

PROPOSAL

Ritualizing Return:

Christian Support for Traditional Acholi Rites of Reconciliation in Northern Uganda

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The Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, South Sudan, DRC, and the Central African Republic, has abducted in excess of 30,000 people in the last twenty-four years of conflict, forcing the abductees to become sex slaves or fighters who then themselves commit atrocities. When former abductees escape or return home, they are often shunned by their own communities.

In an interesting move, Christian leaders in northern Uganda – including Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops – have been in the forefront of a movement to rejuvenate traditional Acholi rites of reconciliation, in particular *mato oput*, or “drinking of the bitter herb.”

This paper moves in three parts. First it outlines the conflict. Then it describes the *mato oput* ceremony. Lastly, it discusses how and why Christian support for the traditional Acholi rite developed. This final section of the paper will draw on interviews with Roman Catholic Archbishop Jean Baptiste Odama and retired Anglican Bishop McLeod Baker Ochola, two of the founders of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative. It will also draw on over 200 hours of interviews with lay people.