EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND RITUALS IN RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND PEACEBUILDING: THE CASE OF THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY

BY

CATHERINE NYAMBURA KARUMBA

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY- AFRICA

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CATHERINE NYAMBURA KARUMBA

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SUMMER 2017
DECLARATION

I, Catherine Nyambura Karumba, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than the United States International University-Africa in Nairobi, Kenya for academic credit. All materials herein from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

Signature……………………… Date…………………………

Catherine Nyambura Karumba (ID No 606991)

This thesis has been presented for examination and approval by the appointed supervisor

Signature……………………… Date…………………………

Dr. Elijah N. Munyi
Supervisor

Signature……………………… Date…………………………

Professor Tom Onditi
Dean School of Humanities and Social Science

Signature……………………… Date…………………………

Ambassador Professor Ruthie C. Rono, HSC
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic & Student Affairs
ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines whether spiritual belief and rituals play a significant role in the recruitment and retention of rebel group members and attempts to find patterns that have an effect on long-term peacebuilding. A brief review indicates that while beliefs and rituals have been highlighted by some scholars within civil war literature as playing a part, there remains a lacuna in the study of the phenomenon. The study finds that for the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony, its leader, was central to the recruitment and retention of members into the group. The findings of the study were attained through key informant interviews with former members of the LRA and community leaders in and around Gulu, Northern Uganda. The study also finds that spiritual beliefs were in this case, not critical to recruitment and retention. For peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence, however, Acholi beliefs, and rituals about cleansing play a considerable function. These beliefs reveal an alternative explanation to why the war occurred in the community and concludes that these rituals and beliefs offer power, protection, and belonging.
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<tr>
<td>ALPI</td>
<td>Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUSCO</td>
<td>Gulu Support the Children Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRA</td>
<td>National Resistance Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLA</td>
<td>Uganda National Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Defense Force</td>
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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Civil War: Conflicts where the contested issue is the authority of the state either whole or in part

Dyad: A pair of warring parties. In interstate conflicts, these warring parties are governments of states, whereas, in intrastate conflicts, one is the government and the other is a rebel group (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015) this study will concentrate on an intrastate conflict

Peacebuilding: Refers to long-term activities associated with reconciliation and social transformation that occur after violent conflict

Rebel group: Organizations that engage in armed opposition and resistance to government or ruling regimes through insurrection or insurgencies

Recruitment: Refers to joining or enlisting

Religion: Refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world separate from the visible one that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world

Retention: Refers to continued presence

Rituals: The performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely predetermined by the performer's
1.1 Introduction

‘…two armies are two bodies which meet and try to frighten each other A moment of panic occurs and that moment must be turned to advantage’. Napoleon

On 20TH August 1986, a group of Acholi, led by Alice Lakwena managed to release 150 former Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers whom she claimed had been captured by the National Resistance Army (NRA) and were held captive in Gulu Barracks. Without firing a single shot, the NRA confronted by partly naked men and women, some holding bibles others magical objects, according to Allen and Vlassenroot did not attack (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). Therefore, without killing or wounding anyone, a campaign against the Ugandan government began with lasting effects not just for Uganda, but the region too.

Civil war has been a subject of interest to scholars within the international relations discipline and across other spectrums (Lyall, 2013). The study of why people go to war, the means they use and the achievement of peaceful resolution continues to elicit debate and is of particular interest in the study outlined below.

In Eastern Congo, July 1964, what is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) a rebel group known as the Ninjas was formed to express displeasure with the newly formed central government. Its members included spear bearing warriors from Kivu
and Orientale provinces. The leaders were considered to be leftist in ideology although, their function was not as valuable as that of the pole bearing witchdoctors. These witch doctors promised the rank and file of having the ability to turn into ‘Simba’ (Swahili for lion) when entering into battle. While this claim may not have been true, almost half of the Congo territory was won from government control, by the Ninjas without firing a single shot, including the capture of local capitals as well as Stanleyville (Petraitis, 2003). This occurred despite the official Congolese army being equipped with guns, armored vehicles, and mortars. At the sight of the chanting Ninja rebels led to the battlefield by the witchdoctors, the soldiers would retreat; abandoning their equipment (Kinder & Hilgemann, 1993) Napoleon’s words reflect the reaction of the Congolese army in 1964 and similarly the advantage garnered by the Ninja rebels. Although the involvement of the Belgian and American armies turned the tide, the battle had been almost won. The unprecedented turn, pitching illiterate, spear toting warriors armed with ‘spiritual defenses’ against what was by the standards of the day a modern army seems to be reflected in different accounts of civil war across the African continent from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times.

Of particular interest, however, is the function that these indigenous spiritual beliefs seem to play in the recruitment and retention of the individuals towards going into war and the eventual peaceful resolution if and when reached. Did they remain because they were successful or because the spiritual leader’s claims had an impact? Considering the emergence of similar groups in the DRC today, are there remnants of this belief that continue to play a part in the lack of a peaceful resolution? Further afield of the DRC, accounts of rebel groups such as the Lord’s Resistance Army using these beliefs in various forms reverberate and these questions, if asked of these accounts, need answers.
The queries raised ask (1) Are spiritual rituals and beliefs a part of the socialization of violence within conflicts on the African continent? (2) How are these beliefs inculcated? (3) If, socialization is the inculcation of norms and beliefs not just as a behavioral interpretation but as a deeper sense of self and the beliefs and rituals are a vital part of this process, then, does the cessation of hostilities by defeat or surrender then alter the self (Checkel, 2015)? (4) How does this impact peaceful resolution once these beliefs are internalized by rebel group members?

This exploratory study examines whether spiritual belief and rituals play a significant role in the recruitment and retention of rebel group members and attempts to find patterns that have an effect on long-term peacebuilding. A brief review indicates that while beliefs and rituals have been highlighted by some scholars within civil war literature as playing a part, there remains a lacuna in the study of the phenomenon. The study finds that for the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony, its leader, was central to the recruitment and retention of members into the group. The findings of the study were attained through key informant interviews with former members of the LRA and community leaders in and around Gulu, Northern Uganda. The study also finds that spiritual beliefs were in this case, not critical to recruitment and retention. For peacebuilding and peaceful co-existence, however, Acholi beliefs, and rituals about cleansing play a considerable function. These beliefs reveal an alternative explanation to why the war occurred in the community and concludes that these rituals and beliefs offer power, protection, and belonging.

The Chapter is laid out as the framework from which the research is based upon. The following sections are divided into the background of the study; where an examination of
civil war literature, a brief history of the Acholi and the beginnings of spiritual beliefs and war as they occurred within Northern Uganda. There is also an introduction of the variables that will be examined. It then elaborates the research questions on which the study is based as well as the scope, significance of the study and then concludes with a chapter summary as well as a summary of the rest of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 Civil War Literature Thus Far

Using a sample size of 448 articles from 15 political science journals between 1995 and 2012, Lyall establishes that contemporary work on civil war spans two research programs (2013). The first of these programs is dependent on cross-sectional analysis after the Second World War and has detailed the study of the onset of civil war. These studies look at the structural factors that lead to civil war such as state capacity (Fearon & Laitin, 2003), resource rents (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004), as well as ethnic exclusion or grievances (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2010) amongst others. Using micro-level analysis, the second research area explores the dynamics of violence such as geo-referencing (Raleigh, Linke, Hegre, & Karlsen, 2010) amongst others. This section will briefly review the literature to situate the framework of the paper.

Theories abound of why groups go into conflict and some are more popular than others. On some level, these theories have been divided into the greed-grievance dichotomy where those that argue that it is the resources and their value towards lucrative opportunities for wealth creation that motivate groups towards conflict are placed against those that claim injustice as the key influence. Chief amongst the greed thesis is the work of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler where using econometrics and substitute variables, they strive to show that
rebel groups and their war profiteer leaders are motivated by resources such as diamonds and oil (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). The critics of this thesis dispute that it is not just wealth acquisition that drives the groups but primarily perceived or real injustice that persuades members to join into rebel movements.

Beyond the loot-seeking behavior, Fearon and Laitin (2003) seek to explain structural factors specifically weak state capacity as the key to understanding why groups agitate through violent means. The breaking of the social contract and the loss of the legitimate monopoly of violence by the state, as well as politicized ethnicity, has spurred many scholars to theorize along these same lines. While these studies locate the role of the patron-client systems (Reno, 2007), or the political elites striving to maintain power (Carey, Colaresi, & Mitchell, 2015) or as reactions to cleavages (Meagher, 2007) social injustice remains a theme. Ethnicity and religion as motivators have also been examined however only the major organized religions (Christianity and Islam) were considered (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2010; Stewart, 2009). A widely known study that considers the impact of African indigenous beliefs and rituals or indeed African religion on the onset of conflict has thus far not presented itself.

Galtung’s widely circulated ideas about positive and negative peace points to structural violence and the frustrations placed on groups unable to achieve their potential (Galtung, 1969). Combined with the scholarly works of others, specifically relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970), horizontal inequalities (Stewart, Brown, & Langer, 2008) and the protracted social conflict theory by Azar (Ramsbotham, 2005) a picture is painted with how individuals and groups perceive of their positions within society and seek to change it. Aggression and frustration seem to be bedfellows as they pool into a violent outburst.
Much work has been used with the technological advancement of sophisticated techniques and numerous datasets are created to map violent conflict of various natures. Geographic referencing was the tool utilized by Raleigh et al, (2010) using disaggregated data the Armed Conflict Level Event Data (ACLED) set was launched. This follows in the tradition of the Correlates of War project and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program amongst others where datasets present the patterns and record events with various variables. While these are valuable tools to the peace researcher, spiritual techniques are not a key factor considered.

The incorporation of Islamic beliefs into the Lord’s Resistance Army as an homage to their Khartoum patron seems a vital aspect to consider (Titeca, 2010). Shifting alliances or the incorporation of alternate beliefs into the ideology of a rebel group is perhaps a key motivation to maintain patronage, however, this aspect has also been largely dismissed in the literature thus far.

Academic scholars have endeavored to understand civil war and armed conflict through various lenses and as this brief review shows, indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals have as yet not been tackled within the expansive field either through datasets or as a motivating variable. The next section attempts to explain why a study that examines these indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals is an important lens to contribute towards peace and conflict studies.

1.2.2 A Brief History of the Acholi in Northern Uganda

Atkinson warns of the danger of studies of ethnohistory where a sharp divide exists between the pre-colonial, colonial pasts and for this study the post-colonial that focuses on
the ‘unique and discontinuous’ rather than the many patterns and processes of change that link and overlap (Atkinson R. R., 1989). This section will attempt to integrate these periods to provide a picture of the creation of the perceived Acholi identity.

In his recently revised book, Atkinson argues that political violence and politics are bound up with the perceptions of societal and ethnic identity (Atkinson R., 2010). These perceptions are social constructions, representations rather than features of the real world. In his characterization of the Acholi socio-historical evolution, he describes a series of events. Climatic upheaval through drought and famine shaped the ethnic identity of the Acholi during the pre-colonial era. By the mid-seventeenth century a shared environment, kinship-based lineage, patriarchal socio-political institutions provided the organization of village life. These lineages determined also patterns of trade and gathered power and influence through accessibility in times of famine and drought to the River Aca. He reinforces the fact that tribalism is a recent phenomenon and not an age-old fact.

The interaction between this pre-colonial grouping and Arab traders around 1850s seeking ivory and slaves further shaped the ethnic identity. Three stations were set up in Patiko, Pabo, and Padibe. Patiko would later be the scene of a massacre perpetrated by the LRA. These trading stations would be the base for the traders for ivory and slaves to be shipped up north to the Egyptian zones. These stations would be raiding stations for cattle, slaves, and ivory. In the beginning, these raids were directed within however later to neighboring communities. The Acholi would assist in the raids.

The British explorer Samuel Baker lived among the Acholi in the 1860s and 1870s at the time when raiding for ivory and slaves had created an unequal distribution of wealth
within the kinship lineages. His descriptions of their lives as cited in Finnstrom quoted below shaped the approach the British perceived of the Acholi and influenced the missionaries

‘The treachery of the Negro is beyond belief . . . A savage who has led a wild and uncontrollable life must first learn to obey authority before any great improvements can be expected’ (Finnstrom, 2008, pp. 59-60).

Atkinson notes this as the beginning of the creation of the ‘other’ by the Eurocentric racist view expressed by Baker. Attempts at resistance towards the British can be traced to the 1911 Lamogi Rebellion which was unsuccessful. For the British, the Acholi were not of importance as their environment was not valuable to their agricultural goals. They were therefore treated as the periphery and not the core in comparison to the Baganda. This manifested in two ways, through the political arm which reinforced the perceived political identity and through the missionaries education policies towards the elite (Atkinson, 2010). The eventual political contention between North and South Uganda can be traced to these roots (Bilotta, 2016; Finnstrom, 2008). By the 1950s there was a significant difference in infrastructural investment between the two regions. The imagery of the ‘savage’ led the British to view the Acholi as a militaristic tribe and therefore had a policy of recruiting for the army from the North (Behrend, 1999; Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). Indeed as shall be seen later the involvement of the Acholi in the World Wars in defense of the British Empire was to have a long term effect to the spiritual fabric of the community.

At the time independence was attained, large cadres of Acholi had been recruited in the army (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). Subsequent postcolonial governments either reinforced the recruitment of the Acholi or persecuted them further strengthening the notion of ‘other’ created by the British.
1.2.3 Spiritual Beliefs and Rituals: Holy Spirit Mobile Forces & Lord’s Resistance Army

The control of Uganda by the British, indeed of East Africa, was first through the missionaries who begun to operate in the area in the 1870s (p'Bitek, 1970). As the Christian Missionaries pursued their mandate to educate and civilize, they declared all other spirits, apart from God as satanic. They also condemned traditional healers and spirit mediums as evil and ancestral worship deemed insidious (Harlacher, Okot, Obonyo, Balthazard, & Atkinson, 2006).

What the missionaries’ had found was among the Acholi a belief in diverse spiritual forces. These forces gave meaning and explanations to misfortune and provided means to cope with the hardship faced (Harlacher, 2009; Behrend, 1999). Apart from providing explanations for calamity and trauma, the cosmology also fostered unity and mutual support (Bilotta, 2016). The spiritual forces in Acholi cosmology can be attributed to ancestors, clan members who had died and were still cared for who could help or harm the community. These spoke through the spirit mediums or ajwaka. According to p’Bitek, they spoke in a manner where the voices could be recognizable by those who had known them in the past (p'Bitek, 1971).

Another distinct category of spiritual forces was jok (pl. joggi). These were attributed to have specific and limited power and reach especially around a clan or chiefdom. However another category of ‘free’ joggi who could travel distances and had attributes of possession and could heal or harm (p'Bitek, 1971). The next category of spirit was known as cen, vengeful spirit of those who had died a violent death (p'Bitek, 1971). As discussed in Chapter Four and Five, the attributes of cen who could travel great distances and possess anyone from
those who had killed, come across the body or live in the area where the killing or spirit resides, provide explanations that give meaning to violence and war.

Spirit possession has a long history on the continent. Whether these experiences are real or imagined is not the point, the aim is to see the relationship the beliefs and rituals around this theme has an implication in a peaceful resolution. No case is more widely known than the experiences of Northern Uganda’s Alice ‘Lakwena’ Auma, spiritual leader of the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSM) and a precursor to the case selected, the Lord’s Resistance Army.

A historical analysis of the HSM attributed to Behrend who has extensively studied the group and its leader begins by examining the Acholi as an entity that began in 1600. Through the migration of the Lwo from Southern Sudan and settled in their present territory (Behrend, 1999). It is considered that during this period and into the nineteenth century, the Acholi numbered about thirty chiefdoms each headed by a rwot or chief considered owner of the land and descendant of an ancestral line. The experiences of the colonial era with its resolute change in identity through the actions of the partition of Africa through the creation of artificial boundaries, the divide and rule tactics of the colonial administration in creating tribal identities and the eventual post-independence years shaped the interaction of the group with the rest of their neighbors and the state.

The rwot was a leader who likes in most ethnic groups in Africa held a political role countered by the elders of the clan who had a and spiritual role. According to Behrend, the rwot had to contend with challenges from the elders who constantly questioned the chief. The chief also had a ritualistic duty especially when it came to fertility and rain, one which competing accounts state were done with a priest (Behrend, 1999). Dolan agrees with
Behrend in conceding the combined nature of the political and spiritual authority of leaders (Dolan, 2009). Keeping this in mind the confounded nature of the post independent years in Uganda, Alice arises as a leader with both caps, spiritual and political.

Alice Lakwena formerly Alice Auma appears at the end of the defeat of members of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) in 1986. The context of the war and its subsequent outcome will be further elaborated later; however one of the key reasons for mentioning here is that Alice performed healing and cleansing rituals. These rituals offered to purify the soldiers from *cen*, the dangerous emanations from those the soldiers had killed. She also offered a compelling argument through the spiritual possessions that gave a sense of power and protection to those she had healed, galvanizing them into action on behalf of the Acholi. Through the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces, territory and battles were won until their defeat in October 1987 she left Acholiland and a vacuum that was filled by Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army.

Joseph Kony claimed to be Alice Auma’s cousin and inheritor of her spirits. His background seems to have been that of an altar boy who retreated to the Awere Hills and came back convinced of his role in the destiny of the Acholi (Titeca, 2010; Beevor, 2016). The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), has been described as a ‘Christian millenarian armed group’ one whose ideology has been steeped in myth (Beevor, 2016; Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; Titeca, 2010). The ideology of the LRA has been described variously as the aim to rule Uganda under the command of the spirits possessing him and the Ten Commandments (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010).

In one account he left his birthplace Odek with eleven followers on April 1st, 1987 with ‘white things a dove, plates, a Muslim robe and the seeds of the Red Poker Tree (Green,
He then met up with members of the ‘Black Battalion’ fleeing from Museveni’s forces blessed them with water from Awere Hills for their protection and thus begun his campaign (Green, 2009). This account while from popular literature reflects the spiritual nature of Kony and the beginning of his movement that would cause untold misery to the people of Northern Uganda for twenty odd years.

As indicated above, the parallels that are drawn from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial regarding spiritual beliefs and rituals are that a historical perspective of identity shaped by a Eurocentric view of the world and a push to ‘civilize’ that caused a break with traditional spirituality meshed together. Here arose in a time where explanation and meaning were sorely needed by a community pursued and persecuted an answer that would provide the unity and cohesion previously given by the cosmology abandoned in favor of the European view of spirit.

1.2.4 Recruitment, Retention, and Peacebuilding

Recruitment and retention are essential requirements for any organization to survive. (Gates & Nordas, 2014). In the context of rebel groups where life and death are features of the task even more so because the success of the movement depends on how it engages with government forces. These two elements have been explored by Gates through the use of formal modeling to determine the positive utility for joining and continuing to fight. In an era of forced recruitment and severe punishment for abandoning the rebel groups, Gates and Nordas contribution is valuable towards understanding the motivations of individuals who join armed groups during civil war.

According to Haer and Banholzer (2015) in examining the commitment of combatants, using a micro level analysis of eight armed groups in DRC through interviews...
to test several hypotheses regarding recruitment, training, punishment, and rewards. While testing for training, the variable 'spiritual training' was used to denote lessons used on the use of traditional medicine, the Bible or indigenous beliefs and their findings denote that there was a reduction in the commitment of the members (Haer & Banholzer, 2015). As they state these findings are based on a small section of respondents (95) and not representative of a large sample size. In relation to this paper, the work of Haer & Banholzer, however, opens up further lines of inquiry which they do not address in their conclusions such as how was the training provided and by whom or what kind of spiritual training did the respondents refer to specifically. Considering the groups mentioned, some of whom are still active in combat, does this have any implications for peaceful co-existence and reintegration?

Citing authors in the same tradition, they also consider the institutional model to explain recruitment and retention similar to Haer and Banholzer. However, they both concur that few studies have been done to examine how rebel organizations maintain allegiance (Gates & Nordas, 2014). Themnér examines why combatants go back into conflict after demobilization and conclude that through the use of middlemen, ex-combatants prefer to fight with their former groups because of their experiences either with rejection by the society or suspicion by the state (Themnér, 2013). The ties of kinship and bonding developed in the battlefield endure. For Eck, ethnicity as a mobilizing factor raises the intensity of violence while concerns for personal security affect motivations higher than economic or social incentives (Eck, 2010).

Disarming, demobilization, and reintegration programs (DDR) are designed as practical and technical. For some, when considering youth actors and child soldiers in particular they conclude that the policies guiding reintegration should be in harmony with the
‘relationship between recruitment motivations and reintegration outcomes’ and they recommend a political lens instead of a technical one (Özerdem & Podder, 2011). Considering the recruitment policies of groups such as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) this sentiment has implications towards the argument made in this thesis.

While various authors as stated in the brief review of the civil war literature have examined the onset motivations of groups and individuals, few disagree with the frustrations developed towards a state that doesn’t meet its obligations. Witchcraft literature also considers frustration with modernity and poverty. Retention and recruitment authors consider the motivations of joining as valuable to understanding civil war. However, as yet, a clear and concise examination of these elements together seems to be missing. It is, therefore, the intention to study civil war and indigenous spiritual beliefs in Africa through the lens of recruitment and retention in a bid to strengthen the policies guiding reintegration programs.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

As stated above, civil war literature has produced extensive quantitative and qualitative studies which have contributed to the knowledge regarding rebel groups. However a comprehensive investigation into the role that indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals play in the recruitment, retention and peacebuilding effort is thus far absent (Eck, 2010; Gates & Nordas, 2014). Indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals are endemic to the African continent and the described continued uses of its rituals indicate a significant relation to rebel groups. This gap in the studies of rebel groups may have implications for understanding the formation of these groups and possibly identify factors not considered in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. This study, using a constructivist theoretical
framework, therefore proposes to explore and describe the various forms and functions that these beliefs and rituals take and their implication in peacebuilding.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The growing trend cited by Pettersson & Wallensteen implies that intrastate wars are on the increase (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015). Throughout the continent, various spiritual rituals and beliefs indigenous to the regions they arise continue to be practiced. For peaceful co-existence to be a reality, it is imperative that the causal relationship between these two elements be understood by peacemakers and peace builders. This study, therefore, seeks to establish the role that African spiritual belief and rituals play if any, in the recruitment and retention of rebel group members in the LRA and if this has a negative effect on long-term peacebuilding.

This study thus aims;

- To describe the form and functions of these rituals and beliefs as used by the Lord’s Resistance Army
- To explore and describe its effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration

1.5 Research Questions

i. What forms and functions do the beliefs and ritual practices used by the Lord’s Resistance Army have and what influence do they have on recruitment, retention, and peacebuilding?

ii. What has been the effect of these rituals and beliefs on the peaceful settlement?
1.6 **Significance of the Study/ Justification of the Study**

The proposed study seeks to explore the role indigenous African spiritual rituals and beliefs play in peace and conflict research and its possible implications in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. It, therefore, places emphasis on the function these rituals hold in recruitment and retention of individuals into rebel groups. This is in an effort to understand the implications, if any, for peaceful settlement and reintegration of former group members and leaders. In the theoretical realm, this study could contribute to current knowledge on the formation and continued sustenance of rebel groups. It may also be applied in policy work in the formation of DDR programs.

1.7 **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study has been limited to the armed group known as the Lord’s Resistance Army between 1987 and 2006. As a rebel group in Northern Uganda, the roots and routes taken throughout its existence show signs of not just indigenous beliefs and rituals but also an adaptation of mainstream beliefs as the occasion suited the purposes of the group. At the time of writing relative peace has been established in the area they once operated in although the group operations are transnational. This study, therefore, seeks to establish if this relative peace in Northern Uganda is sustainable considering the nature of the DDR program established.

1.8 **Chapter Summary**

This Chapter aimed to introduce the background of the area of research explored in this study. It examined the current civil war literature and found that for peace studies, pecuniary and non-pecuniary causes have been used to explain why war happens. This is despite a rich historical background of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial examples
where spiritual beliefs and rituals were significant motivators for war. The Chapter then laid out the historical making of the ‘Other’ of the Acholi and laid a framework for the spiritual beliefs and rituals as they played out in the civil war in Northern Uganda. The research questions lay out the specific area of the study, as well as the significance and the scope of the study, was then elaborated.

The following Chapters are outlined as follows. Chapter Two will examine the literature available on the variables of recruitment retention and peacebuilding. The review also presents an opportunity to delineate the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter Three elaborates the methodology used in the field to collect data, the research design, and case and sample selection. It also presents the ethical standards and the limitations faced in conducting the study. Chapter Four presents the findings the field study revealed. It then goes further to analyze some of the patterns discovered while conducting interviews with key informants. The findings are arranged in themes that are then discussed as the study concludes in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study seeks to establish the role that African spiritual belief and rituals play (if any) in the recruitment and retention of rebel group members and whether this has a negative effect on long-term peacebuilding. The aims established in the first Chapter allude to certain form and functions of African indigenous rituals and beliefs as used by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). It also hints at a possible effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration that these beliefs may have on the societies that they occur. This Chapter, therefore, examines what has been written by others about the topic, what methods they used and establishes the lacuna mentioned in the previous chapter. It will also address the missing gaps in research in view of the seeming centrality of beliefs among rebels groups in Africa. Has the role of beliefs in conflict resolution or perpetuation of these beliefs have been conveniently discounted due to a reliance on the Eurocentric conceptualization of conflict in a manner that does not countenance any role for the mystic, or that is limited in an academic analysis of beliefs as causal variables? How can we account for the role of myth and ritual as causal variables?

Definitions are ‘analytical tools’ according to Ellis and Haar, chosen for their ability to explain the process under observation (Ellis & Haar, 2004, p. 14). For clarity, this section will begin by looking at how belief and ritual are defined and therefore their utility in this study. It will then continue in the tradition of Greetz, considered a pioneer in anthropological studies, who states that two roles should be fulfilled in the study of beliefs and rituals. First, they should be analyzed and second, their socio-psychological structural role examined (Greetz, 1966).
One aspect does need to be addressed. This study is not a commentary on the actual indigenous beliefs but simply addresses their utility in times of armed conflict. This limited scope extends to the Lord’s Resistance Army. African indigenous beliefs and their accompanying rituals are diverse and multifaceted that a generalization would be a disservice to this richness. Furthermore, the subject area of African religions, which this study touches on, has a multiplicity of perspectives that are beyond the limited scope expressed.

The influences of Christianity and Islam on the continent through centuries of interaction mean that some of the rituals described in this study are often hybrids reflecting this reality (Mudimbe & Kilonzo, 2012). In particular, the ritual of naming as an example with its utility as expressions of relations in the indigenous sense and as a symbol of conversion in the Islamic and Christian sense. In agreement with other scholars, they reaffirm that naming, ‘assumes the memory of people, staging a vision’ (Mudimbe & Kilonzo, 2012, p. 47). Some of the rebel groups do offer naming rituals hand in hand with initiation rituals and this context is valuable to the description later of the socio-psychological role.

Durkheim emphasized that religion was the ‘bulwark of social cohesion’ (Richards, 2006). Richards while writing on the Revolution United Front (RUF), compares Durkheim’s meaning of rites and concludes that Durkheim's premise was that ‘rites, as collective actions without practical purpose, generate social solidarity through emotional entrainment’ (Richards, 2006, p. 652). He further emphasizes that Durkheim saw collective agency as the focal point through which belief was generated through collective excitement. He further notes Durkheim emphasis through the forming of solidarities’ through the loss of individual identity and the forging of group identity towards the cohesive performance of tasks. It is this identity that this study seeks to find embedded in ritual. However, Richards’s paper
interestingly argues that the Durkheimian view that belief draws from the collective action can be placed as an assertion that realism and not idealism brings to life the prophecy of civil war as a result of extreme social exclusion. This lays a foundation for which the interplay of rituals as a collective action plays in addressing this climate of extreme social exclusion.

The working definition of ritual used in this study as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely predetermined by the performers. It alludes to the concept of the performance of acts. It is in the description of these acts that a greater appreciation of the ‘relationship to the human community’ and deities, ancestors, spirits and cosmos (Grillo, 2012, p. 112). For Grillo, rituals are an act and specifically for African religion not devoid of thought. It is this interaction that is further explored throughout this study.

The performances of these acts take place within and with the body. The body carries marks of its cultural journey as expressed through the ritual described by Grillo. In the Yoruba tradition the same tradition that sees the head as the seat of destiny, cuts are put on the scalp and infuse these elements of within and with when ‘medicine’ is put through a cut on the scalp that will give the devotee powers or protection (Grillo, 2012). It is also then not just symbolic performances but a transformation of the performer and the performed upon. Stephen Ellis book, *Masks of Anarchy* on Liberian civil war and religious influence alludes to the next embedded aspect of these acts, masquerade and masks (Ellis, 2007). Masks represent ‘containment and mastery of power’ while the masquerade itself reveals this power to be seen and believed (Grillo, 2012, p. 116; Ellis, 2007; Richards, 2006). Sometimes this performance takes place at an altar which for some may be embodied in a permanent or temporary space including a physical space or the body such as through the ritual expert or a
tomb where libations are poured and offered in supplication (Grillo, 2012). These three areas mentioned, the body, the masks, and the altar is where the performance of the acts and utterances take place. These, however, need to be done in an effort to ‘release the transformative powers’ of the energies of the spiritual being whose involvement is being invoked (Grillo, 2012). The Holy Spirit Mobile Forces of Uganda headed by Alice Lakwena embodies a clear example of what the belief transformative powers can do not just for the individual but also for an entire community.

In the release of these energies is where the function of these rituals lie and especially with reference to the context in which this study is placed. Two specific areas, power, and protection are evoked as seen in the vignette offered in Chapter One. This can be further extended to kinship and belonging. This triad is where rituals utility in armed groups can be placed and the themes explored next.

There is strong sociological evidence of the role rituals have in reinforcing ties between the group and the individual, the individual to another individual and the powerful sense of belonging it creates (Ellis & Haar, 2004). Imparted with this sense of belonging is the functional role of secrecy. How these rituals are conducted; the source of the ‘transformational power’ evoked and; the consequences of revealing these to others, not of the group implies a powerful sense towards the control and restriction of information. Power is central. In considering the context of armed conflict, power is controlled by the commanding officer of the rebel group and rituals then offer him an alternative source of punishment for secrets revealed (Haer & Banholzer, 2015). Whether this punishment is delivered by the spiritual being invoked or the commanding officer himself is another matter entirely.
Belief comes into play as we consider the value that the sentiment that power has been imparted to the member of the group through the rituals. Reflecting on armed conflict and especially civil war where violence is unleashed upon neighbors, where the break of social ties occurs, powerlessness abounds. The belief that one has received ‘power’ again to influence their situation is a motivator that can be underestimated. This power manifests then in revenge or retribution for perceived wrongs, motives already recognized in civil war literature. Therefore the duality of ritual and its relation to power binds the individual to the group and other individuals and proffers power to the powerless.

Protection from spiritual beings is not a phenomenon restricted to indigenous religions. Prayer for both Islam and Christianity rituals ask for protection from evil. The cutting and insertion of ‘medicine’ in the body, the wearing of charms and the performance of pre-battle rituals provide the backdrop for the protection from the spiritual being. Belief in the rituals performed by various groups is central to understanding the socio-psychological utility of rituals.

Social ties broken in the civil war are reignited in the rebel group. The loss of belonging is restored and the ties of solidarity go beyond the cessation of hostilities. These ties are also the same networks that violence entrepreneurs use to recruit ex-combatants back into conflict (Themnér, 2013). Forged in battle, tied in with ritual the belonging lost by these armed group members before they joined the group is found again within the kinship bonds.

This introduces the implications to peaceful coexistence that this study aims to understand and describe. Rituals have been used when structuring peaceful settlement and reintegration programs. Cleansing rituals in Mozambique are considered part of the success of the rapid reintegration of demobilized combatants into society (Granjo, 2006). Performed
by healers and diviners, these rituals sought to cleanse and relieve the guilt of acts performed during battle and to indicate to the society that one has repented. The triad that rituals reinforce: power, protection, and kinship, therefore, need to be examined against the two lenses of recruitment and retention to gain an understanding of the effect it may have on peaceful coexistence.

Prevalent within the Acholi belief system is the use of spiritual rituals in times of upheaval as noted in the previous Chapter. An elaborate explanation of cleansing rituals can be found in the work by Thomas Harlacher, who focuses on coping with stress and trauma through cleansing rituals. In his doctoral dissertation, he describes the forms and functions of the rituals laying it in a contextual background of Acholi cosmology (Harlacher, 2009). Rituals such as *mato oput* have their place in healing psychological trauma and provide meaning and explanation to a condition such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While this study will reference these cleansing rituals, their value is in the role they play in peacebuilding.

According to Gates and Nordas, few studies on rebel organization have systematically tried to understand how allegiance is maintained (Gates & Nordas, 2014). In their paper, they use principal agent modeling to ‘explore the logics of recruitment and retention’ in rebel organizations with contestation and without (Gates & Nordas, 2014, p. 7). These authors reaffirm the notion that the social processes of binding groups together follows social networks during initial recruitment. In retention, they consider that rebel groups often engage in ‘systematic strategies of training and indoctrination’ that reinforce a sense of community (Gates & Nordas, 2014, p. 16). This sense of community reinforces the identity of the members of the group and reignites commitment to the ideals of the group.
Recruitment and retention in civil war literature span the various types of rebel groups based on motivations to fight, termed above as contestation. From religious causes, ethnic or ideological justifications certain elements remain across the board. Rebel organizations need their members to remain with the group as numbers may determine victory, to maintain secrecy with regards to strategy and to follow orders. It is important therefore to explore recruitment strategies. There are two ways identified, voluntary or forced recruitment (Weinstein, 2007). In his critically acclaimed book, Weinstein explores these two elements and the effect these have on the civilian populations. He argues that the initial conditions that rebel leaders confront determines the individuals who participate, the strategies of violence and the shape of the rebel group (Weinstein, 2007). His work is illuminating to the conditions under the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and its interconnection with the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces which he uses as a case study. The central findings arising from Weinstein reinforces the notion that external patronage and abundant natural resources are key determinants of high levels of indiscriminate violence, he, however, does not offer great detail to the influence of the spiritual angle.

Beevor writes a comparison between ISIS and the LRA with reference to a term known as charismatic authority. This authority arises when leaders of groups through an indoctrination process, create a coerced sense of dependency amongst their members. Through orders that ensure daily survival and spiritual deliverance, designed to suggest control in the chaotic environment of violence these leaders succeed in proffering identity and meaning, motivating the members to obedience through extreme violence (Beevor, 2016). Beevor provides an explanation to the power that Kony may have utilized in recruitment and retention.
Participation in rebel movements occurs in a social transformative environment. These conditions that Weinstein examines are further elaborated in the work by Stathis Kalyvas as he considers the logic of violence. Kalyvas finds that behind rebel groups, patterns of violence are exerted based on civilian denunciations in areas under its partial control and indiscriminate violence in areas not under its control (Kalyvas, 2006). His work is again illuminating towards how rebel groups interact with the civilian populations that they are part of and the social legacy this leaves behind. Kalyvas however in a similar fashion to Weinstein concentrates on the patterns of the violence and not the spiritual aspect. With relation to the aims of this particular study, his contribution draws attention to the idea of barbarism and sets in motion the examination of the social legacy of civil war.

Wood looks at the social impact of civil war, in particular, its effect on structures, norms, and practices. In one article titled The Social Process of Civil War: The transformation of social networks, she asserts that the six processes that she examines contribute to the legacy left behind by war. In one particular process, military socialization, she quotes Sofsky who agrees with this study that there are not well-documented consequences of military socialization (Wood, 2008). Training and socialization take two forms, in the boot camp for weapons and informally through rituals and hazing. The traumatic forms of induction or the initiation rituals for some groups reinforce the theme above on kinship with ‘commanders being seen as father figures and the group as family’ (Wood, 2008, p. 546).

This implies that an element of socialization occurs within these groups and that rituals play a part in the formation of the new identity that new recruits acquire. A little explored subject area in civil war literature, socialization, and violence as envisioned by
Checkel ought to ‘shed light on how ‘violent norms are transmitted’ (Checkel, 2015). He asserts that socialization is both a process and an outcome and considers the influence, in conjunction with other authors, that persuasion, collective violence, hazing and dehumanization, role playing and instrumental calculations as mechanisms of socialization (Checkel, 2015). These mechanics resonate with the forms of rituals observed in some groups which occur in a temporal and geographical space and therefore the rituals then take various forms manifested in the physical being (body), the physical thing (masks) and the sacred place (the altar).

This section has weaved through the various concepts being observed in this study. From defining the place of rituals and their forms and functions intertwining patterns emerge. The three forms, the body, the masks and the altar combine to reinforce the triad that the spiritual being is evoked to transform in the performer. Power, protection, and kinship play the socio-psychological function that the transformed needs to delve into armed conflict. The social legacy of violence and its patterns as highlighted in civil war literature implies that by the end of the hostilities social networks have been destroyed and bonds changed. How does the recruited transformed performer of the ritual then reintegrate into the society shaped by his actions? The next section offers insight into how reintegration processes have been implemented and the policies that shape them. It examines whether the claim that the Eurocentric view has been instrumental in shaping these policies and questions the silence on belief therein.
The twenty-two years of relative stability in Mozambique has been challenged by the recent rise in hostilities casting shadows on the country’s often celebrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process (Weigink, 2015). Using ethnographic fieldwork Weigink finds that despite the dismantling of the RENAMO rebel structure during the DDR process, there was a continued dependence on relationships shaped by the same military structure. These relationships forged along friendship, marriage, and patronage, provided ‘physical and economic safety, a sense of belonging and economic possibilities’ (Weigink, 2015).

In an innovative small n study using interviews in an area in LRA-affected areas of northeastern DR Congo, Kelly et al. found that the indoctrination methods used on new child recruits served to replace their identity with a newly formed one (Kelly, Branham, & Decker, 2016). Strict isolation, controlled communication and use of witchcraft and secrecy served to reinforce and magnify the power of the group. If one was to trace these techniques against some initiation rituals a similarity could be inferred. The results of the study while illuminating towards the complex system of control that recruits undergo, marginally refers to the ritual of putting gris-gris or witchcraft (through oil or cutting) on the recruits. These recruits later recounted fear of the power these rituals may have on them. The study concludes with a note on the possible long-term mental and socio-psychological impact this would have on reintegration processes.

Ekvik seeks to understand the rural land access of the re-settled Acholi youth after the ceasefire between the UPDF and the LRA (Ekvik, 2016). The findings attained through interviews of thirteen Acholi youth and four experts examine the push and pull factors of migration. It reveals a weak correlation between youths’ rural land access and their rural
resettlement. The urban pull is stronger. While this study illuminates the post-ceasefire migratory patterns, the informants for the paper were not abducted for more than three days and therefore it cannot be definitively stated that the youth are drawn to the anonymity the urban space provides in reintegration. The paper identifies the perception of land as a manifestation of identity and roots and that this perception has changed to one where land is valued for its material benefits as opposed to its spiritual cultural value.

While the ceasefire has been in place for some time, the LRA has not stopped being an active group and indeed it has moved into a transnational group active in the DR Congo and South Sudan. In a research report prepared for the United States government Pearson & Pedersen examine the onset, continuation and cessation of hostilities and claim to provide an alternative narrative to the conflict while examining whether a lasting peace has been achieved (Pearson & Pedersen, 2016) The alternative narrative they offer examines the lack of political will by the Museveni government, the effect of international pressure in the wake of the humanitarian crisis and the cessation of hostilities in South Sudan as cause to cease hostilities. The authors cite interviews with Ugandan local citizens, government officials, aid workers, NGO managers, and U.S. officials to re-evaluate the current degree of stability in Northern Uganda. No mention is made in the alternative narrative of the spiritual beliefs, indoctrination tactics or socialization of violence that could be attributed to the LRA.

As the above review has shown numerous studies into African spiritual beliefs and rituals have alluded to the utility they have in civil war studies. This utility has however not been fully explored and the silence in the literature is one that this study seeks to address using the case of the Lord’s Resistance Army. In seeking further understanding of the
possibility for peacebuilding a theoretical framework is required to tie in the different pieces analyzed above. The next section addresses this framework.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to examine a phenomenon that has been given a wide berth by various scholars in many fields. Most have only alluded to its presence (Haer & Banholzer, 2015; Kelly, Branham, & Decker, 2016). Others have examined its implication in politics (Ellis & Haar, 2004; Ellis, 2007). This study, on the other hand, seeks to put these beliefs and rituals under a lens and see the implication on peacebuilding efforts. Following the advice of a civil war scholar, the lens selected is constructivism (Checkel J., 2011).

Richards looks at the role of religion in African civil wars and contends that the clash of civilizations predicted by Francis Fukuyama is a liberal view while what is needed is a realist view. In his words, ‘War is not a product of the clash of civilizations but a clash of civilizations is a product of war’ (Richards, 2006, p. 651). He goes further to illustrate his claim by examining the origins and actions of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone once captured by the Liberian sects and concludes that ‘action creates belief’. The realist lens Richard uses is drawn from Durkheim’s teachings. As a lens that looks at civil war in Africa realism is useful, however, inadequate as it neglects to incorporate the agent-structure relationship which the constructivist's view weaves delicately.

Other studies use organizational or institutional theory to explain the group (Gates & Nordas, 2014; Kalyvas, 2006; Weinstein, 2007). Kalyvas, Scott and Nordas, Weinstein too, looked at the armed group and the interaction between the command and control structures similar to those in organizations. The pecuniary and non-pecuniary incentives are measurable and the organizational lens provides an easily understood model. It does not, however, take
into account the social processes of identity formation nor consider the dynamics these processes have in reflecting the structure and the agent.

Checkel argues convincingly for the inclusion of the constructivist view. He contends that interaction between agents and structures, the theory of linking individual action to their environment is the logic of appropriateness. By examining the world as humans live in it as socially constructed, constructivism holds the middle ground between realism and critical theory. To quote Adler,

‘Constructivism is the view that the manner that which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world (Adler, 2005, p. 90).’

In other words, constructivism, for this study will illuminate how the rituals and beliefs used to recruit and retain members into the armed groups selected as they shape their material world and the implications this new world view has after the political settlement has been reached and the hostilities have ceased.

Socialization plays a key role as a process of integration into the armed group. Recent studies in socialization and violence by Checkel and others further clarifies this process and raises salient point appropriate for understanding civil war (Checkel, 2015). The shift that socialization brings questions of whether the recruit internalized, simply complied or identified with the armed group will have implications on their reintegration into society.

This study agrees with the contention that social theories that are without considerations of power, interest, and institutions are incomplete (Checkel, 2011). The studies that have examined the relationships that ex-combatants have within their former command networks neglect to examine the rituals and beliefs that bind them together and
forge the institution that makes the group work. The constructivist lens with its emphasis on social discourse, norms, interest, kinship and belonging, power, and socialization seems an adequate framework.

2.2 Chapter Summary

The section above has reviewed some of the literature available on the rituals and beliefs that have been used. As a form, the body, the mask and the altar are the primary areas in which rituals as performance are expressed. Placed against the function in power, protection, and kinship and belonging these forms take on a different meaning when applied to recruitment and retention. Further, still, the social legacy that civil war leaves behind

This section further suggested that a constructivist lens would frame the variables presented in this study. By comparing the norms as the rituals, the institution as the rebel group and the socialization as the individual’s experience, constructivism as a theory reflect the interactions that power, protection, kinship and belonging would affect peacebuilding.

Numerous studies cited above use qualitative and quantitative methodologies to address their aims. From ethnography to large n methods various results and findings have been elaborated. The next Chapter seeks to lay the foundation for the methodology that this study will take and further provide a conceptual framework that indicates the nexus between the variables thus far considered.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study proposed to describe the form and functions of the rituals and beliefs as used by the Lord’s Resistance Army and to explore and describe its effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration. The introductory Chapter described the background where this study finds its aims. African history and present are steeped with examples of rituals and beliefs being used to provide protection, power and kinship and belonging.

This theme was further explored in the previous chapter laid out the relevant literature present that examines spiritual beliefs and rituals. Tracing the civil war literature and other texts, the gap identified showed that an exploratory examination of the effect spiritual beliefs and rituals used by the Lord’s Resistance Army of Northern Uganda (LRA) and their effect on peacebuilding. The literature further implored that a thorough examination in any matter must follow a vigorous methodology, one that captures the social processes while looking out for researcher bias.

This Chapter, therefore, seeks to lay out the design of the study and elucidate further on the selection of the case of the Lord’s Resistance Army. It gives a brief history of the conflict as influenced by the aims of the study and provides information for the manner in which the study attempted to answer the research questions posed.

3.2 Case Selection

Patton (1990) and Palys (2008) who have identified various case selection methods describe that critical case sampling is one that permits ‘a logical inference about the phenomenon of interest’ to be examined (Bryman, 2012, p. 419). The turbulent political
history of Northern Uganda was of particular interest as it embodies the phenomenon under review.

As elucidated earlier the precursor to the conflict the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces was an Acholi led force. Northern Uganda had been the focus of a concerted effort by the Ugandan government under President Yoweri Museveni to contain the activities of insurgent activities. Anecdotal accounts of interactions between the UPDF and the LRA reveal that a spiritual battle also took place while a physical one occurred. In the form detailed by Ellis and Ter Haar where there is a wealth of information not captured by academics because it is oral, these anecdotes and narratives demonstrate the need to investigate the role of spiritual beliefs in how war is conceptualized (Ellis & Haar, 2004).

The complex phases of the war in Northern Uganda have been described elsewhere (see (Dolan, 2009; Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010)) but to serve the purpose of determining the case selection a brief description suffices here. Troops of the new National Resistance Movement (NRM) government under President Yoweri Museveni moved north in 1986 in pursuit of soldiers of the previous government, many of them of the Acholi ethnic group. This was after the NRM’s successful capture of Kampala and overthrow of the previous regime. These ex-soldiers left their weapons and tried to merge into the population. Some however regrouped to fight against the new government. It is in this tumultuous period that Joseph Kony and his eventual force the LRA appeared following the defeat of Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Mobile Forces. Despite initial popular support from the community, the brutal nature of the government forces and the eventual retaliation on the people by the LRA this support dwindled. Abductions, mass killings, and terror tactics characterize the nature of the LRA activities in Northern Uganda. Peaceful co-existence has been witnessed
since 2006 despite sporadic incidents and therefore the presence of returnees from the LRA in Gulu where reception centers were set up seemed appropriate as a primary investigation site.

For the case to be selected to determine the spiritual beliefs and rituals scope of the study, the characterization of Kony’s spiritual abilities as a prophet or messenger is valuable. When he was described in local media and academic papers, he is said to be possessed by spirits who tell him what to do and when to attack. These spirits also seem to give him an almost invincible nature considering he has managed to evade capture for over thirty years. Various rituals and beliefs have been described as being part of his ideology including the following of the Ten Commandments and the use of moo ya (shea butter) for protection and power. It is then a case that would enable the research objective to be interrogated. The use of traditional cleansing rituals towards returning abductees in the interest of repair and reconstruction further extended the ritualistic aspect of the study as it explored the pattern of peaceful co-existence thus far achieved in the area.

3.3 Research Design

The study was designed as a preliminary qualitative investigation into an understudied phenomenon. Research design took into consideration that this study was both exploratory and descriptive. The purpose of the study as detailed was to describe the form and functions of rituals and beliefs as used by the Lord’s Resistance Army and to explore and describe its effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration.

The subject matter relates to politico-religious interactions a subject matter that Twaddle considers broad interpretations and long-term projections difficult (Twaddle, 1995). Indeed any study of armed groups and even more their beliefs and internal processes are
challenging to uncover and even harder to measure. However, this does not mean a study cannot be designed that attempts to uncover the underlying relationships between the variables selected.

A single method approach follows from the need to build an illustrative case study that explores, describes and provides evidence whether or not there is an interaction between the variables identified. The single method approach identified was key informant interviews bolstered by triangulation. It deviates from the trend in civil war literature analyzed earlier that uses quantitative methods and secondly, it enables the historical context of the single case under observation to enhance the findings.

Coppedge argues that case studies are for intensive testing and theory development (Coppedge, 2007) in response to Gerring (2007). In the same symposium, Liberman argues that we ought to diagram the argument in a series of steps (Liberman, 2007) a contention when placed against the notion that it is difficult to test all the assumptions that go into constructing quantitative tests makes sense (Smith, 2007).

In this vein then, a qualitative single case study research design method enables evidence gathered to be interpreted in a limited number of ways and therefore more reliable (Mahoney, 2007; Smith, 2007). The limitations of case study methods are that they are weak in hypothesis testing, external validity, specifying causal effects and working with broad propositions (Coppedge, 2007; Mahoney, 2007). However, their strengths will complement this study as they are good at locating causal mechanism and working with deep propositions while rigid on internal validity. The social scientists aim is to generate knowledge while explaining the particular and making generalizations that apply to broader populations (Smith, 2007; Gerring, 2007). It was therefore anticipated that the use of the single case study
would meet this objective. The selection of the method follows the advice that Bryman offers where the ‘interviewees’ own behavior or that of others is valuable in determining attitudes; norms; beliefs; and values (Bryman, 2012, p. 209).

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

As an exploratory study, certain considerations were employed in the selection of the data collection method, the sampling of the respondents and the nature of the questions.

Over the period of a week, data was collected in locations within and surrounding Gulu, Northern Uganda. The locations identified are Laliya Parish, Cuk wi Got, Gulu Mosque and the office of the Ker Kwaro Acholi. These locations were selected due to their proximity to the respondents. The Human Rights Focus Resource Center in Gulu was also a valuable location for collecting documentary evidence that was used in the literature review and analysis of the data collected. This complimented evidence collected from The United States International University- Africa library online and offline resources. The study was carried out with the affiliation of the Northern Uganda Research Council who provided institutional support. Various sources within the network of family and friends provided financial and in-kind support to enable the fieldwork to be conducted.

The selection of the respondents was through opportunistic purposive sampling where six returnees; three male and three female, a religious community leader and the Prime Minister of Acholiland and leader of the local council Ker Kwaro Acholi were drawn. These groups were selected to substantively enable the research questions to be answered. The respondents selected arose from interactions with a local academic researcher based in Gulu
University whose experience with conducting studies in the area was useful in navigating the complexities of language and space.

A semi-structured interview guide was designed using the research objectives in mind. It was not strictly adhered to and the questions asked followed up from the respondent's answers. Only one interview was recorded while the rest were written in shorthand depending on the response proffered by the translator. These notes were then transcribed and given to the translator for correction and clarification. Present at each interview were the researcher, the translator, and the interviewee.

The main goal of this study was to uncover if there were any patterns linking spiritual rituals and beliefs and peacebuilding through the methods used in recruiting and retention of the members of the Lord’s Resistance Army. As the interview guide shows, questions were asked of the experiences the returnees had as they became members of the LRA. This was an attempt to uncover if the spiritual beliefs and rituals espoused by the LRA were part of their recruitment and retention. With regards to the peacebuilding, the trial of Dominic Ongwen provided a baseline to uncover the respondent's attitudes towards cleansing, a significant part of the Acholi culture. The data analysis technique that was employed was observer impression. The information will be placed against the themes identified through the literature available and the responses generated from the interviews.

3.5 Ethical Standards

The ethical consideration here refers to confidentiality. Prior to the interviews being conducted each respondent was told of the nature of the study and asked which language they preferred the interview to be conducted. The interviews were done one on one to maintain
confidentiality in the answers and each respondent was informed of their option not to answer questions if they were not comfortable or to terminate the interview if they felt they did not want to continue. Emphasis on whether the respondents were willing to reveal their identities and that they acknowledge the voluntary nature of the interview was expressed severally throughout the process.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

Time and Cost- As self-funded research, the implications of spending a considerable amount of time in the area was a large limitation as it had a consequential implication on costs. This limitation was mitigated through a telephonic interaction with a local researcher whose extensive network in the area enabled planning time to be cut short. It may raise concern however that perhaps a skewed respondent set was selected. However, the extensive research history of the local academic researcher was reassuring of his credibility.

Language- Among the returnees, the language barrier presented a limitation. Being primarily Acholi speakers, the services of a male and female translator were required. This meant that all expect one interview with returnees was conducted through the use of a translator. This limited the subtle nuances that conversational Acholi use was lost and the interview depended on the interpretation offered by the translator. In interpreting as well the biases of the translator sometimes shown through and this was addressed by asking the questions using different words.

Overresearched respondents- The case of the LRA has been a subject of the academic and nongovernmental organizations for a long time, particularly the returnees. In this regard narratives of abduction and escape took on a canned and practiced tone. Questions on
spirituality and rituals, however, were received and answered differently with a change in tone and animation.

Methodology- The method chosen to conduct this study was face to face interviews. While this enabled data to be collected, the study if done again would largely benefit from an ethnographic methodology. Questions on culture, belief, and rituals are deeply personal and the impression given is that a deeper investigation into the phenomenon of spirituality and war would reveal greater nuances and reveal the contradictions further. As this study was designed as exploratory the method selected allowed for subtle patterns to be uncovered. These patterns would however greatly benefit from thick descriptions that ethnography and participant observation can produce.

3.7 Conclusion

As this Chapter elucidates the method used to select the case, the techniques used to gather data, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study have been described. The technique used in gathering the data was key informant interviews whose aim was to uncover the attitudes and beliefs of various informants. These informants were selected purposefully and were significant in an attempt to uncover attitudes of the community as the study sought to examine the patterns underlying peaceful co-existence. The limitations of the study present a framework for future researchers to consider should they decide to pursue a similar design. As well some of the ethical considerations are outlined as they take into account the completion of the study within academic timelines. The information gathered will be elaborated in the next chapter as the descriptions and explanations received provide various themes that have been identified. The respondent’s views are presented and briefly analyzed against existing literature.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Previous Chapters have discussed civil war literature which has produced extensive quantitative and qualitative studies contributing to knowledge regarding rebel groups. However, a comprehensive investigation into the role that indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals play in the recruitment, retention and Peacebuilding effort is thus far absent (Eck, 2010; Gates & Nordas, 2014). Indigenous spiritual beliefs and rituals are endemic to the African continent and the described continued uses of its rituals indicate a significant relation to rebel groups. This gap in the studies of rebel groups may have implications for understanding the formation of these groups and possibly identify factors not considered in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs.

The study sought to establish the role that African spiritual belief and rituals play if any, in the recruitment and retention of rebel group members in the LRA and to determine if this had a negative effect on long-term peacebuilding. The following questions; what forms and functions do the beliefs and ritual practices used by the Lord’s Resistance Army have and how do they relate to recruitment, retention, and peacebuilding? And secondly, what has been the effect of these rituals and beliefs on the peaceful settlement? ; provided the basis for the semi-structured interview guide (to be found in the Annex). They also guided the selection of respondents based on their ability to provide context, attitude, and beliefs. The findings detailed below provide a basis to substantively discuss the patterns uncovered.
4.2 Demographic Analysis

The methodology used opportunistic purposive sampling where six returnees; three male and three female, a religious community leader, the first director of Gulu Support the Children Center (GUSCO) and the Prime Minister of Acholiland who is also the leader of the local council Ker Kwaro Acholi were drawn. These groups were selected for the research questions to be answered. Each group of respondents will be explained further.

The Returnees: Six former members of the LRA were (sampled) selected. Three male and three female returnees were interviewed at their respective locations. They had all been abducted at ages ranging from seven to 16 years old. The returnees had stayed with the LRA between three months and three years and had been reintegrated back into the community for more than five years. They had gone to either GUSCO rehabilitation or World Vision Reception Center. This detail is important as each center provided a significant difference in how spirituality was addressed. One female respondent returned into the community with a child born while in captivity. The youngest of the respondents was nineteen years old and the oldest was thirty. The female respondents were interviewed in the marketplace Cuk Wi Got outside Gulu Central Business District where one works as a charcoal seller and the other two as tailors. The male respondents were interviewed at a school in Laliya Parish District a few kilometers from Gulu Town each of them described their primary occupation as subsistence farmers and as board members of a school for the children of returnees based there in Laliya Parish. The returnees were selected to provide insight into the two research questions based on their experiences with the rebel group and the reintegration process. As the key objective was to investigate beliefs, attitudes, and norms the semi-structured interview guide provided a basis from which spirituality and peace could be discussed.
Community Leaders: The first community leader interviewed was Ambrose Oloo, the Prime Minister of Acholiland and leader of the local council Ker Kwaro Acholi. The 1995 constitution of Uganda opened up the recognition of traditional authority structures being recognized alongside the presidential structure. For the Acholi, this lies in the Executive Council of Acholi Traditional Leaders “Ker Kwaro Acholi”. The Prime Minister is the executive director of the local council and therefore represents the 57 chiefs under this local council and also represents the governance structure of Acholiland. The cleansing rituals are run through the Ker Kwaro Acholi and therefore this respondent was best placed to answer questions on the perception of the communities’ elders, the experiences of the community on a macro level of the LRA and the returnees and to provide background on the cosmology of the Acholi as relating to spiritual beliefs. All Hajji Sheik Musa Khalil was the second community leader respondent interviewed. He is the Vice Chairperson of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ALPI). ALPI is an interfaith group whose key successes include being at the forefront of the creation of the Ugandan Amnesty Act, assisted in the bringing back of abductees into the community and advocated for the non-violence approach between the LRA and the UPDF (Uganda People’s Defense Force) in some circumstances. As an interfaith dialogue group, this initiative brought together religious leaders of various faiths in interceding on behalf of the Acholi community. Sheik Khalil is also the Chairman for the Acholi Muslim Leaders Association and has also acted as the district Khadi. His opinion brought to the study an alternative perspective on the place of Islam regarding cleansing and the peacebuilding process. George Omona was the final community leader interviewed. While at Gulu Support the Children Center (GUSCO) he served as its first director and has been involved with returnees since 1994 both in Uganda and in the
Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although he is no longer with GUSCO, his years of experience with returnees was valuable in providing insight into the rituals that they underwent, the value spiritual beliefs played to the returnees and his perspective on the peaceful co-existence experienced in Northern Uganda since 2006.

These respondent groups provided the findings detailed below.

4.3 Presentation of Findings

The key findings of this study are that according to the respondents interviewed:

i. Spiritual beliefs and rituals did not play a part as a recruiting tool. Primarily, abduction was the method the LRA used to fill up their ranks. Hazing rituals were invoked after the abduction and were the basis of the belief in the leadership of Kony.

ii. The spiritual beliefs and rituals that the LRA were performing as part of retention were based on the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony and served to provide protection, power, and belonging

iii. The spiritual beliefs and rituals used by Joseph Kony are not directly linked to the peace process but spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Acholi, the community where the LRA have largely drawn their ranks, are directly linked to the peacebuilding process and continue to play a key part and provides an alternative spiritual explanation to the cause of the war.

iv. The peacebuilding process and the DDR process has elements of spirituality that needs to be explored further, however, economic disenfranchisement plays a role too.
The respondents were each asked various questions depending on their perceived contribution. The returnees were primarily interviewed in Acholi through an interpreter while the community leaders were interviewed in English directly. The semi-structured interview guide was not strictly adhered to as the respondent's answers were taken up as the next point of interest.

The themes explored sought to address the research questions on recruitment, retention, and peacebuilding. Each respondent began by giving a background to who they were and how they got involved either with the LRA, the peacebuilding process or both. In the case of the returnees, their abduction stories provided context to their experiences with the group and how they perceived themselves. The community leaders also explained how their involvement began or continued.

The themes explored in the interview process arose directly from the research questions and as the next Chapter will show in the discussion, these themes partly reaffirmed the notion that the spiritual rituals provided a sense of protection, power, and belonging. The respondents also commented on the ongoing International Criminal Court case against Dominic Ongwen and the possibility of long-term peace being achieved in Northern Uganda. In each case, the linkage between rituals, beliefs, and peace was discussed and these findings are presented below.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Recruitment and Retention

It was the assumption of this study that spiritual rituals and beliefs relate to recruitment and retention and the interview questions were designed in an attempt to address this assumption. The findings of the study are that the notions of power, protection, and belonging arose from the returnees as they directly participated in the activities of the group.
and these were reaffirmed by the community leaders in their dealings with the returnees and the community. It was however clarified that although various rituals were performed, these all related to the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony and not the returnees themselves.

Regarding the use of rituals, none of the respondents felt that they actually had any power, however, each of them acknowledged that Joseph Kony was powerful. Two of the respondents said that they had met him in Jebelein the LRA camp in South Sudan. In one case the respondent said that she had been taken to him directly because she was unable to eat meat.

‘He prayed for me and we were close because he said I was a special one. I helped to look after his children. He is very powerful even before you do something he knows.’

The other respondent in her abduction story narrated how she had taken control of the situation and showed them that she was willing to do what it took to stay alive. For her, the power came from the gun and not the rituals. However, like each of the respondents, male and female, they acknowledged that if Kony said only a group of twelve and named them, should go and raid and a commander disobeyed and instead sent fourteen, the extra two would not return.

As relates recruitment and retention rituals two, in particular, arose, ‘resting’ and the application of moo ya (shea butter). Once they had been abducted, if any of the new abducted could not keep up with the group, they would be asked by a commander ‘Who wants to rest?’ If any of the new abducted who would raise their hands they would be asked to lie down and the rest of the group would pick up logs and beat them to death. This was narrated by all the returnees and each expressed that fear was instilled in them. The second
ritual was when moo ya or shea butter was applied on their forehead and chest in the shape of a cross and they were informed that from that point on they were being watched by Kony and he would find them if they ran away. Three of the respondents acknowledged this as the reason why they did not run away the first chance they got. One in particular said,

‘After they apply moo ya, I saw for myself one boy who tried to run away and he must have run around in circles because he came back saying he had been in the forest confused. The commanders killed him. I never thought about running away after that only when Operation (referring to Operation Iron Fist) happened is when I ran.’

This, in particular, emphasized that while no specific rituals apart from training in weaponry, no other specific spiritual rituals were performed apart from anointing with shea butter.

‘You know, Kony he has power. We were out in the fields and ahead of us were UPDF but they couldn’t see us. Kony had sent us to collect his special water from the hill near Odek and told us not to fight. So when the soldiers were ahead of us, it suddenly began to rain with heavy mist only between us and the soldiers. Everywhere else, no rain. We got away’

This arose from a question on whether the respondent interviewed felt protected. The respondent’s view was that Kony himself was the one protected and that protection extended to the group through him.

‘If you do what Kony tells you to do exactly like he tells you, nothing will happen to you but if you disobey him, you will get hurt or die.’

One female respondent was adamant that if only the LRA and its commanders had followed the instructions as they had been given exactly as they had been told, Kony would have already become president of Uganda. However when asked whether she believed he
still had the power to protect her even now she fell silent and then responded that now she is saved by Jesus and that Kony has no more influence.

Each of the returnees when asked, ‘At what point did you feel like you belonged?’ responded that they never felt like they belonged because they had been abducted. However, when asked about belonging only one respondent said,

‘When we were raiding the Dinka you were together. Whatever you got you shared.’

The returnees both male and female acknowledged and agreed that Joseph Kony had spirits and they had believed that these guided him. When asked if these spirits were evil, none gave a definitive answer. They just acknowledged the existence of the spirits. When asked if they were protected by God while in the bush they responded in the affirmative and if this was the same God that protected Kony the respondents said they don’t know. It was however clear that according to the returnees interviewed, even if there were rituals in the daily life of the LRA each of these spiritual rituals related to Kony. It was through him that notions of power, protection, and belonging arose.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Peacebuilding

The second research question sought to answer whether there were any patterns that could be drawn between the rituals and spiritual beliefs and peacebuilding. This entailed interviewing those who had been close to the peacebuilding process. For the Acholi, the cleansing rituals associated with peace and reconciliation were a key part of the questions asked both to the community leaders and the returnees. As the ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen was ongoing during the data collection period this was a key starting point.
The returnees except one felt that the trial was unfair considering that he; Dominic had been similarly abducted and lived through shared experiences. When asked whether he should simply undertake *mato oput* and be given amnesty they said yes. However, it was not that simple as the head of Ker Kwaro Acholi explained.

“It has been misconstrued how *mato oput* works and there needs to be clarification. There are different rituals on three levels, for the individual, the community and for the legal justice system. The traditional system of justice for the Acholi is about collective responsibility and accountability. Without this, it does not work.”

He went further to explain;

“In Acholi cosmology, there is a divine cord that runs through five levels vertically and horizontally […] when this cord is broken by one harming another it has to be mended.”

When asked about the role Joseph Kony plays in this Divine Cord considering his spiritual beliefs and the rituals he has used, the response received revealed the entrenched relationship between the community and spirituality.

“There are forces that seek to break this divine cord between the vertical and horizontal bonds. These are not just broken by human beings but also by spirits. Kony is outside this divine cord and he has said severally that he seeks to destroy the Acholi….The elders speculate that when the Acholi soldiers who were recruited by the British to go to fight in the World Wars, they came back and never went through cleansing. That may be why Kony has spirits that speak Italian and other languages. It may be that the spirits of those killed in those wars came back and waited for the moment that the community was at its weakest in 1986 and hence took over Alice Lakwena and Kony.”
The idea of the spirits remaining was echoed by the former director of GUSCO who reported that sometimes when he was conducting his work he found that his experiences conflicted with his Christian faith.

“In places where major atrocities were committed such as Atiak, as the villagers went back they would come back and complain that they would walk and hear people talking while there was nobody there. Or strange things happening and they would be convinced that it was the spirits of those who had been left behind that needed to be appeased.”

He narrates another incident,

“In one case I will never forget when one girl (a returnee) at the reception center begun to talk like a man and said that the girl he possessed had killed him and that he needed to be appeased. I had no budget for any rituals but I felt to help this girl I needed to do something. So I sent a social worker along with the girl and her parents and they killed a goat ritually. The girl then became normal again. How do I explain this to myself…I have asked psychologists and they have said it is the girl who believed it and it is a kind of schizophrenia but I don’t know. But I started to put in my budget means to cater for these rituals of cleansing.”

In contrast to the other respondents Sheik Musa Khalil because of Islam and its attendant precepts said that:

“We as Muslims we do not believe in cleansing. It is against our religion. We encourage any returnees who have come back to the mosque to rely on Allah and His divine guidance.”

Regarding the returnees as they reintegrate back into their communities, all except one went through nyono tonggweno (“stepping on the egg”). None had gone through mato oput. The respondent who had not undergone the ritual of nyono tonggweno (“stepping on the egg”) said
“I am a Christian now and my family did not see the need for me to go through any rituals.”

In the course of the interviews, the returnees were asked why they went through the rituals and they responded that they had been told by the elders that they had to go through them. When this was further interrogated by being asked whether they believed they were evil, overwhelmingly they said that they were not. It was observed that their spiritual lives in the LRA and outside it was not related as all the returnees belonged to a Christian church and all professed deep faith as God had protected them while in the hands of the LRA.

The question of long-term peace, however, revealed that despite the cleansing rituals and the detachment by the returnees to spirituality as practiced within the LRA, economic considerations now took precedence. As the respondent had earlier commented on the egalitarian nature of life in the LRA where everything was shared their new lives in a capitalistic world has left them disillusioned. This sentiment was echoed by the community leaders.

The head of Ker Kwaro Acholi narrates:

“There is a former brigadier in the LRA who received amnesty and settled back into Gulu. However, he found that all the property he had left behind had been taken by his family and he had nothing. So here he is. He was formerly a man of means in the LRA and here he is nothing. The case is in the courts and we are trying to help him through the formal justice system but still, he was once powerful and now he is powerless.”

He goes further to echo a sentiment shared by the former director of GUSCO and confirmed through informal discussions with local community members around Gulu that the common assumption is that after the conclusion of the trial of Dominic Ongwen, the same
way that justice is collective and has a compensation element in the traditional system is the same way that then there would be compensation from the conclusion of the Ongwen trial that would uplift the community. There was also shared a dissatisfaction with the manner in which the lives of the returnees have fared post-demobilization and reintegration with all returnees stating that economically they were disadvantaged.

4.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has provided a summary of the findings on whether spiritual beliefs and rituals played a part in the recruitment and retention of members to the LRA. It has been illuminated by the respondents particularly the returnees that while they were forcefully recruited, their introduction to the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony’s leadership provided a basis for their retention rather than any particular rituals while with the LRA. Conditions of their recruitment notwithstanding, the initial ritual where shea butter is used to ward off escape played a role in their staying with the group. It cannot be discounted however the violence of the resting ritual also provided a disincentive (fear) for escaping. Shared experiences between the returnees revealed a similar belief in the power the perceived spiritual aura that Kony exudes. This led to the returnees expressing the various experiences they had while out in the bush where the felt protected and provided with belonging through the shared activities they performed.

However, with regard to their reintegration, which points to the spiritual rituals and beliefs of the Acholi, acceptance to the community through the cleansing rituals has a significant impact. While this has been explored by other academics, the new knowledge the study has revealed is the communities’ perception of the spiritual cause of the war. The idea that the lack of cleansing which never took place preceding the return of the Acholi soldiers
from the world wars as the reason for the spiritual possession of Joseph Kony and Alice Lakwena points to its importance to the Acholi to continue cleansing rituals. A practice challenged by some religious leaders and organizations such as World Vision. It raises the question of what happens in cases where all the returnees don’t go through cleansing as raised by the Sheik and some of the returnees. The next Chapter explores this and other patterns as the findings are placed in context and discussed.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study is based on the premise that the physical world alone may not hold the answers to how rebel groups recruit and retain members. It further holds the assumption that the non-physical also plays a role in how peaceful existence and peacebuilding occur. The non-physical alludes to the realm of spiritual beliefs and rituals. If Napoleon is to be believed that in war the ability for one army is to frighten the other sufficiently to gain an advantage as the quote in the beginning of the study suggests, then the examples across history require a second look.

In Africa, one group has managed to not only survive the other army for over twenty years but also its leader presently evades capture. The inauspicious beginnings of the Lord’s Resistance Army closely linked with another group the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces held spiritual beliefs and rituals central to its ideology. An examination of civil war literature showed a lacuna in the role these spiritual beliefs and rituals played in recruitment and retention as well as the effect they have on peacebuilding. It was then the objectives of this study to describe the form and functions of these rituals and beliefs as used by the Lord’s Resistance Army and secondly to explore and describe its effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration.

The previous Chapters have laid a foundation for the study, examined the existing literature and a theoretical framework, explained the methodology used to meet its objectives and in the previous chapter presented its findings and results. This Chapter, therefore, seeks to tie all these elements together and attempt to discuss the significance of the study. It begins by providing a summary of the study which describes the previous chapters. It then
goes into a summary of the key findings. A discussion of these findings then follows with the aim of illuminating the findings of the study against existing literature and terminates with concluding remarks and recommendations for future research and practice.

5.2 Summary of Study

In the literature review Chapter, it was established that this study was not a commentary on the actual indigenous beliefs but simply an address of their utility in times of armed conflict. Following the maxim set out by Greetz when studying beliefs and rituals that two roles should be fulfilled, an analysis of the beliefs and rituals and an examination of their socio-psychological structural role (Greetz, 1966). With these parameters set out, the literature review sought to establish what had been said about armed conflict and rituals and beliefs.

Durkheim’s commentary on solidarities and social inclusion through ritual offered insight into the idea of identities forming through ritual. He placed emphasis through the forming of solidarities’ through the loss of individual identity and the forging of group identity towards the cohesive performance of tasks (Richards, 2006). As this study revealed, the cohesive performance of tasks reinforced belonging as discussed by the returnee describing raiding. This study, therefore, found a collective identity forged through a common task that engaged members of the LRA.

Three areas were identified as considered by Ellis, Grillo and Richards, masks, the altar and the body as playing a role in the transformative power of ritual and belief. Masks represent ‘containment and mastery of power’ while the masquerade itself reveals this power to be seen and believed (Grillo, 2012, p. 116; Ellis, 2007; Richards, 2006). These authors discussed the transformative power as they observed conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
The function of the transformative power under examination is in offering protection, power, and belonging. As was discussed in Chapter Two this triad provided group members social bonds lost in the conflict and forge new identities similar to how Durkheim hypothesized. It is through the transformative power aspect that pointed the study to Northern Uganda and the specific case of the Lord’s Resistance Army.

Gates and Nordas when considering allegiance further reaffirm the notion that the social processes of binding groups together follow social networks during initial recruitment. In retention, they consider that rebel groups often engage in ‘systematic strategies of training and indoctrination’ that reinforce a sense of community (Gates & Nordas, 2014, p. 16). Allegiance allows for the variables of recruitment and retention to be considered alongside transformative powers of beliefs and rituals. In this study, allegiance has been found in the retention element through the smearing of moo ya as a protective charm and the convincing idea that Kony’s powers were sufficient in seeing escape or protective in case of ambush.

Weinstein’s identification of recruitment as either forced or voluntary and its effect on the populations the groups are part of reinforcing the notion that external patronage and abundant natural resources are key determinants of high levels of indiscriminate violence left out spirituality or charismatic authority despite examining the Lord’s Resistance Army. He argues that the initial conditions that rebel leaders confront determines the individuals who participate, the strategies of violence and the shape of the rebel group (Weinstein, 2007). Kalyvas similarly looks at patterns of violence and his illuminating work shows some logic to violence and control (Kalyvas, 2006). However what had been missing is the discussion of where spiritual beliefs and ritual plays a role. This study agrees with Weinstein and Kalyvas that as a rebel leader, Joseph Kony determined that abduction was the best way to recruit and
goes further to underscore his use of his charismatic authority to reinforce a belief in his ability to protect those who were within his grasp with spirituality.

Beevor’s depiction of the charismatic authority that Kony displays proved to be a useful tool for analyzing the findings of this study. As she had indicated in her paper, the use of the person of the leader to compel the members of his group to perform acts of violence was illustrated by the respondents. Charismatic authority seems to be a key finding that has been backed up in the literature.

Socialization and violence as envisioned by Checkel ought to ‘shed light on how ‘violent norms are transmitted asserting that socialization is both a process and an outcome and considers the influence that persuasion, collective violence, hazing and dehumanization, role playing, and instrumental calculations as mechanisms of socialization (Checkel, 2015). This leads to the work of Weigink who found that there was a continued reliance on relationships shaped by the same shared military experience. These relationships forged along friendship, marriage, and patronage, provided ‘physical and economic safety, a sense of belonging and economic possibilities’ (Weigink, 2015).

It is therefore appropriate that the theoretical framework that anchors this study is constructivism in agreement with the notion that social theories that are without considerations of power, interest, and institutions are incomplete (Checkel, 2011). The logic of appropriateness, according to Checkel allows for socialization and violence to be examined. Constructivism acknowledges the value of the structure agent dynamic and calls attention to norms, attitudes, and beliefs as valuable to understanding how the conflict transformed environment as discussed by Wood is influenced (Wood, 2008).
Using this backdrop of existing literature and theoretical framework, a qualitative exploratory study was carried out in Northern Uganda where nine respondents were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The study was conducted with the use of opportunistic purposive sampling method to identify key respondents and crucial case selection method to identify the case study under investigation.

The key findings of the study are presented in the following section.

5.3 Key Findings

The semi-structured interviews yielded the following key findings and these are presented below with a brief explanation. For an in-depth analysis see the discussion section. This study had set out to describe the form and functions of the spiritual rituals and beliefs as used by the LRA and to explore and describe its effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration.

A key finding of the study was that spiritual beliefs and rituals were not used in recruiting. The LRA used abduction as the main recruiting tool used. Recruitment into rebel groups has been discussed by Weinstein as either forced or voluntary (Weinstein, 2007) and in the case of forced recruitment, as espoused by the returnee respondents, the spiritual beliefs and rituals of the LRA were not considered as recruitment tools.

Retention on the other hand or the reason why the returnees stayed long after they had been abducted was found to be a result of the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony and served to provide protection, power, and belonging. The claims of the commanders in charge of the returnees or the returnees experiences themselves forged in their minds a sense of protection from the Ugandan Defense Forces while out on patrol from Kony. Further to this, a sense of power was attained as they held weapons and meted out violence as part of the
group. This also translated into a sense of belonging where, as one returnee explained that when they were raiding they were together. The anointing with shea butter, the prayers before going out perhaps infused these notions but the returnees did not point to these directly. It would, however, seem the ritual where shea butter was used as an intimidation tool where abductees were anointed at told they would become visible to Kony if they tried to escape was effective. It played a central role to the belief of the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony and the violence associated with ‘resting’ a convincing tactic.

One surprising finding was the alternative spiritual explanation to the cause of the war. The LRA’s spiritual beliefs were not central in the peacebuilding process but instead, those of the Acholi emerged as the key factor in peaceful reintegration. This alternative spiritual explanation involved the return of Acholi soldiers after the world wars without going through cleansing and their return with the spirits of those they had killed abroad remaining and attacking the community through Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony. It is these spirits which possess these rebel group leaders and caused the rise and longevity of the movements they led.

There are several cleansing and reconciliation process at the heart of the peacebuilding in Northern Uganda including mato oput. The study had not set out to investigate these rituals as much had been written about them however they emerged as fundamental to understanding peaceful co-existence. Mato oput has an element of compensation that must be met for it to be a complete ceremony. For a community that has been devastated by war for over twenty years economics, not spirituality seems to occupy their consciousness. This was the second surprising finding, that the economic
disenfranchisement that is felt by returnees and not spiritual beliefs or rituals that will threaten peace in future.

5.4 Discussion

At the heart of this study is the question of whether spiritual beliefs and rituals are compelling enough for men and women to rally to a rebel group such as the LRA and participate in the socially transforming armed conflict. The assumptions that the beliefs held by Joseph Kony may have been a common cause have been dispelled by the returnees interviewed because they were forcefully abducted. The number of forceful abductions has been estimated to be between roughly 50,000–72,000 young people since the 1990s (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010) and perhaps this may have led to the finding that for recruitment, spiritual beliefs and rituals were not central. However, those interviewed were not present at the beginning of the insurgency in 1986. Perhaps they would tell a different story.

The trial of Dominic Ongwen was a key question to returnees as their perceptions’ on peacebuilding were interrogated. Each of the returnees agreed that he had been abducted just as they had even if they disagreed on the correct form of justice that should be meted against him. While they shared their common origins into the group, the question of why they stayed as he did, is another matter altogether. Retention was a pillar of this study and the returnees responses pointed not to the ideology of the group but to the charismatic authority of their leader. Whether it was the protection they felt as described in the incident where mist covered the troupe as they passed UPDF or the power that the gun gave them. Even the confusion his friend experienced as witnessed by one returnee as he tried to escape and the violence meted out on his return.
Recruitment and retention are central to how rebel groups keep their numbers and maintain their visibility (Gates & Nordas, 2014; Weinstein, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006). For the LRA their strategy of abduction kept their numbers up however due to a lack of information one can’t substantively consider their attrition rate. As the activities of the LRA in Northern Uganda have waned since 2006 the numbers of those still active remain uncertain. Regarding recruitment and retention what has emerged from this study, thus far, is both the belief that Joseph Kony has spiritual guides is firm and these guides are the reason for his charisma and hold on rebel group members. These, however, developed after the returnees interacted with the group and not before. These beliefs, however, were not compelling enough to cause them to stay neither were they rooted enough not to later cause escape.

The study sought to establish if the spiritual rituals and beliefs were strong enough to cause a pattern to emerge that would point to a shift in the current peaceful coexistence experienced in the region. What emerged was a discussion instead of spiritual beliefs and rituals that are central to Acholi cosmology. The traditional reconciliation strategy of mato oput has been discussed by academics from sociology to law. It emerged however for this reconciliation strategy to work certain elements such as the emergent theory on why the war happened are vital in the discourse of the causes of war.

As some of the elders perceive it, the lack of cleansing by those who returned after participating in the world wars was enough to open a gap for spiritual interference with the community as a whole. This was a surprising take that is absent in the literature. This new knowledge sheds light then on how vitally important the cleansing rituals are for the consciousness of the community. For the Divine Cord that is central to the beliefs of the Acholi to be restored, the spirits of the ancestors’ and the slain must be appeased. Hence the
rituals associated with cleansing, peace, and reconciliation should be done with a sense of caution for the future. One might scoff at this notion and dismiss its place in academic literature but time and again it has been shown that not all the answers are tangible or material. The rituals and beliefs of the Acholi replace the function of the spiritual beliefs and rituals that the members were exposed to while in the field. These provide a sense of protection, power, and belonging as the returnees are reintegrated back into the community. The theoretical framework of this study is constructivism and hence the place for beliefs, attitudes, and norms are recognized as the Acholi reconstruct their lives.

The areas where atrocities occurred such as Atiak are centers of spiritual concern for those firmly rooted in Acholi cosmology. These areas were scenes of massacres and as reported by one of the respondents, they have unsettled spirits’ that need to be appeased. Again the concept may seem unconventional in an academic paper however if we are to consider that nexus between mental health and socio-psychological notions then the value of including spiritual rituals and beliefs becomes clearer. Bilotta quotes Kleinmann and others where ‘Illness is shaped by cultural factors governing perception, labeling, explanation, and evaluation of the discomforting experience, processes embedded in a complex family, social and cultural nexus’ (Bilotta, 2016, p. 388). The constructivist lens used in the study guides in the understanding of how beliefs and rituals interact with the agent to create the existence that explains hardship.

Bilotta looks at the reception centers and the different ways in which they approached intervention. Reception centers were where returnees stayed as they underwent reintegration. His paper argues that the approach for mental health in these centers was based on western conceptualizations. He further goes to compare two centers, World Vision a Christian-based
international NGO and GUSCO and their strategies. For World Vision, Christian beliefs were central to how they performed their reintegration program to formerly abducted children while for GUSCO whose programs were Acholi run until the intervention of an Italian NGO called VIVO in 2008. Using this lens he concludes that the interventions done by the two centers where Western influence was central in determining reintegration for the returnees at the expense of their traditional beliefs are not only imperialistic and oppressive but presents in the same manner that the colonial influences shaped Acholi society (Bilotta, 2016). One aspect that this study in its introduction and literature review questioned is whether reintegration was based on a Eurocentric view and the respondents as indicated in the previous Chapter echo Bilotta indirectly.

The trial of Dominic Ongwen precludes an expectation of compensation as the traditional justice system of the Acholi dictates. The manner in which the ICC works does not provide for compensation. How this plays out for the people of Northern Uganda, devastated by years of war and marginalization is yet to be seen. The returnees and the community leaders responded that economic concerns were central to the daily pattern of their lives. The inability to make ends meet in a town such as Gulu with its bustling trade to South Sudan seemingly exclusive to outsiders will be a factor for future debate on peaceful coexistence.

This study was based on an exploratory design. It sought to find forms and functions of the spiritual beliefs of the LRA as relates to recruitment and retention and find if there was a pattern that could be related to peaceful coexistence. As discussed above, the study instead revealed an alternative spiritual cause for the war while pointing to economic disenfranchisement as a factor to look at in future stability. It also found that the charismatic
authority of Joseph Kony explains retention and recruitment through abduction, therefore, spiritual rituals and beliefs did not play a part in rallying new members to the rebel group.

5.5 Conclusion

Karl Marx as cited in Hitchens, in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* considered

Religious distress is *an expression of real distress and a protest against real distress* {emphasis mine}. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people (Hitchens, 2007, p. 20).

The long war between the LRA and the UPDF in Northern Uganda came at a time when uncertainty and loss of power were felt by the community. For spirituality to have taken hold as a rallying call in that time, then Karl Marx quote above reflects the real distress that the fleeing soldiers must have felt, impacted on the community as a whole.

Religion, mainstream or not have a role in social cohesion and provides a route for bonds to be built within a society as through rituals. This study sought to examine those bonds through the lens of the Lord’s Resistance Army and emerged with an alternative spiritual explanation for the war and the guiding spirits associated with Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony. It found that beyond the charismatic authority of Joseph Kony, these bonds may not cause a revert back to war instead economic disenfranchisement a topic familiar in civil war literature could emerge.

The triad of physical being, physical thing, and sacred place arises beyond the temporal as evidenced with the interpretation of the alternative spiritual cause. The peaceful co-existence felt in the geographical location of Northern Uganda after years of war does not
mean peace in the consciousness of the community as the trial of Dominic Ongwen continues at The Hague. Questions about compensation and justice, the traditional and the modern, retribution and restoration, are fundamental to the nexus between the material and the spiritual. While this study examined recruitment and retention with the LRA, the underlying relation to the Acholi and their perceptions of spirituality interspersed with regards to peacebuilding.

The reintegration process where Western notions of trauma and reconciliation merge with religion, Christian in this case as relates to World Vision presents a challenge when in a society deeply determined to follow its version of reconciliation. Cultural relativism is a consideration when DDR is occurring and how the community socially constructs its identity, attempts to provide reasons for the traumatic events of armed conflict and even recruits and retains members.

5.6 Recommendations

5.6.1 Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed as a qualitative exploratory interrogation of the effect spiritual beliefs and rituals have on recruitment and retention in rebel groups, in this case, the Lord’s Resistance Army. It has revealed that the charismatic authority of its leader was the focal point for retention and that the practice of abductions precluded their use as recruiting tools in the later years as per the respondents’ interviewed.

For future research are the possibilities of not only examining other rebel groups historically from various conflicts not just in Africa but around the world. The recent rise in religious fundamentalism means that recruitment and retention, as variables against spiritual
beliefs and rituals, may provide insight not yet garnered. It would also be of value to consider how socially constructed spiritual explanations of the causes of war may relate to peaceful coexistence.

An area that was beyond the scope of this study that could prove interesting for future research is in memory, commemoration, and narratives about the war. At present ‘atrocity’ tourism has begun to take shape in Gulu with tours to sites of massacres or the birthplace of Joseph Kony being some of the places on offer. These two areas of study have been documented in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. Northern Uganda would indeed be an area worthy of study considering the interplay between the Ugandan government and the historical interaction with the Acholi.

As indicated by the Chapter Three, future research in the area would benefit from an ethnographical methodology. This should be designed early in the peace process as a longitudinal time series where attitudes on the spiritual aspect are recorded as the returnees begin the reintegration process, after a brief stay within the community and after the returnees have built a life within the community. Such a design would capture how attitudes towards spirituality change over time and give insight into how allegiance beyond the battlefield and into settled community life evolves.

5.6.2 Recommendations for Future Practice

For professionals interested in the future of Northern Uganda, a keen understanding of Acholi traditional views continues to be fundamental in the creation of any programs aimed at the region. The spiritual divine cord plays a central role in how this community
perceives its members and approaches to peace and justice continue to influence its daily patterns of life.

Addressing the economic disparities in the region is another area that policy makers should consider strongly. After the devastation of the war and the Acholi piece back their lives, competing in an uneven field where the factors of production remain elusive. This should also apply to those policymakers who seek to make a lasting impact upon the lives of returnees after the DDR process has occurred.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

United States International University Letter of Affiliation

Northern Uganda Research Council Permit

Sample Letter of Consent
APPENDIX: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This study aims to explore and describe the effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration that spiritual beliefs and rituals play within Gulu, Northern Uganda.

These interviews will, therefore:

- interrogate the contextual role rituals played in recruitment and retention of members to the LRA;
- the effect the cleansing rituals played upon returning group members on themselves and the community;
- the balancing factor of the ICC as a justice mechanism and the current state of peaceful settlement within Gulu.

It is intended as a guide to in-depth interviews of returnees, community leaders and the Ker Kwaro Acholi within Gulu.

Background Question for all Respondents

- What do you do here in the community? - To establish position and work
- Please describe your experience with the insurgency - To place context

Returnees:

Recruitment and Retention

- How long were you with the group?
- Please describe what happened, in the beginning, you were with the group-
- Did you go through some rituals to make you feel like you belonged in the beginning?
- Are you able to tell me IF you were made to feel part of the group? How?
- Did you go through daily, weekly rituals?
- Did you feel like you belonged? How did that happen?
- How did you come back to the community?

Cleansing Rituals

- Did you go through mato oput? Why?
- Do you feel like the community has welcomed you back?
- Do you feel you have been forgiven by others?
- Do you go to church regularly? Are you still a believer in the Ten Commandments?
- How successful do you consider mato oput to be?
- Would you encourage others to go through mato oput? Why?
ICC as justice and peace

Are you following the ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen?
How do you feel about it?
Do you think it will make a difference?

Community Leaders
Recruitment and Retention

Please describe any rituals you have heard about when individuals join the LRA
What do you think these rituals were meant for?
Do you think these rituals changed the individuals?
In your opinion do you think the returnees still believe in what they were taught while within the group?
Do you consider the returnees have successfully abandoned the rituals and beliefs that they went through?

Cleansing Rituals

Did you go through mato oput? Why?
Do you feel like the ritual made a difference?
Do you feel you have forgiven the returnees?
Do you go to church regularly? Are you still a believer in the ten commandments?
How successful do you consider mato oput to be? Scale
Would you encourage others to go through mato oput? Why?

Local council-Ker Kwaro Acholi
Recruitment and Retention

Please describe any rituals you have heard about when individuals joined the LRA
What do you think these rituals were meant for?
Do you think these rituals changed the individuals?
In your opinion do you think the returnees still believe in what they were taught while within the group?
Do you consider the returnees have successfully abandoned the rituals and beliefs that they went through?

Cleansing Rituals
   Did you go through mato oput? Why?
   Do you feel like the ritual made a difference?
   Do you feel the community has forgiven the returnees?
   How successful do you consider mato oput to be?
   Would you encourage others to go through mato oput? Why?

ICC as justice and peace
   Are you following the ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen?
   How do you feel about it?
   Do you think it will make a difference?

Additional questions will be asked as they arise from the interviewee's responses.
27th January, 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION LETTER – NYAMBURA KARUMBA

We wish to inform you that the bearer of this letter; Nyambura Karumba - student ID No. 606991, is a Master’s Student at United States International University (USIU) – Africa, pursuing a Masters of Arts in International Relations.

She is currently conducting a research on: ‘Exploring the Spiritual Rituals and Beliefs of Rebel Groups In Africa: The Case of the Lord’s Resistance Army’, which is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for her to qualify for graduation.

Please, note that any information provided will be treated with confidentiality and at no instance will it be used for any other purpose, other than for this Research Thesis.

Kindly, accord her the desired assistance and contact the undersigned should you have any queries.

Sincerely,

Tom Onditi, PhD
Assistant Professor, English
Dean, School of Humanities & Social Sciences
To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Research Permit for Ms. Nyambura Karumba

I am writing in support of Ms. Nyambura Karumba application for a research permit. Ms. Nyambura Karumba is Graduate Student at United States International University (USIU) – Africa, pursuing a Graduate degree – MA Masters in International Relations. She is currently conducting a Research Thesis on the working title: 'Exploring the Spiritual Rituals and Beliefs of Rebel Groups In Africa: The Case of the Lord’s Resistance Army' which is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for me to qualify for graduation. Part of her research will be conducted in Gulu, Amuru and Nwoya districts in Northern Uganda.

Her research project explores and describes the effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration that spiritual beliefs and rituals play within Northern Uganda. She is conducting in depth interviews of community members, returnees and the local council within the districts of Gulu, Nwoya and Amuru addressing key issues in conflict studies that nations continue to grapple with and we expect her findings to inform our policy advocacy as well as contribute to her academic research. We have reviewed the research protocol to be used in this study in light of the new UN CST National Guidelines for Research involving humans as research participants and we are satisfied that it complies with the UN CST guidelines.

Please find enclosed a preliminary summary of Ms. Nyambura Karumba’s research project. Please do not hesitate to contact me on +256-772-519-641 or director@car-nurc.org should you require further information.

Sincerely,

Mr. Owor Arthur,
Director of Research,
Centre for African Studies-Northern Uganda Research Centre.
Dear Respondent,

RE: LETTER OF CONSENT

My name is Nyambura Karumba. I am a Master’s Student at United States International University (USIU) – Africa, pursuing a Graduate degree – MA Masters in International Relations. I am currently conducting a Research Thesis on the working title: ‘Exploring the Spiritual Rituals and Beliefs of Rebel Groups In Africa: The Case of the Lord’s Resistance Army’, which is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for me to qualify for graduation. I am writing to request your consent for participation in this study. Before you agree to participate in this interview, it is important you understand the extent and purpose of the research.

This project explores and describes the effect on peaceful settlement and reintegration that spiritual beliefs and rituals play within Northern Uganda. She is conducting in depth interviews of community members, returnees and the local council within Gulu. This interview may recall some painful memories of the conflict in Northern Uganda. If at any point you wish to discontinue the interview or skip a question, you may do so freely. However, your participation in this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the Northern Ugandan conflict in the hopes of preventing similar conflicts in the future.

Once this research project has been completed, it will be available as a hard copy at the following address:

Centre for African Studies,
Northern Uganda Research Centre,
Post Office Building, Plot 1/3,
Airfield Road, Gulu Municipality.

Throughout this interview, the primary researcher will take written notes and, with your permission only, use an audio recorder. Your name will only be used in research if you indicate permission to do so. In addition, the researcher will protect your confidentiality by keeping all notes and interview transcripts in a private notebook and password-locked computer. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. After you sign this consent letter, you can still withdraw from the interview at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact the primary researcher: Nyambura Karumba- Researcher

0780510813 E-mail: karumbanyambura@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Nyambura Karumba.

Please sign below if you consent to participate in this interview.

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ___________________________

I allow my name to be used in the publication of this research. Check one: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I allow for the use of an audio recorder during this interview. Check one: ☐ Yes ☐ No