ... proceed further than Rejaf” in present-day Central Equatoria State of South Sudan.⁵⁸¹ “The Mahdists imprisoned most of the Banyoro delegation and killed many of them,” but Okello escaped.⁵⁸²

According to Lacito Okech, Okello stayed in Sudan for three years, learned Arabic and he returned to Acholiland alone in 1899.⁵⁸³ He was the only member of the delegation to return. But, upon returning to Acholiland, Okello abandoned Kabalega.⁵⁸⁴ Instead, Okello joined Major Delme-Radcliffe, a British colonial agent, in the “pacification” of Acholiland, and eventually played an important role in the colonial state. Although the colonial documents gloss over his roles in the “pacification,” in the late 1970s, the historian John Dwyer noted that Okello became the main “intelligence source” for the colonial state, and led “the British into Lango country in search of Sabakea [the leader of the Sudanese mutineers]. This move was a turning point in the campaign against the rebellious Sudanese, and it was not long before Delme-Radcliffe had captured the last of them in Lango. By 1901, Okellomwaka had become a trusted servant of the

⁵⁸⁰ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 98.

⁵⁸¹ See F.A. Knowles, “Notes about Kabarega’s Embassy to Mahdi in 1887,” 94; *see also Uganda Journal* 19, 1(1955): 94 and Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 64.

⁵⁸² Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 98.

⁵⁸³ For more on this see Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58-60.

⁵⁸⁴ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58.

British in Acholiland.”⁵⁸⁵ Perhaps because of his influential role in the “pacification,” the colonial state rewarded Okello by making him the first colonial interpreter.⁵⁸⁶ However, long before the colonial state employed him in 1899, Okello had already served his chief and other political leaders in Acholiland and beyond as a war leader and a diplomat of sorts.

Upon completion of the pacification of Acholiland, Okello took on other roles. He became involved in every colonial expedition to Acholi chiefdoms, and, on behalf of Delme-Radcliffe, settled disputes between the colonial state and Acholi chiefdoms. Perhaps his most auspicious role was in 1901, immediately after the pacification, when he was sent to diffuse the mounting tension between the British and the natives in Lamogi. On this occasion, we are told, Okello “played a critical role as [a mediator] between Rwot [Chief] Oyat of Lamogi, the most influential man on Mount Guruguru, and Delme-Radcliffe,” and “Okello Mwoka’s negotiating skills proved critical, leading to avoidance of a military solution to the conflict.”⁵⁸⁷ Was Okello’s involvement on the part of the British crucial to the submission of rebellious chiefs and their war leaders? The colonial records and people who have studied Okello, do not delve into these intangibles. This is in large part because they did not understand Okello’s precolonial roles, although it is clear that the state had already realized Okello’s immense potential and actual worth as a diplomat and a military commander throughout Acholiland and beyond.

In 1903, Delme-Radcliffe’s contract ended, and he left Acholiland, handing over responsibility to F.A. Knowles, the then Collector in Bunyoro. Intriguingly though, Delme-Radcliffe does not even mention any of the mediating roles that Okello played, or the wars that

⁵⁸⁵ Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 99-100.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 37; see also Anywar, *Acholi ki Ker Meg-gi*, 40; Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 97.

⁵⁸⁷ Ocitti, *Oteka Okello Mwoka Lengomoi*, 72; see also Onek C. Adyanga, *Modes of British Imperial Control of Africa: A Case Study of Uganda, c.1890-1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 65.

he fought, on behalf of the colonial state. He simply writes: “Okello Mwaka [Mwoka], was *my right hand man throughout the expedition* and was certainly one of the *most plucky* sensible, honest, and single minded natives I have ever met [all italics are mine].”⁵⁸⁸ Okello’s invaluable role in the establishment of British rule over Acholiland is simply glossed over.

Between 1903 and 1909, Okello continued to play an influential role for the colonial state even after the pacification of Acholiland and the departure of Delme-Radcliffe. He worked as a liaison officer of sorts for the colonial state’s offices in Bunyoro and Nimule, and also continued to act as an interpreter for touring British officials and as an intelligence source for the state.⁵⁸⁹ In 1910, when the state established a permanent presence in Gulu, Okello became one of the most influential Acholi figures in the colonial administration, all the while continuing to participate in colonial expeditions to many Acholi chiefdoms.

For example, from 1911 to 1912, after the state had established a permanent presence in Acholiland, the colonial state met resistance from Lamogi Chiefdom over issues of taxation and forced labor. This resistance resulted into an open armed confrontation that became known as the Lamogi rebellion. To prevent the conflict from escalating, the colonial state sent Okello to help negotiate for peace. “On 17 January Mr. Sullivan and the Gulu Police arrived at Guruguru accompanied by Okellomwaka [Okello Mwoka], a prominent member of Paranga [Puranga] clan” and attempted to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.⁵⁹⁰ Why would the colonial state send Okello to all the simmering conflicts in Acholiland? C. W. Guy Eden, Provincial Commissioner of Northern Province, who lacked any knowledge of Okello’s background or

⁵⁸⁸ See Major Delme-Radcliffe, *Report on the Lango Expeditions* 16 (1902): 6. See also F.K. Girling, “The Traditional, Social and Political Order,” 186.

⁵⁸⁹ See A16/3 Shuli(Acholi) Correspondences Inward, Vol. III, 1903-1904; see also A16/2, Shuli(Acholi) Correspondences Inward, Vol. II.

⁵⁹⁰ Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” 174; see also Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 155-6.

precolonial profession, simply called him “the most loyal and hard-working chief in the Nile Districts.”⁵⁹¹ Missing here is how Acholi perceived Okello. But given his name and his reputation as a war leader in the region, chiefs and other Acholi leaders saw him very differently. On their part, the European colonial officials, ignorant of Okello’s precolonial background, could not comprehend the precolonial underpinnings of his authority in colonial Acholiland.

In the end, from 1899, when he joined the colonial service, to 1914, when he died, Okello accompanied several colonial expeditions to seek allies and help the colonial state negotiate treaties and maintain peace. For these services, the colonial state rewarded Okello by earmarking him for chiefship, a position he, a commoner, would never have dreamed of in the precolonial era. Yet, as fate would have it, Okello never became a chief. He died before he was formally appointed. More interestingly, unlike some of his contemporaries whom we shall meet in this section, Okello rose to prominence in the colonial state without becoming a Christian or literate. This suggests that the British appointed him as the first colonial interpreter solely on account of the knowledge and skills he deployed during the “pacification,” and in spite of his illiteracy.

Lacito Okech

Besides Okello and his group of war leaders who became colonial servants, there were other types of leaders, like Lacito Okech and his cohort of royal messengers, who also served the colonial state in different positions. But who was Okech? Okech was born in Koc Chiefdom in either the late 1870s or early 1880s, an era characterized by inter-clan wars and famine. Because of these two events, he could have been named either Olweny or Okech. His family chose the name Okech which is given to a boy born during famine, instead of Olweny, given to a boy born

⁵⁹¹ As cited in Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 100-101.

during war. This choice of name suggests that the famine had a more disastrous impact on his family and clan than the inter-clan wars. The name Okech, unlike Okello, was not associated with *jok*. But, like Okello, Okech came of age in a harsh world that must have shaped his personality. The name Lacito, on the other hand, was acquired much later in his life, and we shall come back to it at an appropriate time.

We know very little about Okech's father, and nothing about his mother. Part of this information comes from Okech himself. His father was called Omara Aryamu.⁵⁹² It has not been possible to trace the meaning of the name Aryamu. Omara, on the other hand, is a common name even today in Acholiland. It is "usually given to a newly born male-child whose parents ... were very much liked in the society, might be because they were social, generous and generally benevolent," writes Jalobo Ngomlokojo.⁵⁹³ This name suggests that Okech's father was well liked, and possibly even a leader in his community. We also know that Omara was a prominent Arabic interpreter,⁵⁹⁴ which suggests that Okech came from a fairly rich, or even wealthy, family, and that he was exposed to Islam and Arabic.

As a young man, Okech trained as a royal messenger. The training of royal messengers, which Okech underwent, has been sketched in Chapter Two. However, we do not know exactly at what age, he started his training. The roles of the royal messengers have also been covered in Chapter Three, but it is important to reiterate some of Okech's key roles as a royal messenger, however, briefly. Okech tells us that he performed many roles as a royal messenger. But his primary role was to deliver information from his chief to other chiefs in and beyond Acholiland.

⁵⁹² Paul Okot Bwangamoi, "Temajo People in the History of Koch (A Genealogy of the Temajo Family) 1720-1985," (Unpublished manuscript, Gulu, 1987).

⁵⁹³ Ngomlokojo, *The Acholi*, 127.

⁵⁹⁴ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 13.

This role was made all the more possible because he was a polyglot. In his book, Okech tells us that he spoke several languages: Acholi, Lango, Alur, Jonam and Labwor, in addition to English, Kiswahili, Lunyoro and Madi, which he learned during the colonial era. Perhaps the most striking language missing from his arsenal of languages is Arabic, although, in his work, he reports having interviewed some of the descendants of Arabs in Acholiland and was a son of an Arabic interpreter.⁵⁹⁵ According to several interviews, including one with one of Okech's sons, and a more recent document, Okech spoke Arabic.⁵⁹⁶ If so, why did he not cite Arabic among the languages he spoke?

There are two possible answers. First, we know that Christian missionaries associated Arabic with Islam, and that they hardly tolerated either among their converts. Christian converts were expected to keep clear of any other beliefs. Therefore, it would have been foolhardy of Okech, a prominent Christian convert, to admit, especially in writing, that he spoke Arabic. Secondly, it is possible, though improbable, that Okech might simply have forgotten to include Arabic in his linguistic arsenal. All the same, whether or not Okech spoke Arabic, he already spoke enough languages to enable him to execute his role: delivering information to other chiefs in and outside Acholiland. I should, however, point out that Okech's ability to speak many languages was not unique: there were many other Acholi men who also spoke various, perhaps even more, languages than Okech.

At first glance, Okech's role as a royal messenger in the precolonial era may seem like an easy task, and many Europeans have mistakenly portrayed it as such. J.R.P. Postlethwaite, one

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., VI.

⁵⁹⁶ Paul Okot Bwangamoi, interview, 12 December 2015; see also this article on Okech's knowledge of Arabic: Samuel Oduny, "The Story of Daudi Ocheng and why he was a Hero," *Acholi Times*, June 10, 2016, accessed June 17, 2016, <http://acholitimes.com/2016/06/07/the-story-of-daudi-ocheng-and-why-he-was-a-hero/>

of the first colonial officials in Acholiland, simply called royal messengers “native runners.”⁵⁹⁷ This was because of European ignorance of the socio-political context in which pre-colonial royal messengers operated. In preliterate Acholiland, Okech and his cohort of royal messengers did much more than just deliver information, which made the position all the more important.

In pre-literate Acholiland, a royal messenger like Okech was expected to hear an oral message, understand and internalize it, and then couch it in the most appropriate terms for the receiver. He also had to answer all the questions that would arise from the message, and most likely explain the context that had generated the message in the first place. If, for example, the message was related to imminent hostility, then we can imagine how difficult and delicate his role would be. Thus, to see Okech as a mere messenger or a “native runner” as Postlethwaite did, is to miss the point. As a royal messenger, Okech was also a top diplomat, with powers to speak on behalf of his chief. This means that fellow Acholi saw him (and other royal messengers) in a much broader perspective than the Europeans did. This role introduced Okech (and other royal messengers) to many rulers and their subjects, and it gave him a thorough knowledge of the social and political geography of the region, plus connections to both ordinary people and leaders. These are some of the intangibles that he would later deploy in the service of the colonial state.

Furthermore, Okech was part of the chiefly entourage whenever his chief went on a visit. As I have shown in Chapter Three, royal messengers also had knowledge of what, for lack of a better term, I call “simple” divination. For a royal messenger, divination consisted in reading the signs of good and bad omens for their journeys. Therefore, one of Okech’s roles was to interpret such signs and ensure the safety of himself and of his chief whenever the chief was part of his

⁵⁹⁷ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 68. See also pages 48 & 61.

entourage. Yet, Okech does not tell us about this role in his book. This silence, perhaps like that on his knowledge of Arabic, must have been deliberate. As already suggested, this perhaps has to do with his having become a Christian: Christians were not expected to believe or indulge in such “pagan” practices as divination. Therefore, Okech’s silence on his divination abilities could have been a deliberate act of authorial self-censorship to protect and buttress his position in the colonial state; and it might have been one of the ways in which he navigated the choppy waters of colonial bureaucracy.

So far, we can see that long before the colonization of Acholiland, Okech and his fellow royal messengers already possessed various valuable skills and were multilingual and well known to various chiefs and their subjects. Moreover, they had intimate knowledge of the geography and power configuration of Acholiland and its environs. All these attributes served to elevate their status in the eyes of both the chiefs and ordinary people. In short, their precolonial arsenal of knowledge, skills and repute gave Okech and other royal messengers leadership legitimacy.

When the CMS missionaries began their activities in Acholiland in 1904, Okech did not initially convert to Christianity, perhaps because his chief did not release him or because Okech himself had not yet perceived the material value of Christianity and literacy. However, on the return of the CMS missionaries in 1911, following their departure from Acholiland in 1908, Okech joined the mission. He was baptized in 1912 and given the Anglican name Erastus, which the Acholi then domesticated as Lacito.⁵⁹⁸ The baptism and literacy he acquired as a catechumen paved the way for Okech to enter the service of the colonial state. After his baptism, he worked for the CMS in both Acholiland and Langoland. It was not until October 1914 that Okech joined

⁵⁹⁸ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 27.

the colonial state as a clerk, and was posted to Atyak Chiefdom, one of the powerful pre-colonial chiefdoms that he must have previously visited as a royal messenger.⁵⁹⁹

The chiefdom of Atyak had witnessed overt resistance to the colonial state prior to Okech's arrival. Postlewaithe provides perhaps the best account of the resistance. According to him, upon the establishment of colonial rule, Chief Olya of Atyak became one of the pro-government chiefs in Acholiland. As a result, Postlewaithe continues, Olya faced resistance and was nearly killed by his own subjects.⁶⁰⁰ As Postlewaithe explains, the resistance began during the First World War, after the colonial government received "instructions that all trained native askaris, whether police or ex-KAR [King's African Rifles], were to be sent down to the German East Africa Frontier as soon as possible" to fight the Germans alongside the British. But the withdrawal of the colonial army and the police, according to Postlewaithe, gave the natives of Atyak "the impression that the government were preparing to depart and that the old days of war, pillage and lawlessness were near to returning."

Postlewaithe adds that, in that state of uncertainty, "a runner [royal messenger] from Attiak [Atyak] brought the news."⁶⁰¹ Postlewaithe received a letter which, according to him, had been written by one of Olya's sons "who had been to the mission school and knew a little English." According to Postlewaithe, the letter "stated that the Acholi of Attiak [Atyak] had surrounded their chief and ... had decided that the old order had been changed and the British had run away. They had further decided that Olya [Olya] had been a man of the white man and that as his masters had fled, it was fitting that they should kill him and appoint a new chief in his

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁰⁰ For more on Chief Olya, see Postlewaithe, *I Look Back*, 65; A16/5 Shuli(Acholi) Correspondences Inward, Vol. III, 1905-1906, December 30th Report 1905.

⁶⁰¹ Postlewaithe, *I Look Back*, 69.

stead.”⁶⁰² Postlethwaite further notes, “The note concluded... that... Olya [Olya] would die unless his protector, the District Commissioner [Postlethwaite], saved him who had been a faithful and loyal servant.”⁶⁰³ This letter clearly reveals that the people of Atyak were in a rebellious mood, most likely because of their abhorrence of colonial taxation and forced labor, and the role of their chief in enforcing these exactions against his own people.

Just two months after the event, the colonial state posted Okech to Atyak to begin his appointment as a colonial clerk. Unfortunately, the records do not tell us why it was Okech who was taken specifically to Atyak. Besides being literate, an important requirement for the job, did Okech personally choose to go to Atyak or did Postlethwaite post him randomly? There is no way we can answer these questions with certainty. Yet, in this climate of intense hatred for Chief Olya and the colonial state, Okech excelled in his roles: collecting taxes and organizing forced labor for colonial projects, the very activities that had earned Olya the wrath of his people.

Not surprisingly, after only 14 months of service, the state was so impressed with Okech’s performance that he was transferred from Atyak to Gulu Town, the headquarters of colonial administration in Acholiland, to help the District Commissioner. Okech worked at the headquarters for 8 years, and he must have performed so well that he was promoted from a Clerk to a Chief, and deployed in another troubled chiefdom, Lamogi, which had rebelled against the colonial state between 1911 and 1912.⁶⁰⁴ Like in Atyak, Okech succeeded in collecting taxes and organizing forced labor in Lamogi, some of the issues (besides firearm registration) that had caused the Lamogi Rebellion. He served there for 14 years, a long enough period to suggest that

⁶⁰²Ocitti, *African Indigenous Education*, 69.

⁶⁰³ J.R.P. Postlethwaite, *African Roses* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 1937), 58-9.

⁶⁰⁴ Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion,” 166-177.

he was generally accepted by the natives of Lamogi, and that the state wanted him there. In 1937, perhaps because of his distinguished service in Lamogi, Okech was withdrawn from the field and promoted to the position of Native Financial Assistant, which he held for eighteen years before retiring.

For our purposes here, the important phases and successes in Okech's illustrious career are those in Atyak and Lamogi, two difficult stations that had threatened the life of a powerful native chief and challenged the might of the colonial state respectively. How could the natives of Atyak, who were on the verge of killing their own chief, accept and obey a native colonial clerk, and, moreover, one from another chiefdom, when he was enforcing the very policies they detested? And how could the rebellious natives of Lamogi, who had challenged the might of the colonial state, pay taxes and submit to forced labour at the behest of an appointed chief from another chiefdom?

No existing document offers us any clues to the answers to this question. Those who are unaware of Okech's precolonial roles are likely to jump to the conclusion that Okech was able to pull off these achievements by dint of the coercive power of the colonial state. Although state coercion might have played a role in Okech's success, it was certainly not the most important factor, or the only one. I argue that a substantial part of the explanation for Okech's success lies in the local people's perception of him in the context of the precolonial Acholi concepts of the status and power of a royal messenger. The kind of "successes" Okech achieved mirror those of Okello Mwoka Lengomoi whose career we have already sketched. In the course of my fieldwork in Acholiland, many elders often mentioned Okech as a royal messenger before identifying him as colonial chief. These interviews suggested that the Acholi saw Okech in a much broader, traditionally rooted, perspective than the Europeans who simply saw him as a Christianized,

literate and effective colonial servant; and it might have been the Acholi perception that facilitated his work even in the most difficult places.⁶⁰⁵

Ojok Adonyi

Finally, we have a biography of a healer. Like war leaders and royal messengers, some healers became Acholi colonial employees in the first decades of colonization. But detailed information on healers who doubled as colonial officials is hard to come by in the archives. This is partly because, after their strategic conversion to Christianity, they did not want to identify themselves as healers, or even write about their past roles as healers, lest they lose their colonial state jobs. According to anthropologist Heike Brehrend, “Being a Christian, i.e. Protestant or ‘reader,’ was a prerequisite of acquiring a position of a chief,” and other positions in the colonial state.⁶⁰⁶ Clearly, these precolonial intellectuals knew about this union between the CMS and the colonial state. In some instances, as I have already stated, colonial policies, especially the Witchcraft Act, which prohibited anything that Europeans deemed to be witchcraft, further made many healers conceal their identities. As a result, there is a dearth of information on healers who doubled as colonial employees, and the bulk of our information on them comes from a combination of scanty documentary sources and fieldwork.

In the course of my fieldwork in Acholiland, as I attempted to trace the descendants of former colonial employees to interview them about their parents and search for private archives, many people told me about several grades of healers who became prominent colonial servants in their communities. Interestingly, my informants did not see any contradiction in being both a

⁶⁰⁵ Petero Oryema, interview, 23 January 2015.

⁶⁰⁶ Heike, *Alice Lakwena*, 115.

healer and a colonial servant at the same time. Instead, they argued that a colonial servant who was also a healer was even more revered by the community, especially if he was a powerful healer. Ojok Adonyi was perhaps the most popular and frequently cited healer. I first encountered Ojok as a prominent colonial servant in a document but, in the course of my fieldwork, as I inquired about Ojok and his living descendants, I was told several stories about him as a healer and a colonial servant. Eventually, I was introduced to Komakech Onono, an eighty-year old man (in 2014) and the last surviving son of Ojok.⁶⁰⁷

A teacher by training, Komakech retired in 1986, partly due to the onset of the insurgency that pitted the Lord's Resistance Army against the Government of Uganda in northern Uganda at the time. Komakech was born in 1934, and was the last born of his father. He studied at the prestigious Anglican school, Gulu High School, the first CMS High school in Acholiland. According to Komakech, after completing high school in 1952, he became a trader but, because he did not reap the monetary benefits he had anticipated from trading, he abandoned it, and returned to school to train as a primary (elementary) school teacher. Komakech began his teaching career in 1953, the same year his father retired from colonial service.

When I asked Komakech to narrate to me the career of his father, Ojok Adonyi, he went into his house and returned with an old 1988 diary in which he had outlined his life history and that of his father. He soon began to read aloud an outline of his father's life. He also told me that several years back, he had compiled both life histories so that his children and grandchildren "will not forget them." As Komakech read out from his diary, I learned that his father, Ojok, was born in the late 1870s or, at the very latest, in the early 1880s, to Lulwak Adum of Patiko

⁶⁰⁷ Komakech told me he was the fifteenth child of his father. For colonial documents on Komakech see Papers of Mario Cisternino archived at Comboni Missionaries in Layibi, Gulu.

Chiefdom, one of the most powerful chiefdoms in pre-colonial Acholiland.⁶⁰⁸ Ojok grew up in Patiko which was also a major Arab trading post.⁶⁰⁹

That Komakech's father was named Ojok is important because it already provides us with insights into his trajectory to becoming a healer. "My father was called Ojok," Komakech explained, "because he was born with eight fingers on the left hand, and according to the Acholi tradition, that was a manifestation of *jok*. That is why his parents named him Ojok." This explanation is in line with many of the early missionary ethnographies I have already discussed in Chapter Two. For example, in 1916, a Catholic missionary referred to a child born with extra fingers as "believed to be one of [the] powerful children who could talk directly to *jok*."⁶¹⁰ Thus, Ojok's journey to becoming a healer began from the time of his birth: he exhibited qualities that his people thought could be harnessed for the good of the community. The name Adonyi, on the other hand, came late in his life and we shall come back to it at an appropriate moment.

As a young man, Ojok trained as a healer. The content of the training of different grades of healers has already been described in Chapter Two. According to Komakech, his father completed all the training and became an *ajwaka*. Interestingly, though, in the biography of his father, Komakech does not use the term *ajwaka*, which simply refers to the most versatile grade of healers. Instead, he uses the term *lamii-yat*, which literally means one who gives only medicine (without consulting spirits). When I inquired why, Komakech explained, "I am not disowning my father's work, but if I used the term *ajwaka*, people today would most likely

⁶⁰⁸ In his work, *Tekwaro*, 13, Lacito Okech does not mention Olwak Adum, but names one interpreter as Lalwak.

⁶⁰⁹ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 70.

⁶¹⁰ See Papers of Mario Cisternino archived at Comboni Missionaries in Layibi, Gulu.

equate my father with a witch, which I do not want; but *lamii-yat* can be received in a good way.”

Despite Komakech’s attempt to conceal his father’s true profession, he was not reluctant to talk about his father’s role as a healer. Komakech noted that prior to colonization and his official employment by the colonial state, his father had become a healer and had practiced for many years. “It was his role as a healer that in fact gave him the respect he enjoyed in the community. By the time the colonial office was established, my father was already a popular healer not only in Patiko Chiefdom but also in the nearby Lamogi chiefdom, where he went on healing journeys and continued to do so even when he was a colonial servant.”

Upon the establishment of colonial rule, according to Komakech, the state experienced a problem: “Our village was too far removed from the seat of Patiko Chiefdom,” he said. “The colonial state realized that it was impossible for the chief of Patiko to control the entire chiefdom or to ensure compliance with colonial policies throughout the chiefdom.” To mitigate the problem and ensure effective rule, “It was Bwana Gweno [J.R.P. Postlethwaite],” Komakech wrote, “who came up with the idea that the large chiefdoms be subdivided to ease administration, and that people in the new subdivisions should choose their leaders.”⁶¹¹ “In that arrangement,” Komakech added, “my father, without having the benefit of a royal family background, was selected as a leader of the people. He became what the Europeans called a native adviser.”

It had never occurred to me that there was such a title. But when I returned to the colonial reports, I found, in a 1915-6 report, that there were indeed native advisers. “Native advisers

⁶¹¹ Komakech Onono, interview, 14 November 2014. J.R.P. Postlethwaite was christened Bwana Gweno because of his love for chicken. See more about this name in Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 61.

...were placed to assist and advise the chiefs,” reads a colonial document.⁶¹² It would appear that the institution of this new post in a few large chiefdoms facilitated the management of outlying villages. In the same colonial report, a colonial official explained that native advisers have “been most successful, with no complaints about them having been received and they are generally respected and looked up to by the natives.”⁶¹³ The response of the people to this new position in a few chiefdoms, it appears, encouraged the colonial state to create the position in even more chiefdoms. But, although it created this elective position, the state had no clue regarding the caliber of many of the people elected to fill the position, or why they were so popular and effective that some of them ended up becoming chiefs. Year later, as R.M. Bere, the immediate successor of Bwana Gweno, noted, people “were re-grouped and the numerous *lobong* [commoners] communities were allowed to produce their hereditary heads to fill these positions.” This sort of arrangement, Bere admitted, “gave some of the *Lobong* communities the opportunity to claim a politically independent position which they had never in fact possessed.”⁶¹⁴

It was such colonial arrangements that provided opportunities for various non-royal pre-colonial intellectuals to ascend to positions of prominence. The appointment of Ojok as a native adviser, Komakech recalled, gave him his second name—Adonyi. “Adonyi was a nickname,” Komakech explained, adding, “it came because of my father’s appointment as a Native Advisor.” “As a commoner,” Komakech added, “he entered into a role of a royal person, but because he was appointed by the colonial state (after being elected by his people), royals from the Patiko

⁶¹² A46/809—Northern Province Annual Report, 1915-6, May.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Bere, “Land Chieftainship among the Acholi,” 51.

Chiefdom needed to distinguish him from themselves and they began calling him Adonyi, which simply means someone who has entered into political leadership without a royal background or without the approval of the royal officials,” an upstart of sorts. Taken together, the two names, Ojok Adonyi, embody the bearer’s dual personality as a *jok*-chosen healer who used his healer status to ascend to a chiefly position that would have been out of his reach in the precolonial era. But the name “Adonyi” also reflects the discomfort and apparent disapproval with which the Patiko royal family regarded the implementation of this aspect of colonial rule—allowing people to elect their own leaders, and permitting non-royals to exercise chiefly power.

The appointment of Ojok as a native adviser got him interested in missionary education. He joined the CMS school in 1917 and was baptized in 1918.⁶¹⁵ In the same year, perhaps because he had become literate, he was elevated from the position of a native adviser to that of a chief, a position he held until 1953 when he retired.⁶¹⁶ According to Komakech (and as colonial records seem to concur), Ojok worked only in one place: he was never transferred. To account for his father’s having never been transferred, Komakech explained, “My father never experienced any considerable opposition in his community. He was more than a colonial servant. As a healer, he was a helper of the community.”⁶¹⁷

Komakech’s explanation is not unlike that of Bere, one of the longest-serving colonial officials in Acholiland. According to Bere, those appointed colonial chiefs were accepted because of many reasons. First, “the ordinary Acholi accepted these people as their chiefs provided that they did not come from hostile clans.” Secondly, because “sometimes even to

⁶¹⁵ The CMS list of catechumens of 1917 includes someone called Ojok, but we cannot tell with certainty if that was Ojok Adonyi. See MUA: AR/CMS/98/1: Church timetable, 1910-1924.

⁶¹⁶ Komakech Quinto, interview, 12 October 2014.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

someone not of the blood [royal clan] who showed, perhaps, greater skill with the rain-stones in time of drought [was accepted as a chief] for the *Rwot* was also rainmaker.”⁶¹⁸ This reveals that one’s knowledge and skills in a particular domain were significant in helping one to gain acceptance as an appointed chief. In Ojok’s case, the fact that he was popularly elected to the position of Native Adviser before being elevated to that of Chief must also have facilitated his effectiveness and popularity as an appointed chief. Colonial reports indicate that Ojok performed to the expectations of the colonial officials, collecting taxes and mobilizing labor effectively. In one colonial report, Ojok was described as a “tried figure”: “Ojok Adongi [Adonyi] is an old standing & tried figure who has performed very well in collecting taxes in the whole of Patiko and nearby places.”⁶¹⁹

After Lamogi Chiefdom, it was Patiko Chiefdom that challenged the colonial state in Acholiland. Perhaps, as a result of Ojok’s superior performance as a chief in a difficult chiefdom, in 1925-6, a colonial official rejected a proposal to transfer Ojok and other chiefs from their posts. Ojok, Matayo Obina and Erinayo Owiny are all cited as outstanding chiefs that “should remain in their locations because they have done so far very well in very tough places.”⁶²⁰ But the colonial documents do not tell us why they were able to do “very well in very tough places.” Ojok retired from state service in 1953. So, what do these biographies of the precolonial intellectuals tell us about their contributions to the colonial state? Why did they have such stellar careers in the colonial state?

⁶¹⁸ Bere, “Land Chieftainship among the Acholi,” 50.

⁶¹⁹ See other examples of chiefs getting very high praises from the colonial officials. A46/806—Northern Province Annual Report, 1910-1911, April.

⁶²⁰ There had been several complaints from the colonial state about the Patiko people “getting somewhat out of hand” several times since 1912. See, for example, A46/790—Northern Province Annual Report, 1913, November. Concerning problems with origin of collecting taxes in Patiko see, for example, A46/790—Northern Province Annual Report, 1913, May Report.

Roles of the Precolonial Intellectuals

The preceding biographies reveal some of the knowledge and skills that the precolonial intellectuals brought with them to the colonial era and deployed in the transition to colonial rule. But the biographies alone do not tell us enough about the intangibles that they carried or their respective contributions to the colonial state. Moreover, they do not explain why some of these men had stellar careers in the colonial era. So, I have supplemented the biographies with other documentary evidence to broaden the discussion about the roles of the precolonial intellectuals.

It is clear from the biographies that, from the dawn of colonization, some precolonial intellectuals often proved just as knowledgeable and skilled as the colonial agents they served.⁶²¹ This was largely because the traditional professions of some of these pre-colonial intellectuals were not only relevant to the colonial project but also similar to those of some of the colonial agents. Partly as a result of this professional similarity, the contribution of the Acholi precolonial intellectuals to the colonial project has been obscured; all credit has been accorded to their Europeans professional counterparts. Moreover, because early commentators have been unaware of the positions and roles of precolonial intellectuals, and approached them as products of European institutions, they have not been able to perceive fully the contribution of the Acholi precolonial intellectuals to the European projects, or the precolonial underpinnings of that contribution. The transitional Acholi intellectuals have been regarded as mere opportunists.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the role of war leaders. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the case of Okello Mwoka, whose career we have already outlined. Okello, as we now know, was a highly successful and reputed pre-colonial war leader. When Major Delme-Radcliffe, a senior colonial military officer, arrived in Acholiland, he recruited Okello,

⁶²¹ See, for example, Major Delme-Radcliffe, *Report on the Lango Expeditions*, 1902; see also Johnston, "Major Delmé Radcliffe's map," 162-164.

and the two worked together in the “pacification” of Acholiland. In his final report, which I have already cited, but which I find appropriate to recall here, Major Delme-Radcliffe simply reported, “Okello Mwaka [Mwoka], was my right hand man *throughout the expedition* and was certainly one of the *most plucky*, sensible, honest, and single minded natives I have ever met [all italics are mine].” Commentators who have read this comment without any knowledge of Okello’s pre-colonial war leadership role have not been able to make much sense of it. For example, the historian Dwyer, who was ignorant of Okello’s precolonial status, wrote: “Okellomwaka...is an excellent example of a capable individual who was able to assess the political scene at the first stage of the imperial thrust and to take advantage of it for himself and his people.”⁶²² In neglecting Okello’s experiences prior to joining the colonial state, Dwyer, like other scholars, failed to capture the complexity of Okello’s life.

Perhaps the most important part of Delme-Radcliffe’s comments on Okello is that in which the former concedes that Okello Mwoka was his “right hand man *throughout the expedition*.” This begs the question: Why would a native be Delme-Radcliffe’s right hand man throughout a colonial pacification expedition? Knowing Okello Mwoka’s precolonial background, we can logically conclude that, as an accomplished precolonial war leader, Okello provided military intelligence, skills and experience, plus his soldiers. In 1908, just before the establishment of a colonial office in Gulu in 1910, two British travelers marveled at the Okello “army,” writing that they found in Okello’s army “civilised methods of soldiering.”⁶²³ It is these attributes that must have enabled Okello to be Delme-Radcliffe’s “right hand man *throughout the expedition*.” Moreover, according to the historian Dwyer, it was Okello who led “the British into

⁶²² Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda,” 101.

⁶²³ Frank H. Melland and Edward H. Cholmeley, *Through the Heart of Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 233.

Lango country,” where “the rebellious Sudanese” were hiding before being defeated by the state. This is further evidence that Okello was not only Delme-Radcliffe’s right hand man throughout the expedition, but also the *de facto* colonial state military leader on some occasions. Therefore, the very process of the “pacification” of Acholiland was not exclusively accomplished by Major Delme-Radcliffe; rather, it was a complex and multifaceted collaborative effort that also benefited from the knowledge, ideas and skills of Acholi actors, such as Okello and many others whose names have not been passed down to us.

Besides providing intelligence, military knowledge, men and knowledge of the geography of the region, some war leaders, like royal messengers, also came with an additional tool: fluency in some important languages.⁶²⁴ Their fluency in important languages, such as Lunyoro, Arabic and Swahili, was to help the colonial state in many ways. Together, royal messengers and war leaders joined the colonial state, and they became interpreters or aides, clerks and chiefs. They continued to use their precolonial multilingualism, reinforced with English acquired from the CMS school, and made two vital contributions to the state.

First, these languages, especially Lunyoro, English and Arabic, facilitated communication with the colonial officials. In being able to communicate with colonial officials, these people also passed out important information to the colonial officials. For example, we know that indirect rule “required colonizers to know how [native] power and authority worked,” and, in Acholiland, the colonial officials turned to these interpreters for such information.⁶²⁵ Perhaps as a result of the colonial officials benefiting from information supplied by native interpreters, 1914, J.R.P. Postlethwaite, one of the first colonial officials in Acholiland, produced

⁶²⁴ See, for example, comments on the ability of Okello to speak Swahili in Melland and Cholmeley, *Through the Heart of Africa*, 233.

⁶²⁵ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 3.

a detailed handbook, *Instructions for Acholi Chiefs in Gulu District*. The instructions sought to curtail the powers and influence of traditional chiefs.⁶²⁶ Though no Acholi is acknowledged in this work, we cannot discount the contribution of Acholi precolonial intellectuals, especially given that Postlethwaite produced this work within three months of his arrival in Gulu. This book became the constitution that the state used to regulate the conduct of chiefs and to ensure that they supported the state. In the end, the ability to communicate with colonial officials turned precolonial intellectuals into significant mediators and disseminators of knowledge about Acholi society, especially about the workings of power and authority in Acholiland, knowledge that allowed the state to take effective control of the region.

Secondly, because they had sufficient command of both English and native languages, native interpreters translated colonial policies to both chiefs and the people; and more importantly, they had the power to enforce the policies. In his influential work on peasant intellectuals in Tanzania, Steven Feierman offers us a template for grasping the role of the Acholi precolonial intellectuals in translating and enforcing colonial policies. Feierman argues that “[t]he colonial regime’s choice of African agents” had a profound influence on the success of the colonial policies they implemented because they often “used their own words to support the colonial policies they administered.” According to Feierman, “if they [colonial officials] chose chiefs, then their policies would be justified in chiefly language.” “Yet their own impact,” he concluded, “was one they [the colonial officials] did not fully understand [because of their ignorance of African culture], and therefore one they did not control in its particular.”⁶²⁷

⁶²⁶ Postlethwaite, *Cik pa Meri*, 1916.

⁶²⁷ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 120.

In Acholiland, the colonial regime's inadvertent choice of healers, royal messengers and war leaders as colonial employees to implement colonial policies had a profound impact on the ground. Acholi who had known these figures or at least heard rumors about their outstanding, and sometimes extraordinary, abilities not only accepted them as leaders but also complied with their orders. The word of these leaders carried a degree of authority which neither colonial officials nor ordinary missionary school graduates could attain.⁶²⁸ This might explain why figures like Okech, Ojok, Okello Mwoka and many other precolonial intellectuals enjoyed stellar careers in the colonial state.

Besides the different languages that that royal messengers and war leaders used to facilitate communication with colonial officials and the translation of colonial policies to colonial subjects, royal messengers, in particular, possessed another vital skill: running. The British made extensive use of royal messengers, especially when the state was still embryonic. From the time of pacification to the full establishment of colonial rule, the British lacked a robust communication system on the ground, and relied on the Acholi precolonial communication system. Royal messengers were drawn into the colonial structure through their co-opted chiefs. In addition to their roles in the chiefdom, they also served as carriers of letters throughout Acholiland and perhaps beyond, which aided the functioning of the colonial state tremendously.

Perhaps the best insight into the role that royal messengers played in bridging the communication gap between the colonial officials themselves, and between colonial officials and local leaders is in the writings of J.R.P. Postlethwaite, one of the first colonial officials in Acholiland. Postlethwaite made several references to royal messengers. For example, in one communication, he wrote, "a mail *runner* was dispatched with a letter asking for official

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

approval.”⁶²⁹ In another communication, Postlethwaite wrote, “they [colonial state] dispatched *runners* with letters, one to the medical officer of the Northern garrison.”⁶³⁰ Elsewhere, he wrote, “a native *runner* overtook me with an official letter to the effect that there was a possibility of European war and that all district officers were to return to their stations and stand by. Somewhat reluctantly, I abandoned what I really believe to have been an exceptionally large elephant, and returned to Gulu, where I found another runner awaiting me with a letter to the effect that war had been declared.”⁶³¹ Finally, he reported, “a *runner* from Attiak [Atyak] brought this news.”⁶³²

In each of Postlethwaite’s quoted pieces, we see clear evidence of the vital role of royal messengers, ignorantly referred to as mere runners, in bridging the communication chasm between colonial officials, and between colonial officials and Acholi leaders. An unintended consequence of the royal messengers’ role was that they were introduced to the colonial officials who would later appoint them to different positions in the colonial state. Earlier on, the same role had introduced royal messengers to the various chiefs in Acholiland and beyond, enabling them to build enduring relations with the region’s chiefs and their subjects, relations the importance of which cannot be easily dismissed. It is these kinds of contacts and relationship built over time that helped some former royal messengers to be accepted wherever they were posted as colonial functionaries: people already knew, respected and trusted them. In the end, the knowledge, skills and contacts that royal messengers possessed were to serve them in good stead and to benefit the colonial project in the first decades of colonial rule.

⁶²⁹ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 48.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 68-9.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Equally interesting, though lacking documentary evidence, is the possible role of precolonial societal norms. For example, we know that in precolonial Acholiland, royal messengers had diplomatic immunity. Personal recollections and more recent documentary sources afford us more revealing glimpses into how royal messengers were protected under these customary norms. In the course of my fieldwork, informants narrated to me how royal messengers were protected under the Acholi customs. For example, Ochola Otto, who told me that he had worked as a royal messenger of Patiko Chiefdom from the 1950s until the abolition of chiefdoms in 1966 by the government of Uganda, recalls that the compensation for killing a royal messenger was higher than that for killing any other person. “If the compensation committee sit down and agree that for killing an ordinary person an offender should pay, for example, three cows,” Otto told me, “a royal messenger’s compensation will be double that amount to deter people from even contemplating doing any harm to a royal messenger.”⁶³³ According to another informant, Tomaci Odida, “compensation for killing a royal messenger required more cattle than for killing an ordinary person.”⁶³⁴

To date, the Acholi Customary Law (2003), a publication of the Acholi Cultural Institution (*Ker Kwaro Acholi*), effectively supports the recollections of the above two informants. According to the law, “whoever kills anybody [ordinary person] intentionally will pay ten (10) cows and three (3) goats,” but “whoever kills a royal messenger will pay twenty cattle (20) and ten 10 goats.”⁶³⁵ The fact that compensation for killing a royal messenger is over

⁶³³ Ochola Otto, interview, 17 December 2013.

⁶³⁴ Toamci Odida, interview, 29 October 2013.

⁶³⁵ Ker Kwaro Acholi, *Cik Tekwaro* (The Customary Law (unpublished, 2003), 1. See also Ker Kwaro Acholi, *Law to Declare the Acholi Customary Law* (Gulu: J.B. Enterprises, 2010), 3 & 4.

twice as high as that for killing an ordinary person reflects the relative importance of the royal messenger, the high esteem in which he was held, and a deliberate attempt to protect him.

If royal messengers were that valued and protected under traditional norms, did people like Okech, who had been one, benefit from such precolonial societal norms? Available sources do not allow us to answer this question with certainty. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to dismiss the possibility that these norms helped some Acholi precolonial intellectuals as they implemented the often unpopular colonial policies. It is possible that the savviest royal messengers, like Lacito Okech, took full advantage of such norms, skillfully taking advantage of his royal messenger status for his benefit and that of the colonial state he served.

Taken together, the preceding discussions illustrate some of the knowledge and skills that the precolonial intellectuals brought with them to the colonial era, and deployed in the transition to colonial rule. The discussions also offer us some explanation as to why some transitional figures had stellar careers in the colonial era. They succeeded not only because of the power of the colonial state, but largely because of their precolonial knowledge, skills, experiences, contacts and followers. It is these attributes that enabled precolonial intellectuals to contribute significantly to the transition to, and the institutionalization of, colonial rule. Their ability to execute colonial policies because of their knowledge and skills, some of which inspired both admiration and fear, and their legitimacy as traditional leaders, enabled them to surpass their traditional chiefs as colonial state functionaries. But, as Feierman eloquently put it, these were the very dimensions that, Europeans “did not fully understand [because of their ignorance of African culture], and therefore...did not control.”⁶³⁶ Indeed, precolonial intellectuals, much more than ordinary literate Acholi, were the best placed category of people to mediate between the

⁶³⁶ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 120.

people and the colonial state. But their careers were not all beds of roses; and neither did they all end well.

The Fate of the Intellectuals: Tensions and Struggles in Colonial Acholiland

Beginning in 1910, with the establishment of a colonial office in Gulu, the colonial state co-opted traditional chiefs with the hope that they would support the state to implement its policies effectively.⁶³⁷ The nascent colonial state also gave precolonial intellectuals a variety of opportunities. But the majority of them became “interpreters, messengers and domestic servants”⁶³⁸ Yet, by 1913, as British rule was taking shape on the ground, most of the traditional chiefs that had been co-opted had become disillusioned with the colonial state, having come under duress to implement unpopular policies (forced labor and taxation) in order to retain their positions. The impact of the colonial state’s demands on chiefs was twofold. First, chiefs that acceded to the colonial demands to implement unpopular policies became dictators and unpopular. This then generated tensions and struggles within the Acholi chiefdoms because the new role of chiefs went counter to traditional chiefly roles.⁶³⁹ In some chiefdoms, there was open rebellion against the co-opted chiefs.⁶⁴⁰

Secondly, chiefs that defied or otherwise undermined the colonial imperative to implement colonial policies had different fates. As R.M. Bere, one of the longest-serving colonial officials in Acholiland, recalled years later, “Many of the traditional chiefs were

⁶³⁷ CO 536/ 12271: Opening of Gulu as an Administrative Center.

⁶³⁸ Girling, *The Acholi*, 188-9.

⁶³⁹ For roles of chief in the precolonial era see Atkinson, *The Roots*, 82-97.

⁶⁴⁰ For rebellions that emerged in chiefdoms see J.R.P. Postlethwaite, *African Roses* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, Ltd., 1937), 58-9.

dismissed, retrenched or retired, and others were transferred to fill vacancies caused by these removals: new chiefs were appointed irrespectively of clan or family.”⁶⁴¹ These dismissals, retrenchments and retirements created opportunities for the pre-colonial intellectuals who had already demonstrated their ability to implement colonial state policies from their previous roles as interpreters and messengers. Some even “secured appointments as chiefs.”⁶⁴²

Precolonial intellectuals who secured appointments as chiefs, or in lower positions, proceeded to build their bases in the colonial world. But their tenures were not always smooth ones. Intriguingly, colonial agents, like Bere, do not tell us of any resistance to appointed chiefs. Bere simply notes that the appointed chiefs were accepted wherever they were sent “provided that they did not come from hostile clans,” and if they possessed “greater skill with the rain-stones” to make rain.⁶⁴³ But the dismissed, retired or retrenched traditional chiefs did not fade away immediately. For example, in 1914, shortly after Chief Awich of the Payira Chiefdom had been deposed and replaced by his son, some of his courtiers resisted his CMS-educated son, Yona Odida. One colonial administrator reported that one man, only known as “Ibrahim [and] an old satellite of Chief Awich, was found to be doing his best to spoil the work and undermine the authority of Chief Yona Odida who is doing really well as chief of Payera (Gulu Division). I have accordingly made Ibrahim political prisoner pending the arrival of the Provincial Commissioner when his ultimate domicile can be considered.”⁶⁴⁴ This report highlights a form of resistance against Odida, an appointed chief, in spite of his royal parentage. More importantly, it

⁶⁴¹ Bere, “Land and Chieftainship among the Acholi,” 51.

⁶⁴² Girling, *The Acholi*, 189.

⁶⁴³ Bere, “Land Chieftainship among the Acholi,” 50.

⁶⁴⁴ A46/791, July monthly report, 1914, 3.

explains how the colonial state, backed by force, suppressed resistance against Awich's collaborative son, making it relatively easy for him to thrive as a chief in his father's chiefdom.

As a result, appointed chiefs who replaced traditional chiefs were put in a precarious situation as they found their position constrained by traditional chiefs; and this is where the precolonial backgrounds of appointed chiefs became crucial. An appointed chief with a favorable precolonial background could easily build on his precolonial rapport with the deposed chief, win his support and thus reinforce his legitimacy. However, not all appointed chiefs succeeded in winning the support of the deposed chiefs they replaced; neither were all appointed chiefs as powerful as they are often portrayed. They had to find ways to win the support of deposed chiefs they replaced. In 1922, while discussing the conduct of the Anglican chiefs who dominated chiefships in the first three decades of colonial rule in Acholiland, a Catholic priest complained that all the appointed Anglican chiefs still "worship the former traditional chief," adding that Christian chiefs gave "goats every month to former traditional chiefs," and participated in "worshiping [at chiefdom] shrines every dry season."⁶⁴⁵

Although we already know the rivalry that existed between Catholics and Anglicans, it would be unwise to dismiss this comment from a Catholic priest as simply reflecting that rivalry.⁶⁴⁶ What the comment implies is that two political systems or structures were operating simultaneously: the traditional Acholi and the colonial state systems. Deposed chiefs continued to be *de facto* chiefs, at least in the eyes and minds of their subjects, while the appointed chiefs were the *de jure* chiefs. For the appointed chiefs to be accepted and effective, they had to establish alliances with the deposed chiefs. Thus, appointed chiefs often found their positions

⁶⁴⁵ Papers of Mario Cisternino at the Comboni Missionary Library in Layibi, Gulu Town.

⁶⁴⁶ For more on the rivalry between the Catholics and Anglicans see Adimola, *The Development of Primary Education in Acholi*, 1962.

increasingly constrained by traditional chiefs with whom they had to negotiate constantly. Acts like giving “goats every month to former traditional chiefs” and “worshiping [at chiefdom] shrines every dry season,” that the Catholic priest noted, were among the many ways in which appointed chiefs negotiated with deposed traditional chiefs, implying that they owed allegiance to both their European employers and the traditional chiefs. As already indicated, in the course of my fieldwork, many informants told me that if they failed to pay their taxes, an appointed chief “would ask you to go and dig in his garden or *in that of our traditional chief* [italics mine].”⁶⁴⁷ These were forms of tribute that traditional chiefs continued to receive (but were mobilized by appointed chiefs) in the colonial era. The key recipients of tribute, apart from the chiefs themselves, were the courtiers. All this is evidence of the power and influence that deposed traditional chiefs and their courtiers continued to wield over their appointed successors, and of the efforts of the appointed chiefs to mollify deposed traditional chiefs.

It is this sort of delicate balancing act that allowed these precolonial intellectuals turned-colonial-functionaries to thrive in the colonial era. They had to satisfy traditional chiefs but at the same time implement unpopular colonial policies. In doing so, the savviest appointed chiefs straddled both the old and the new worlds, enabling them to survive in the colonial world, especially from around 1914 to the end of 1930. But from the 1940s, the context seems to have changed so considerably that appointed chiefs no longer needed to appease traditional chiefs in order to function effectively. By this time, most of the appointed chiefs had already transformed themselves into what Girling called “the new group of powerful families among the Acholi.”⁶⁴⁸ They had already acquired enough independent wealth, followers and influence to continue

⁶⁴⁷ Obol Otema, interview, 13 January 2015.

⁶⁴⁸ Girling, *The Acholi*, 188-9.

exercising power without the support of their traditional chiefs.⁶⁴⁹ Moreover, beginning in 1937, the colonial state reorganized “the native administration.” In this reorganization, Acholiland was “divided into six counties, each of them under a County Chief.”⁶⁵⁰ This meant that the “more than sixty chiefdoms” that the colonial state found in Acholiland were now not recognized,⁶⁵¹ which weakened considerably the powers of the traditional chiefs.

But not all precolonial intellectuals succeeded all the time in reaping the benefits of collaboration with the colonial state. Some failed to straddle the two competing worlds, and they became enmeshed in conflicts with their chiefs, conflicts that were sometimes fatal. The colonial reports between 1910 and 1917 contain many cases of murder, but we do not know enough about the victims or their killers to understand what was at stake. Perhaps the best illustration of the unfortunate fate of some pre-colonial intellectuals in the colonial era is that of Okello Mwoka Lengomoi. This chapter began with the story of the murder of Okello; and it is now opportune to return to that story and attempt to answer two questions: Who killed Okello? And what did Okello do to deserve murder?

Existing colonial documents do not tell us enough about the saga, simply portraying it as a duel between the state and the Acholi, which obscures the kind of internal tensions that emerged within Okello’s chiefdom as a result of the implementation of colonial rule. In the aftermath of Okello’s death, Postlethwaite arrested eight people and tried them. In his 1914 report, he states: “The trial of the eight Acholi who murdered Chief Okellomwaka resulted into four being sentenced to death and four to seven years rigorous imprisonment. The sentences have

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 188.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 195.

⁶⁵¹ Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 42.

been confirmed by the High Court and will be carried out in Gulu. This most satisfactory end should be a means of putting a stop to any recrudescence of intimidation towards loyal chiefs by their followers.”⁶⁵²In his memoir that came out years after he left Acholiland, Postlethwaite still blamed the eight men that he had tried for the murder of Okello.⁶⁵³

But, the reports and accounts of Postlethwaite do not match those of Acholi historians who have explored the murder of Okello. In *Tekwaro*, Lacito Okech, a friend of Okello, gives us by far the best account yet published of Okello’s death. Okech’s account exposes the internal tensions that arose from the implementation of colonial rule and Okello’s own failure to navigate the turbulent new realities. Okech’s account deserves a rather lengthy quotation:

Okel[I]o Mwaka [Mwoka] was a war leader that Chief Ogwal trusted, and all people of Puranga trusted too. Okello was both a war leader of Puranga and at the same time an interpreter. Ogwal was very good with Okello until the government was established in Gulu in 1911. When the state had entrenched its rule, this started bringing envy and jealousy between Ogwal and Okello Mwaka [Mwoka]. At the end of 1913, the D.C. of Gulu gave Okello 15 guns but gave Ogwal only 5 guns. This was because every work was done by Okello. This added problems [for Okello] and he [Chief Ogwal] asked the people of Puranga to kill Okello for the compensation of the death of Ojok Ibuyu⁶⁵⁴ [that had happened in 1905].

Okech concluded that after the death of Okello, Postlethwaite deported Okello’s own traditional chief, Ogwal, to Masindi, in Bunyoro Kingdom, where he died.⁶⁵⁵ I have not been able to find any record of Chief Ogwal’s deportation, but the account on Ogwal’s exile is also corroborated by another Acholi mission-trained intellectual and a member of Puranga Chieftdom,

⁶⁵² A46/791, Northern Province Monthly Report 1914, May Monthly Report, August 1914.

⁶⁵³ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 63-4.

⁶⁵⁴ Ojok Ibuyu was a man who, according to Lacito Okech, was killed in a fight, and his death was blamed on Okello Mwoka. But when Okello was asked to pay compensation, he rejected it and his chief, Ogwal, supported Okello, noting that it was not Okello who had killed Ojok. For detail of the story see Okech, *Tekwaro*, 58-9.

⁶⁵⁵ Okech, *Tekwaro*, 60.

Onyango Odongo.⁶⁵⁶ Why did the state exile the chief? Exiling Chief Ogwal suggests that he was an accomplice in the murder of Okello, but Postlethwaite could neither imprison nor execute him for fear of an uprising in Puranga Chiefdom.

Okech's description of the events reveals important clues to what eventually led to the murder of Okello. It brings to the fore a much larger picture of the tensions and struggles that arose, not just in Puranga Chiefdom but also in other chiefdoms, as a result of the implementation of colonial rule, and may account for some of the deaths in colonial reports between 1910 and 1917. The advent of European rule leveled the ground for all natives, irrespective of their backgrounds. Those who took advantage of it because of their knowledge, skills and capacity to implement colonial rule because of their leadership legitimacy, like Okello, were highly sought after and rewarded with positions, power and wealth (including guns). But this also put them on a collision course with the deposed traditional chiefs and their royal subjects who regarded them as usurpers and traitors.

Furthermore, colonial rule took away the powers of chiefs to control and use their intellectuals for the benefit of their respective chiefdoms. These changes created competition between colonial agents, such as Postlethwaite, and chiefs, like Ogwal, for the services of intellectuals, like Okello. Therefore, the death of Okello can be seen as the culmination of Chief Ogwal's struggle and failure to control Okello in a rapidly shifting colonial era where Okello's knowledge, ideas and leadership abilities were sought by both Ogwal and the colonial state. With the expansion of colonial rule, it became difficult for some precolonial intellectuals to serve both masters. That Ogwal, as Okech stated, could resurrect a 1905 feud in 1914, simply suggests how much time he had devoted to pursuing Okello, and how badly he needed to get rid of him if he

⁶⁵⁶ J.M. Onyango-ku-Odongo, "The Origin of the Puranga Kingdom," in *The Central Lwo during the Aconya*, eds. J.M. Onyango-ku-Odongo and J.B. Webster (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 151.

could not have him in his camp. Thus, when the colonial state had successfully wooed Okello into its fold, and was toying with the idea of making him a chief, Ogowal must have seen his options limited, and hatched the plan to eliminate Okello.

In the end, Okello failed to straddle and balance the competing powers of the old and the new worlds; and he was speared to death by his own people. At the beginning of this chapter, we saw how the colonial state used public executions to dramatize its power and deter people from killing colonial employees. The multiple stabbing of Okello may have also been a strategy by the Puranga traditional chief to deter other transitional intellectuals from joining the Europeans. Ultimately, the story of Okello's tragic end is one of struggle and competition between a chief and his subordinate official, a struggle that arose as a result of the implementation of colonial rule. It is also a story of a struggle between the old order and the new era, and a struggle between the colonial state and a traditional chief for the loyalty and services of a transitional intellectual in the early decades of colonial rule.

Conclusion

Many factors, including colonial state violence, conspired to accomplish the transition from precolonial Acholiland to the colonial era. But many scholars have overstated the role of colonial state violence in the transition. The Acholi who became the first group of colonial employees also made an important contribution to the transition and institutionalization of colonial rule. They brought with them a range of knowledge and skills that proved vital to the success of the colonial project. Tales about their special knowledge, skills and powers circulated in and beyond their chiefdoms, making them powerful in their own ways. The stories solidified their claim to leadership, leading colonial subjects to regard them as uniquely and legitimately

qualified to hold political power in the new order. In addition to these personal attributes, societal norms and the ability to marry well and build enduring relationships also helped the transitional intellectuals to thrive as colonial agents.

Because of their proven ability to execute colonial orders and policies from the time they joined the state as interpreters and messengers, the transitional intellectuals often impressed colonial officials, which propelled them to stellar careers in the colonial era. But these careers were not without challenges. Serving the colonial state, especially in the position of a deposed traditional chief or when one was not traditionally anointed, often raised questions about one's loyalty to one's people. Moreover, it required one to perform a delicate balancing act, astride two competing worlds, moving back and forth between them. As a result, precolonial intellectuals sometimes went out of their way to satisfy the interests of both the Acholi traditional system and the colonial state in order to hold onto their positions in the colonial era. They were constantly negotiating their positions with opposed powers. While some successfully straddled these two competing worlds, others did not fare so well. Okello Mwoka was among the latter.

General Summary and Conclusion

Broadly, the dissertation has explored the lives of overlooked Acholi leaders such as royal messengers, healers and military generals, whom I call pre-colonial intellectuals, as they transitioned from the pre-colonial to the colonial eras. I have argued that the Acholi who became the first group of evangelists and colonial employees played important roles in the transition from the pre-colonial to the colonial eras and in the institutionalization of European projects (evangelization and colonial rule) in Acholiland in ways that have not been previously well understood. The dissertation, therefore, set out to achieve two aims. First, it sought to excavate the obscured precolonial intellectuals and elucidate their making and their roles in the functioning of their chiefdoms, as well as the kinds of transformation the region had gone before the advent of the Europeans. Secondly, the dissertation sought to examine the contributions of this generation of intellectuals to the missionary and colonial enterprises.

Overall, the work has demonstrated that the Acholi who became the first group of Acholi colonial employees and evangelists were much more complex than most scholars have realized. They came from different chiefdoms and backgrounds; but most of them had previously been subordinate court figures in their respective chiefdoms. It was their previous positions within their chiefdoms that enabled them to join the Europeans and to begin mediating between Europeans and the Acholi chiefs. But prior to colonization, these leaders had acquired knowledge and skills in different areas, which put them at the center of their chiefdoms. Those who excelled at their roles in their communities not only acquired legitimacy and power but also large followings over which they wielded considerable personal power.

Upon the arrival of Arabs, beginning in the 1850s, many of these courtiers or subordinate leaders learned Arabic and began mediating between their chiefs and the Arab traders. Out of

these roles, they not only learned Arabic but also acquired wealth, thus strengthening their positions in their respective chiefdoms. These interactions with Arabs, as I have argued, prepared these subordinate leaders for the encounter with the Europeans and for their subsequent contributions to the European projects in different ways.

Beginning with the arrival of the CMS missionaries in 1903, these leaders, expecting similar benefits from the missionaries as they had received from the Arabs, turned up at the mission station. But after failing to realize any benefits from their alliance with the missionaries, these leaders rejected the activities of the CMS, and even destroyed the first CMS church in the region. As a result, in 1908, the CMS withdrew its missionaries from the region. In 1910, the colonial state arrived and established a permanent administrative center at Gulu in the heart of Acholiland. In the same year, the colonial state invited the CMS back to Acholiland to produce the literate manpower needed to implement colonial rule. This alliance between Church and State had important consequences. Because literacy, an important condition for employment in the colonial state, was tied to conversion to Christianity, these leaders became “Christians.”

Yet, besides being Christians (at least nominally) and literate, they were also healers, royal messengers, war leaders and other types of leaders, aspects of their lives that rarely, if ever, feature in the archives of the missionaries or of the colonial state. This is largely because once these leaders became evangelists or colonial state employees, they muted those aspects of their lives that were likely to bring them into conflict with Europeans and jeopardize their positions in the colonial era. They did not write about them. And because scholars have relied exclusively on missionary and colonial archives, they have remained oblivious to the non-Christian dimensions of these figures and, consequently, the existing works leave half of their story untold.

That is why the last two chapters of this study approached the first group of Acholi colonial employees and evangelists in a slightly different way. The chapters followed these leaders from the precolonial to the colonial eras. They offered a deep history of the first group of colonial employees and evangelists that has allowed us to highlight the knowledge and skills that this group brought to the colonial era, and the subsequent roles of the group in the missionary and colonial state projects in Acholiland. These last two chapters challenge works that often portray the transitional leaders simply as products of the European institutions, especially the missionary and colonial schools. Perhaps the most important contribution of these leaders to institutionalizing European projects was to endow the projects with legitimacy. And once these leaders became colonial employees or evangelists, they became instrumental in taking the messages of both the colonial state and the CMS to their people, persuading, and even forcing the people to embrace the European projects. But these were not their only roles. They also became mediators between the Europeans and the Acholi, and disseminators of knowledge about Acholiland to Europeans. Generally, this study contributes to the growing works on African colonial employees and African intellectual history. More specifically, the dissertation contributes to the debate on the roles of Africans in evangelization and colonial state projects.

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