

THE HISTORY OF STONE WALLS IN LAMWO DISTRICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA
(1850 – 2025)

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REG NO: 24 /U/ 0658/MAH/PS

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY OF GULU UNIVERSITY**

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DECLARATION

I, Laker Angioleta Katya, declare that this research report titled “The History of Stone Walls in Lamwo District in Northern Uganda: 1850 to 2025” is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution of higher learning for any academic award. Where the work of others has been cited or used, it has been duly acknowledged and referenced.

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APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to: My dear parents, the late Mr. Konstantino Kabeja (RIP) and Mrs. Aber Paska Kabeja, whose wisdom, encouragement, and sacrifices laid the foundation for my academic journey. My supportive spouse, Mr. Lukungu Francis, for the patience, understanding, and unwavering encouragement throughout this endeavor. My children, Lagum Patricia, Atimango Edinah, Rwot-Omara Emmanuel Peter, and Rwotomiya Innocent James, whose innocence and joy continue to be my source of strength and inspiration. This work will be a reflection of the values you have instilled in me.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

IKS: Indigenous Knowledge Systems

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

MA: Master of Arts

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

NATIVE ACHOLI WORDS AND MEANINGS

Awak: Communal labor parties used for transporting materials and construction.

Cupoi: A gun.

Gogo: The local term for the stone walls, often personified as "silent guardians".

Ladit: A title of respect for an elder.

Opiding: Specialized defensive portholes or apertures in the wall used for firing at enemies from a protected position.

Rwot: The King or Chief of a chiefdom.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the historical origins, construction techniques, and symbolic meanings of the stone walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda, from 1850 to 2025, addressing a significant gap in the documentation of pre-colonial Acholi architecture. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study adopted a historical and ethnographic design, combining oral interviews with elders and key informants to capture communal memory and indigenous knowledge. These accounts were validated through archival sources and field observations, including physical measurements and photographic documentation of the stone wall architecture and masonry patterns. The findings revealed that these dry-stone structures, locally known as *Gogo*, originated as defensive fortifications during the migration of the Palabek and Paloga clans and served as strategic centers during the era of long-distance trade and colonial resistance. The study also detailed a sophisticated indigenous engineering system that utilized interlocking “male” and “female” stones and defensive features such as *opiding* (portholes), while highlighting the walls’ function as a social picture that reflected chiefdom hierarchies and spiritual boundaries. The study concluded that the walls constituted a vital component of Uganda’s cultural heritage, which challenged colonial narratives of regional stagnation, contributing new knowledge regarding gendered stone classification and indigenous measurement systems. Consequently, the researcher recommended the formal gazettement of these sites for heritage tourism and called for further archaeological dating and conflict resolution regarding clan ownership to ensure the long-term preservation of this living history.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

This study explored the history of the stone walls in Lamwo District in Northern Uganda. The study observed that the contemporary history of stone walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda, presents a unique but limited exploration of the historical aspects, with limited studies on this archaeological area. While Kinyera's (2021) archaeological study provides foundational insights into the Palabek cultural landscapes, including radiocarbon dating of stone structures to circa 1650 AD, his work focuses primarily on dating and structural description. A comprehensive historical analysis integrating oral traditions, construction techniques, symbolic meanings, and contemporary heritage management perspectives remains absent. Widely known as structures built by stacking stones without the use of mortar (dry stone) or with mortar to bind them together, Thorson (2023, p. 9) conceptualised stone walls as a culturally created object that is distinct from its surroundings. He added that they are typically continuous, more than four times longer than wide, and about two feet high; they form the study's background, problem statement, objectives, questions, scope, justification, and significance.

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1 Historical Background

(i) Acholi Origins, Migration, and Cultural Identity

The Acholi people, who are the primary inhabitants of Lamwo District, constitute the largest ethnic group in Northern Uganda, occupying areas including Gulu, Amuru, Lamwo, Kitgum, Pader, Nwoya, and Agago districts. According to ethnographic and historical sources

(Atkinson, 1994; Girling, 1960), the Acholi are classified as a Western Nilotic Luo-speaking people, sharing linguistic affinity with the Lango and Alur of Uganda, as well as Luo-speaking groups in western Kenya, eastern Uganda, West Nile, and South Sudan. The Acholi language is a Western Nilotic dialect categorized under the larger Luo language family, which extends across East Africa.

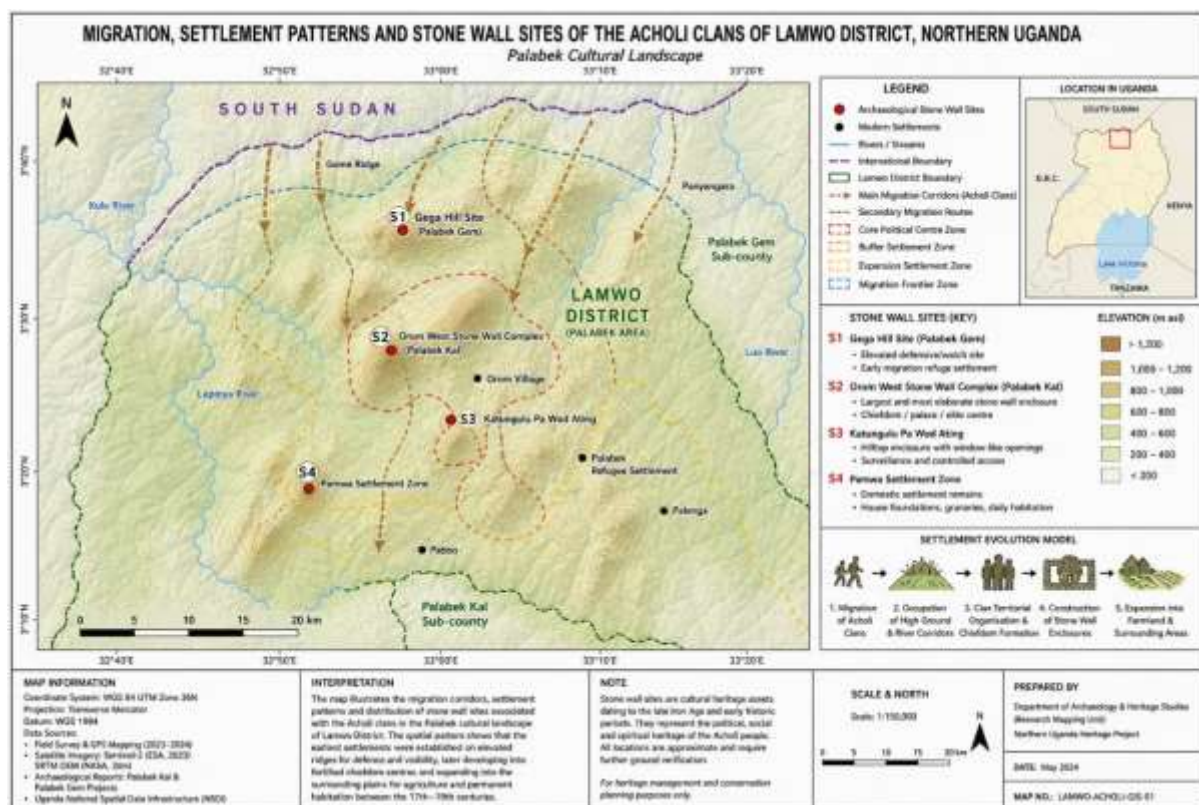
The term “Acholi” is historically a misnomer that was eventually adopted for convenience over the years and refers to people locally known as *Luo Gang* hence the reason why their neighbors, the Langi, refer to the Acholi as “Ugangi,” meaning “the people of the home” (p'Ojwang, 1995). This etymological observation is significant because it suggests that the Acholi identity was partially constructed through external categorization, a phenomenon common among many African ethnic groups during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. As Atkinson (1994, p. 45) notes, ethnic identities in the Lake Victoria region were often fluid and situationally defined, with labels emerging from inter-group contact rather than primordial self-designation.

Regarding their origins, oral traditions and historical linguistics indicate that the Acholi migrated from Bahr el Ghazal in present-day South Sudan around 1000 CE to present-day Northern Uganda, while the main Luo group moved down under the leadership of Olum and finally settled within Pubungu near Pakwach (Webster et al., 1973). However, alternative scholarly accounts trace their origin to intermarriage between Luo and Madi peoples, suggesting a more complex process of ethnogenesis rather than a simple unidirectional migration. This finding aligns with Vansina's (1985, p. 27) observation that African oral traditions often preserve multiple, sometimes contradictory, origin narratives that reflect different layers of historical experience.

It is said that towards the end of the 17th Century, a new socio-political order emerged amongst the Luo in northern Uganda, characterized mainly by chiefdoms

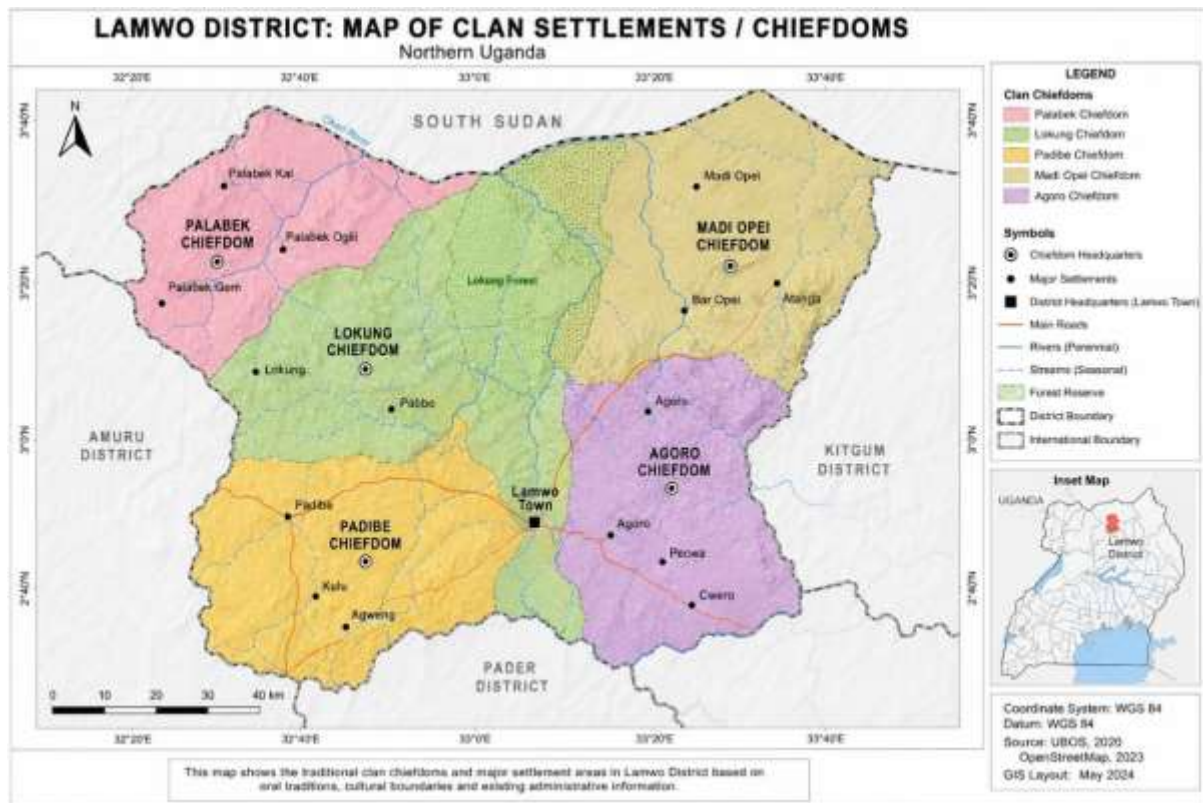
under *Rwodi* or *Rwot* (meaning ruler). The tradition of chiefs emerged from one clan, resulting in each chiefdom comprising different villages that were made up of several patrilineal clans (Atkinson, 1994, p. 112). This political formation is what Kopytoff (1987, p. 15) terms the “internal African frontier” a process by which African societies developed complex political structures without external models. The emergence of *Rwot*-led chiefdoms in Acholiland by the late 17th century provides the political context within which the stone walls of Lamwo District with numerous chiefdoms (Palabek, Lokung, Padibe, Madi Opei, and Agoro), were later constructed as royal residences and defensive fortifications.

Figure 1: Migration, Settlement Patterns and Stone wall sites of the Acholi clans of Lamwo District, Northern Uganda



Source: Department of Archeology and Heritage Studies, Northern Heritage Project

Figure 2: Map of clan settlements/Chiefdoms in Lamwo District



Source: UBOS, 2020; OpenStreetMap, 2023

(ii) Acholi Settlement Patterns and Material Culture

Traditional Acholi communities were arranged in small settlements that lived within circular huts characterized by a peak, a mid-sleeping platform, jars of grain, and a fireplace. It was the responsibility of women to smear the walls with mud and create conventional geometric decorations of red, grey, and white, while men were primarily hunters who used spears and nets to catch wild game (Girling, 1960, p. 34). This gendered division of labour women associated with domestic architecture and decoration, men with hunting and defense has implications for understanding the stone walls of Lamwo. As Deetz (1996, p. 45) argues, material culture is not neutral but encodes social relations, including gender roles. The construction of large-scale stone walls, requiring heavy labour and specialized technical knowledge, appears to have been a male-dominated activity, consistent with elder narratives

describing “master builders” as “high-ranking clan members” (Oketayot Joseph, personal interview, 2025).

(iii) Acholi Cosmology and Birth Customs

Legends among the Acholi hold that the Luo was the first man with no human parents but sprung from the ground; his father was *Jok* (God) and the mother was the Earth (p'Bitek, 1971, p. 45). This cosmological foundation that humanity emerged from the earth itself has direct bearing on the spiritual significance of stone walls. If the earth is the mother of humanity, then stones as the “bones” or “teeth” of the earth are imbued with ancestral presence. This finding corroborates the elder narratives documented in the present study, where stones are described as “the bones of the ancestors” and the Gogo hill as a sentient witness to history.

When it comes to culture and customs, the Acholi recognize two different birth customs the normal birth as well as the *Jok Anywala* (godly birth). After a child is born, he or she is named on the third or fourth day, whereupon a delegation from the child’s paternal and maternal relatives, led by the old woman who acted as the midwife, goes to the house carrying a winnowing tray (*adero*) in one hand and a knobbed stick (*ogwec*) used for stirring simsim into ready cooked food in the other (Ocaya-Lakidi, 1997). These naming rituals, while not directly related to stone walls, illustrate the broader Acholi worldview in which ritual practice, ancestral veneration, and community identity are intertwined a worldview that also shaped the construction and use of stone walls as ritual spaces and symbols of lineage legitimacy.

(iv) Acholi Dances and Cultural Expression

The Acholi people are known for their vibrant cultural dances and songs that reflect everyday life and commemorate notable past events, with about eight distinctive dances: *Myel Wanga*, *Atira*, *Lalobaloba*, *Ladongo*, *Otiti*, *Bwola*, *Apiti*, and *Myel Awal* (p'Ojwang, 1995). The *Bwola* dance, in particular, is associated with chiefdom ceremonies and royal courts. The

existence of specialized dances performed only in the presence of the *Rwot* provides cultural context for the Gogo stone walls' dual-enclosure system: one enclosure for royalty, one for subjects. The physical separation of spaces enabled different forms of cultural performance (dances, rituals, council meetings) appropriate to each social group.

(v) Stone Walls in Global, Continental, and Regional Context

According to Thorson (2002), the history of the study of stone walls as a subject of inquiry began primarily through interest in archaeology, history, and landscape ecology, especially in New England in the United States where stone walls are prominent. During the 18th and 19th centuries, farmers in New England commonly removed stones from their fields to make way for cultivation, arranging them along property lines in the form of walls, which gradually became a prominent feature of the rural landscape (Thorson, 2002, p. 27). As agriculture declined in these areas, forest began to reclaim the land, and many stone walls were abandoned and deteriorated. Sloane (1955) documented the disappearing elements of early American rural life, sparking concern and curiosity among historians and preservationists.

Scholars globally have examined stone walls as manifestations of cultural, political, and technological development across civilizations. Notable examples include Hadrian's Wall in the United Kingdom, which Robin Birley (1991) identifies as a Roman defensive and administrative frontier, and the Great Wall of China, which Arthur Waldron (1990) analyzes as an evolving military defense system against northern nomadic threats. These studies demonstrate how stone walls functioned not merely as physical barriers but as complex socio-political instruments reflecting the strategic priorities of their builders.

In Africa, Great Zimbabwe is an ancient city that served as the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe during the late Iron Age. The site is renowned for its extensive dry-stone walls, constructed without mortar, demonstrating advanced engineering and architectural skills dating

from the 11th to the 15th centuries (Pikirayi, 2001). This stone wall was purposely built as a royal palace, trade center, and fortification, demonstrating the advanced engineering and political organisation in pre-colonial Africa. It is believed that the first European to document Great Zimbabwe was Karl Gottlieb Mauch, a German explorer who visited the site in 1871. However, his interpretations were heavily influenced by Eurocentric biases, leading him to incorrectly attribute the construction to civilizations such as the Phoenicians or the biblical kingdom of Sheba, rather than acknowledging indigenous African builders (Huffman, 2009). Subsequent research by Caton-Thompson (1931) and Chirikure and Pikirayi (2008) confirmed that Great Zimbabwe was built by the ancestors of the Shona people.

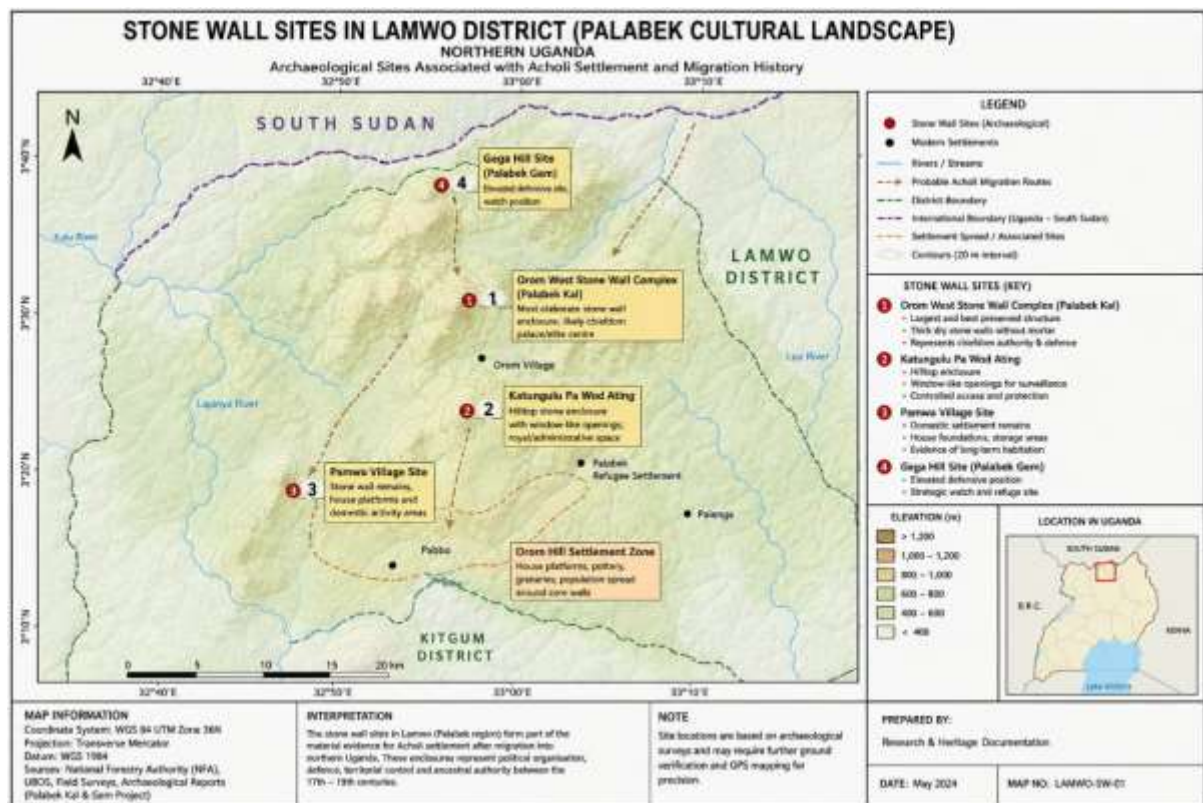
In East Africa, Thimlich Ohinga, located in Migori County, Kenya, is a complex of dry-stone wall ruins dating back to at least the 15th century and attributed to Bantu-speaking communities (Wandibba, 1986, p. 45). The main enclosure features walls up to 4.2 meters thick and 4.2 meters high, constructed without mortar using undressed stones, likely serving as a defensive fortification (Kabwiju et al., 2025, p. 112). Similarly, Kilwa Kisiwani in Tanzania, identified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, features stone ruins of a powerful Swahili trading city including fortifications, palaces (e.g., Husuni Kubwa), and mosques, representing a fusion of African and Islamic architecture using coral stone (Horton et al., 2022).

In Northern Uganda, Fort Patiko (constructed in 1872 by British explorer Samuel Baker) represents colonial-era stone architecture. Built using locally sourced stone, the fort initially functioned as a military post and later as a grain storage facility (Baker, 1874, p. 203). This colonial structure reflects how stone was utilized during the 19th century not only for utility but also as a symbol of administrative control and territorial presence.

Research on the stone walls in Lamwo District gained momentum in 2021 following the groundbreaking work of Charles Okeny Kinyera in his doctoral study, which documented and

analyzed the archaeological features of the Palabek cultural landscapes (Kinyera, 2021). His investigations led to the discovery of stone wall structures in the villages of Pamwa, Orom, and Katungulu, with radiocarbon dating indicating they were constructed around 1650 AD. Kinyera's research challenges earlier assumptions about Northern Uganda's suitability for early settlements, providing new insights into the region's historical habitation patterns. Local oral traditions often attribute these stone structures to mysterious or supernatural origins, with some narratives describing them as the work of "giants" or ancient civilizations predating the Acholi (Uganda Radio Network, 2021).

Figure 3: Stone wall sites in Lamwo District (Palabek Landscape)



Source: Department of Archeology and Heritage Studies, Northern Heritage Project

1.1.2 Theoretical Background

The stone walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda, form part of the wider archaeological and cultural heritage of the Acoli sub-region. While Kinyera's (2021) study provides foundational insights, oral traditions and comparative analyses suggest these structures may have served multiple functions.

The study was guided by cultural materialism theory, as proposed by Harris (1979, p. 55), which posits that material conditions such as technology, environment, and economic activities shape social organization and cultural practices. In the context of this study, the stone walls are interpreted as adaptations to environmental or socio-political pressures, such as the need for defense, territorial control, or resource management amid population growth or conflict (Harris, 1979, p. 57). This theory helps explain why the Acholi of Lamwo invested significant

labour in dry-stone construction: the material conditions of the 17th–19th centuries (Arab slave raids, inter-clan warfare, competition over hilltop resources) necessitated defensive architecture.

Similarly, functionalism, advocated by Malinowski (1922, p. 132), argues that cultural traits exist to meet societal needs. From this perspective, the walls functioned to enhance security, organize communal space, or reinforce social hierarchies within Acholi communities (Malinowski, 1922, p. 135). The dual-enclosure system (royal enclosure versus subjects' enclosure) is a clear functional response to the need for social differentiation and centralized authority.

1.1.3 Conceptual Background

The investigation of stone walls in Lamwo District is fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing upon archaeology, geology, ecology, landscape studies, anthropology, and heritage studies (Trigger, 2006, p. 12). These structures represent more than physical remnants of past societies; they function as cultural symbols that encode historical patterns of settlement, identity formation, land use practices, architectural knowledge, and socio-political organization (Deetz, 1996, p. 45).

From a heritage management perspective, the stone walls constitute what UNESCO (2003, p. 7) terms “living heritage” - tangible elements from the past that maintain contemporary cultural significance for local communities. This conceptual framework positions the walls as dynamic artifacts that simultaneously embody material culture and intangible cultural values (Smith, 2006, p. 34). This study aligns with Darvill’s conceptualisation of stone walls as: “Dry-stone built structures constructed without mortar, typically serving functional purposes (such as territorial demarcation, defense, or livestock enclosure) while simultaneously expressing cultural knowledge and social organization” (Darvill, 2008, p. 112).

1.1.4 Contextual Background

The stone walls of Lamwo District are documented in the tentative list for Palabek Cultural Landscapes, with seven identified sites (Kinyera, 2021, p. 34). These include: Lotuturu Stone Wall – Lumwaka "A" Village, Aringa Parish, Putika Sub-County; Lacic Stone Wall – Lacic Ngora Cell, Ogwech Sub-County (Lamwo Town Council); Pamwa Stone Wall – Pamwa Village, Palabek Kal Sub-County; Katunguru (Pa Wod Ating) Stone Wall – Katunguru Village, Palabek Kal Sub-County; Orom West Stone Wall – Orom Village, Palabek Kal Sub-County; Gega Hill Stone Wall – Gega Village, Gem Sub-County.

Historically, stone walls across Africa have served multiple functions, including defense, territorial marking, livestock enclosures, and ceremonial purposes (Connah, 2001, p. 72). In Lamwo, the Acoli people, the predominant ethnic group, preserve oral traditions that may offer insights into the origins and uses of these structures (Atkinson, 1994, p. 112). Cultural practices documented among the Acholi including the recognition of *Jok Anywala* (godly birth), naming ceremonies involving ritual objects (*adero, ogwec*), and the performance of chiefly dances like *Bwola* provide a rich cultural backdrop against which the stone walls' symbolic and ritual functions can be understood. The walls are primarily situated in mountainous zones, suggesting a complex socio-political system potentially tied to chieftaincies or clan-based governance (Kopytoff, 1987, p. 24) and strategic adaptations to environmental and security needs (Tishkoff et al., 2009, p. 1035).

However, decades of conflict, displacement, and modernization have eroded traditional knowledge transmission (Finnström, 2008, p. 56). Academic focus on Northern Uganda has prioritized post-conflict studies, leaving these architectural features under-researched (Branch, 2011, p. 89). This study aimed to address this gap, reconstructing Lamwo's pre-colonial history

through an interdisciplinary investigation of the walls, while situating them within the broader context of Acholi culture, cosmology, and political organization.

1.2 Problem Statement

The stone walls of Lamwo District represent a significant but under-documented aspect of Uganda's pre-colonial heritage, which reflects the defensive ingenuity of the Acholi people in the 19th century. These structures should serve as vital sources for understanding pre-colonial socio-political organization and as cornerstones of regional heritage and cultural tourism. Yet, the shift from traditional fortified settlements to modern living has led to a cultural amnesia, where the construction techniques and symbolic significance of the walls risk being lost with the aging generation (Girling, 1960).

Despite their architectural value, the walls are deteriorating rapidly due to weathering, human encroachment, and the absence of conservation measures (p'Bitek, 1971). While Nilotic history has been broadly studied, little attention has been paid to the specific masonry methods and changing cultural meanings of these walls in Lamwo. Decades of conflict in Northern Uganda have also hindered archaeological and historical fieldwork, leaving their history from 1850 to the present largely undocumented (Finnström, 2003). Although sites like Agoro Hills, Fort Patiko, and Lotuturu Hill have recently gained recognition (Alidri et al., 2025; Lamwo District Archives, 2020), a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study tracing the origins, construction, and transformation of Lamwo's stone walls remains absent. This study, therefore, sought to fill this void by examining the walls through periods of consolidation, disruption, and revival, ultimately aiming to decolonize Northern Ugandan narratives and support community-led preservation.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to document the History of Stone Walls in Lamwo District in Northern Uganda.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To investigate the historical origins of the Stone walls in Lamwo District
2. To analyze the skills and techniques for the construction of the stone walls.
3. To explore the cultural, social, and symbolic meanings of the stone walls among local communities.

1.3.3 Research Questions

1. What is the historical origin of the stone walls in Lamwo District?
2. How were the stone walls in Lamwo constructed?
3. What was the symbolic meaning of the construction of the stone walls?

1.4 Scope of the study

1.4.1 Geographical scope

The study was geographically centered on Lamwo District in Northern Uganda, an area characterized by a unique mountainous landscape and a rich history of fortified settlements. This specific location was chosen because Lamwo serves as a primary site for dry-stone masonry traditions that are distinct from the architectural styles found in other parts of the Acholi sub-region. By focusing on this district, the research specifically targeted the *Orom West Village* and *Agoro hills*, where the density of these structures is highest. This narrow focus allowed for a localized, on-the-ground analysis of how the specific topography and available natural resources influenced the placement and durability of the walls.

1.4.2 Content scope

The content of this research was strictly guided by the three primary objectives: historical origins, technical construction, and socio-cultural symbolism. First, the study investigated the causal factors behind the stone walls, such as the need for defense against slave raiders or inter-clan skirmishes. Second, it delved into indigenous engineering, documenting the specific masonry techniques, such as the selection of granitic rocks and the art of dry stacking without mortar, that have allowed these structures to survive for centuries. Finally, the scope extended to the intangible heritage of the walls, exploring how they function as symbols of ancestral power, markers of land boundaries, and sites for community rituals. This broad approach ensured that the walls were studied not just as piles of stone, but as living monuments of human ingenuity.

1.4.3 Time Scope

The temporal scope of 1850 to 2025 was designed to capture the full evolution of the stone walls from their functional peak to their contemporary status. Starting in 1850 allowed the study to examine the walls during a period of high regional volatility, where they served as critical defensive fortifications during the era of the Long-Distance Trade and early colonial incursions. Moving through the colonial and post-independence eras, the timeframe accounted for how these structures survived decades of conflict and displacement in Northern Uganda. Ending the study in 2025 provided a modern perspective, evaluating the current state of preservation and the potential for these walls to be recognized as national or global heritage sites in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The investigation into the "History of Stone Walls in Lamwo District" is necessitated by the urgent need to document and analyze indigenous architectural heritage that remains vulnerable to environmental degradation and historical erasure. These stone walls represent sophisticated

pre-colonial engineering, serving as vital physical evidence of land demarcation, social stratification, and defensive strategy among the communities of Northern Uganda. As Jan Vansina (1985) posits, in regions where written archives are sparse, material culture and oral traditions become the primary pillars for reconstructing African history. Furthermore, the work of Peter R. Schmidt (1978) underscores that built heritage, such as these stone structures, is indispensable for understanding the historical identity and socio-political organization of East African societies. Given that the mountainous landscape of Lamwo provides an abundance of natural stone, these walls are not merely functional; they are a direct expression of human adaptation to the environment, requiring formal academic documentation before the oral narratives tied to them are lost with the passing of the current generation of elders.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study of stone walls in Lamwo District offers numerous contributions to historical, cultural, and socio-economic discourse:

Preservation of Cultural Identity: By tracing the origins of these structures, the study safeguards the oral traditions, myths, and cultural values of local communities, cementing their connection to their ancestral lands.

Archaeological and Historical Insight: The research provides empirical evidence of ancient settlement patterns, pre-colonial defense mechanisms, and territorial boundaries. This offers a clearer picture of migration histories and the complexity of early political organizations in Northern Uganda.

Validation of Oral Historiography: This study serves as a practical application of Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology, using physical artifacts to corroborate oral histories, thereby enriching the historiography of a region often overlooked by colonial records.

Socio-Economic Development and Heritage Tourism: If formally documented and preserved, these stone walls can be integrated into Uganda's national heritage portfolio. This creates potential for memory tourism and research-driven travel, providing a sustainable economic avenue for the people of Lamwo.

Educational Empowerment: The findings will serve as a pedagogical resource for the youth, fostering a sense of historical pride and encouraging community-led conservation efforts.

Advancement of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS): Analyzing the masonry techniques and materials used offers critical insights into indigenous engineering and environmental adaptation, highlighting the intellectual and technical sophistication of pre-colonial African societies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of literature relevant to the history of stone walls, with a particular focus on the study's objectives. It drew from academic works in archaeology, history, anthropology, heritage studies, and African oral traditions to provide context and conceptual grounding. The review aimed to examine what scholars have documented concerning stone wall construction, historical functions, cultural meanings, and technological aspects in various parts of Africa and the world. Through this, the study identified strengths, theoretical contributions, methodological approaches, and knowledge gaps, particularly as they relate to Northern Uganda and Lamwo District.

2.1 The historical origins of the stone walls in Lamwo District

Globally, stone walls have long histories tied to settlement, defense, and cultural expressions. In Europe, Hadrian's Wall (Birley, 1991, p.24) and the Great Wall of China (Waldron, 1990, p.33) were built for defense and political boundary marking. These historical contexts offer frameworks for understanding similar practices in African contexts. In Africa, one of the most renowned examples of indigenous stone architecture is the Great Zimbabwe ruins. Caton-Thompson (1931, p.110) and later Chirikure and Pikirayi (2008, p.79) confirmed that these dry-stone walls were built by the ancestors of the Shona people, overturning earlier colonial theories that attributed them to foreign civilizations. These findings emphasize the indigenous capability in large-scale construction and challenge Eurocentric views of African history.

In East Africa, Thimlich Ohinga, a 15th-century dry-stone enclosure in Kenya, has been extensively documented by Wandibba (1986, pp.45-47). These enclosures likely served as both living spaces and fortifications, attributed to early Bantu-speaking communities.

In Uganda, much of the scholarly attention has focused on archaeological sites such as Nyero Rock Paintings (Nyiracyiza & Turchetta, 2013) and colonial forts like Fort Patiko (Baker, 1874, p.203), with limited attention given to indigenous pre-colonial stone structures. However, the seminal work of Kinyera (2021, p.34) in Lamwo District marks a turning point. Through archaeological excavations and radiocarbon dating, Kinyera traced the origins of stone wall construction in Palabek to as early as 1650 AD. His work provides foundational data but lacks a comprehensive historical interpretation regarding who built the walls, their motivations, and how their uses evolved over time.

Thus, while comparative studies exist globally and regionally, the historical origins of Lamwo's stone walls remain insufficiently explored in historical literature, making it a significant area of focus for this study.

2.2 The skills and techniques for the construction of the stone walls

Dry-stone construction is a widespread architectural technique involving the stacking of stones without mortar. Thorson (2002, pp.9,27) defines a stone wall as a cultural object built from stone particles, usually without mortar, and typically more than four times longer than it is wide. In his work on New England's stone walls, he classifies them based on material, form, function -providing insights that may apply analogously in the African context.

Walling, like other 'crafts', has not been seen as an activity which demands high levels of intellectual capability, or high levels of expertise. Writing on crafts tends to stress their traditional nature (Ley, 1995, Seymour, 2001). Wolek (1999) and Gamble (2001) stress the continuing importance of craft apprenticeship as a way of learning. McEachren (2004) suggests that craft work is simple, and that this is part of its attraction:

What draws many people to craft making is the long period of time that can be spent in quiet contemplation while hands are kept performing simple repetitive tasks (p.147).

This view is not borne out by this study. In Africa, Thimlich Ohinga's construction relied on undressed stones carefully fitted together without the use of mortar (Kabwijamu et al., 2025, p.112). The walls reach up to 4.2 meters in height and reflect a high level of indigenous engineering and spatial planning.

Within Uganda, colonial structures such as Fort Patiko show the use of mortar-bound stone construction (Baker, 1874, p.203). However, in Lamwo, Kinyera (2021, p.34) documents dry-stone techniques that reflect indigenous knowledge systems. These walls vary in size and design, with some following circular patterns around hills and others appearing as straight barriers, likely aligned with terrain and intended function.

Despite these findings, there remains little detailed analysis of the construction processes, tool use, or knowledge transmission systems that underpinned this architectural tradition. As such, this research aims to fill the methodological and descriptive gap by documenting and analyzing the construction techniques from oral testimonies and field observation.

2.3 The cultural, social, and symbolic meanings of the stone walls among local communities

Anthropological literature stresses that material culture must be interpreted within its cultural context (Deetz, 1996, p.45). Walls are more than physical barriers they encode meaning, authority, social status, and spiritual beliefs. In the context of Great Zimbabwe, the stone enclosures symbolized power, prestige, and sacred spaces (Pikirayi, 2001, p.67).

In Uganda, oral traditions often assign symbolic significance to landscape features. According to Okot p'Bitek (1985, p.23), proverbs and metaphors often reflect deeper social meanings, including the association of walls with protection and isolation. His poetic reference - "A stone wall of guns surrounds our village" demonstrates the metaphorical and literal roles that walls play in community consciousness.

Equally, Herriot and Brabbs (1994) note; *“Those wonderful walls, often the only sign of the hand of man, symbolize the very soul of the high Pinnes, the endlessly varying of grey against green, carving out ragged squares and oblongs (p.22).”* Kinyera (2021, p.36) notes that in Lamwo, local oral traditions describe the walls as products of supernatural beings or "giants," indicating their importance in myth and communal identity. Kopytoff (1987, p.15) suggests that such attributions are not only symbolic but also reflect social memory and power structures within African communities. The walls may have reinforced clan territories, served as ritual spaces, or demarcated sacred areas.

Despite these perspectives, few studies have specifically explored how communities in Lamwo interpret these walls today or in the past. This research addresses that gap by engaging with local oral historians, elders, and cultural leaders to decode the meanings embedded in the structures. Paul Sollitoe (1996 pp.75-108) Stresses on indigenous knowledge systems, ethno science, and development anthropology, but he does not write specifically about stone walls. However, his work provides a powerful theoretical framework on how indigenous communities built, manage, and interpret structures like stone walls particularly through the lens of local ecological knowledge, technical skills and cultural logic, water flow and boundary making that is significantly valued and socially embedded.

Objects and built structures are active components of social life; they are not passive artifacts but part of how people construct identity and memory. Daniel (1987 pp13-17), Daniel critiques anthropological and Marxist approaches to understanding objects. Here he examines how material objects are integral to the construction of social relation and meanings. While Miller does not discuss stone walls directly, his emphasis on the social lives of objects can be applied to the understanding of stone walls as more than physical structures. They can be seen as embodiment of cultural practices, social relationships, and historical narratives. For instance,

in communities where stone walls delineate property or communal spaces, those structures may symbolize social order, heritage and collective identity.

2.4 Conclusion: Strengths and Gaps in the Literature

2.4.1 Theoretical Strengths and Contributions

The reviewed literature offers strong theoretical frameworks, especially in the application of cultural materialism (Harris, 1979, pp. 55-57; Ingold; 2002 pp. 339-348); Daniel Miller (1987 pp.13-17) functionalism (Malinowski, 1922, pp. 132-135); Task scape Ingold (172-188) and heritage studies (Smith, 2006; UNESCO, 2003, p.7). These perspectives help interpret stone walls as both functional and symbolic structures embedded in social systems. Comparative literature from other African and global contexts provides valuable reference points for understanding construction purposes, techniques, and meanings.

2.4.2 Methodology Gaps

Most existing research on stone walls in Africa and Uganda is rooted in archaeology rather than history. Works such as Kinyera (2021, pp. 34-37) emphasize dating and structural description but fall short in exploring the socio-cultural and historical contexts. There is a notable absence of oral history integration and ethnographic inquiry approaches essential to reconstructing local historical narratives in Lamwo. This study responded by incorporating qualitative methods such as oral interviews, ethnography, and historical analysis.

2.4.3 Spatial Gaps

While much has been written about Great Zimbabwe, Thimlich Ohinga, and sites in West and Southern Africa, Northern Uganda remains severely underrepresented in the scholarly literature. Lamwo District, despite being rich in built heritage, is rarely addressed in national or regional histories. This research therefore filled this significant spatial and thematic gap in

East African historiography through a localised lens on Lamwo, in Northern Uganda. The tabular representation below illustrates the above identified gaps:

Identified Gap	Explanation (Description)	Source	Page Number
Limited focus on Northern Uganda (Lamwo)	Most study focus on Zimbabwe (Great Zimbabwe), Kenya, or South African Stone Walls.	<i>Pwiti, G. (1996) Continuity and change: An archaeological study of farming communities in Northern Zimbabwe</i>	pp. 112-114
Lack of ethnographic detail	The Local meanings, indigenous knowledge, and oral histories surrounding stone walls are often ignored or briefly mentioned.	<i>Miller, D. (1987). Material Culture and Mass Consumption.</i>	pp.108-109
Missing Gendered Perspectives	There's little exploration of how gender influenced the construction, use, and symbolism of stone walls.	<i>Schmidt, P. R., & Mapunda, B. (1997). Debating Archaeology.</i>	p. 41
Neglect of Contemporary relevance	Most Literature treats stone walls as ancient, ignoring how modern communities interact with, preserve, or	<i>Lane, p. (2011). Possibilities for a postcolonial archaeology in Sub-</i>	p. 8-9

	reinterpret these structures, and meanings	<i>Saharan Africa: Indigenous and usable pasts. World Archaeology 43(1).</i>	
Ecological and Environmental aspects are unexplored	Few studies investigate the relationship between stone walls and local ecology. (e.g., water conservation, soil erosion).	<i>Sinclair, P. (1987). Space, Time and Social Formation.</i>	pp. 147-148
Absence of comparative analysis	There is a lack of comparative work between stone walls across different African regions to access similarities, differences, and	<i>Chami, F. (2006). The Unity of African Ancient History</i>	p. 95
Underrepresentation in cultural heritage policies	Stone walls are rarely mentioned in official cultural preservation frameworks, especially in East Africa.	<i>Ndoro, W. & Pwiti, G. (200). Heritage management in Africa. World Archaeology, 34(3).</i>	p. 232

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlined the methodological approach that guided the investigation of the historical origins, construction techniques, functions, and cultural meanings of stone walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda. The research study was done by use of the Qualitative research approach and a historical research design. This helped researchers to understand people's thoughts, emotions, culture, and behaviours in more detailed narratives. The preceding sections of the chapter detail the research approach, design, target population, sample size, data collection techniques, ethical considerations, data analysis methods, and data presentation strategies to ensure the study achieved its objectives systematically and ethically.

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the historical origins, construction techniques, functions, and cultural meanings of stone walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda. Chosen for its ability to capture thoughts, emotions, and cultural practices through narratives rather than numbers (Creswell, 2013), the approach was justified on three grounds: documenting indigenous knowledge and oral traditions; interpreting elders' symbolic meanings of the walls as military, spiritual, and political structures; and recording lived experiences of migration, conflict, and heritage preservation.

The research combined historical reconstruction (oral and material sources), ethnographic fieldwork (participant observation at Gogo hill), and narrative inquiry (oral testimonies from elders such as Aboda Jackson and Otto Kenneth). This allowed flexibility for emergent themes, including the "Leopard Strategy" of warfare, gendered stone classifications, and contested clan ownership. Triangulation was central, drawing on elders, youth, district officers, archives, and

physical observation. For instance, standardized wall dimensions (0.8m thick, 2.134m high) confirmed elder accounts of codified building standards. This enabled documentation and interpretation of the Gogo stone walls as a distinctive yet overlooked African heritage tradition.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a historical research design, supplemented by auto-ethnographic and narrative methods. The historical design was appropriate because it enabled the reconstruction of past events, practices, and societal patterns through the analysis of both oral and material sources (Creswell, 2013). The flexibility of this design allowed for extensive data collection, triangulation, and interpretation using interviews, observations, oral traditions, and document review. The data collection methods employed included oral histories and interviews, ethnographic field observation, and review of existing literature. This multi-method approach ensured that the study captured both the tangible (physical measurements, construction techniques) and intangible (symbolism, cultural memory, spiritual beliefs) dimensions of the stone walls.

3.3 Study Population

The study population comprised community members and stakeholders directly or indirectly connected to the history and presence of stone walls in Lamwo District. These included the following categories:

First, elders and cultural leaders were selected as the primary custodians of oral traditions and historical knowledge regarding the stone walls. These individuals held generational memory of migration narratives, construction techniques, and ritual practices associated with the Gogo and other hill sites.

Second, local historians were included as individuals possessing historical narratives and secondary information transmitted through formal and informal educational channels.

Third, youths and community members were engaged to offer generational perspectives on heritage awareness, contemporary uses of the wall sites, and attitudes toward preservation.

Fourth, cultural institutions and district heritage officers were consulted to provide institutional insight into existing preservation efforts, policy frameworks, and administrative challenges.

Fifth, academics (including those from Gulu University and the Uganda Museum) were identified as potential sources to enrich the analysis with professional and local archaeological perspectives, though access depended on availability during the fieldwork period.

3.4 Sample Size Selection

The research employed purposive sampling to select participants with rich, relevant, and diverse knowledge of the stone walls across the three sub-counties where the structures were located: Potika Sub-county, Palabek Kal Sub-county, and Gem Sub-county. Purposive sampling was selected because it allowed the researcher to deliberately identify individuals who possessed specialized knowledge not held by the general population (Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling (where initial participants refer other knowledgeable individuals) was employed as a supplementary strategy within the purposive framework. For example, Aboda Jackson referred the researcher to Oketayot Joseph and other elders. However, snowball sampling alone would have risked producing a sample limited to a single social network (e.g., only Pameya clan members or only one village).

The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, which refers to the point at which no new information or themes emerged from subsequent interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data collection continued gradually, and after each set of interviews, the

researcher conducted preliminary analysis to assess whether new findings were still emerging. Saturation was reached at 59 participants, at which stage consecutive interviews yielded no substantially new information regarding the historical origins, construction techniques, symbolic meanings, or contemporary challenges of the stone walls.

The final sample of 59 participants was disaggregated into the following five categories:

Elders and Cultural Leaders (18): This category included 18 elders and cultural leaders who served as the primary custodians of oral traditions and historical knowledge. These individuals held generational memory of migration narratives from Shilluk, construction techniques, ritual practices, and the lineage of Rwot Ouna. Key participants included Aboda Jackson (82 years), Otto Kenneth (75 years), Orach Solomon, Obol Thomas, Ojara Patrick, Oketayot Joseph, Okello Dickson, Akello Imelda, Lanyero Sylvia, Okwera Samuel, and Owali Joseph, among others. Saturation was achieved within this category when new interviews ceased to produce additional migration routes, construction details, or ritual descriptions.

Local Historians (08): This category comprised eight local historians who possessed historical narratives transmitted through formal and informal educational channels. These participants provided secondary information, contextual knowledge, and written records maintained at the sub-county level. Saturation was reached when no new interpretations of colonial administration or Arab invasion events emerged.

Youth and Community Members (15): This category included 15 youths and general community members who offered generational perspectives on heritage awareness, contemporary uses of the wall sites (including cattle grazing and squirrel hunting), and attitudes toward preservation. Saturation occurred when narratives consistently reflected similar levels of heritage knowledge and similar concerns about economic pressures on the sites.

Cultural Institution and District Heritage Officers (06): This category comprised six officials from cultural institutions and the Lamwo District local government, including the acting Prime Minister of Ker Kwaro Lokung (Nyeko Martin) and district heritage officers. Saturation was achieved when institutional perspectives on preservation efforts and policy frameworks became repetitive.

Academics (12): This category included 12 academics, all of whom originate from the study area, and confirmed to have studied at Gulu University, and had an interaction with the Uganda Museum at the district level. These participants provided professional archaeological perspectives, comparative knowledge of other dry-stone sites (Thimlich Ohinga, Great Zimbabwe), and technical expertise on dating methods. Saturation was reached when no new comparative cases or technical recommendations were offered.

Generally, data saturation was confirmed across all five categories, ensuring that the findings represented the full range of knowledge held by the community and experts regarding the stone walls of Lamwo District.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

To ensure rich, triangulated data, the following methods will be employed:

3.5.1 Oral Histories and Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with elders, community leaders, and local historians who possessed traditional knowledge of the origins, construction, and uses of the stone walls. The interviews also included farmers and builders familiar with traditional wall-building techniques. Where necessary, translators for Acholi speakers were involved to ensure accurate communication. This method enabled the study to capture indigenous knowledge, migration stories, uses of walls, symbolism, and collective memory. As argued by Vansina

(1985), oral history is critical in areas with limited written records, as it preserves historical consciousness that would otherwise be inaccessible to researchers.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues, environmental context, and immediate analytical observations. Quotations from elders were transcribed verbatim and translated into English where originally given in Acholi.

3.5.2 Archival Research

The study relied on colonial archives and local government records from the post-1962 period to understand colonial policies on land use, boundary demarcation, and any official mentions of stone structures. However, as noted in Chapter Four, colonial records regarding the stone walls themselves were limited, as the British administration was primarily concerned with administrative reorganization under “Bwana Gweno” rather than documenting indigenous architecture. Archival materials were consulted at the Kitgum District archives and through secondary sources referencing colonial reports.

3.5.3 Field Observation and Ethnography

Field visits were conducted to the stone wall sites for physical inspection, measurement of dimensions, analysis of materials used, and documentation of construction styles. This method enabled the study to analyse construction techniques (stone types, interlocking patterns, presence of *opiding*), as well as the current conditions of the walls. Observational checklists were used to systematically record wall height, thickness, stone types, evidence of deterioration, and surrounding topography. Photographic documentation was conducted using a digital camera, producing the images presented as Figures 1 through 16 in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Participant observation was also employed during visits to Orom West Village, where the researcher observed daily interactions with the wall site, including cattle grazing near the structures, youth activities, and the physical state of the *opiding* portholes.

3.5.4 Document Review

Historical documents, previous research (including Kinyera, 2021), colonial records, and other academic work on Northern Ugandan history, Acholi cultural practices, the Northern Uganda rock system and landscape, and traditional architecture were reviewed. The review also included work on conflict and land use, such as the Arab invasion and the impact of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict, to support the historical narrative and cross-reference oral accounts. Documents reviewed included Alidri et al. (2025) on Lotuturu Hill, UNESCO (2018) definitions of dry-stone walls, and the Dry-Stone Walling Association (2009) technical guidelines, which were used for comparative analysis in Chapter Five.

3.6 Research Procedure

The research procedure was organized into five sequential phases.

Preparation Phase: The researcher obtained research clearance from Gulu University's research and ethics committee, secured introductory letters to district authorities, and identified key research assistants (including interpreters for Acholi speakers where needed). Preliminary literature reviews were conducted to refine the research questions and identify gaps in existing knowledge.

Entry into the Field: The researcher conducted courtesy visits to community leaders in Lamwo District, including local council officials and clan elders, to explain the research objectives, seek permission, and build rapport. These initial visits were critical for establishing trust, particularly given the sensitive nature of land ownership disputes mentioned in Chapter Six.

Pilot Interviews: Initial interviews were conducted with two elders to test the semi-structured interview guides, refine questions, assess respondent engagement, and evaluate the effectiveness of translation protocols. Minor adjustments were made to question wording following the pilot phase.

Main Data Collection: Interviews and observations were implemented across all selected sites (Potika, Palabek Kal, and Gem Sub-counties). Note-taking, voice recordings (with consent), and photography were used systematically. Field visits to Gogo hill in Orom West Village were conducted on multiple occasions to measure walls, photograph the *opiding*, and observe the dual-enclosure system.

Data Validation: Triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Member checking involved returning to selected elders to verify quotations and interpretations, particularly for sensitive claims regarding the Pamega clan ownership dispute. Peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers at Gulu University who reviewed preliminary findings for consistency.

Exit and Feedback: Community feedback sessions were conducted to present preliminary findings to participants and local leaders, accompanied by expressions of appreciation for their contributions.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles throughout the research process, as detailed below:

3.7.1 Research Clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained from Gulu University's Research and Ethics Committee prior to commencing fieldwork. Introductory letters were presented to Lamwo District officials and local leadership at the sub-county and village levels. Permission to access the Gogo stone walls

was obtained from the relevant clan authorities, including acknowledgement of the ongoing ownership dispute documented in Chapter Six.

3.7.2 Informed Consent and Assent

All participants received full explanations about the research's purpose, their role, their rights, and the intended use of data. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all adult participants. For elders who were not literate, verbal consent was audio-recorded after the research purpose was explained in Acholi. Parental or guardian consent was obtained where minors were involved, though the study's primary informants were adults.

3.7.3 Confidentiality

All data were stored securely on password-protected devices and anonymized in reporting where requested. Pseudonyms were used when participants expressed concerns about identification, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as the Pamega clan ownership dispute and critiques of colonial administration. However, many elders, including Aboda Jackson and Otto Kenneth, explicitly consented to being identified by name, as they viewed their testimony as a matter of public record and cultural heritage.

3.7.4 Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

The researcher respected local customs, dressed appropriately, and followed traditional protocols when dealing with elders and sacred sites. Before photographing the *opiding* or measuring wall dimensions, the researcher sought permission from the site custodians. During interviews, traditional greetings and forms of address for elders (*Rwot, Ladit*) were used to demonstrate respect. The researcher also participated in community meals and acknowledged the hospitality of host families as part of building reciprocal relationships.

3.7.5 Risk Mitigation

Efforts were made to minimize emotional, cultural, or reputational harm. No sensitive political or conflict-related issues were pursued unless volunteered willingly by participants. When the ownership dispute between the Pamega clan and the wider Acholi community emerged spontaneously during interviews, the researcher refrained from taking sides and instead documented both perspectives faithfully, as presented in Chapter Six. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the following qualitative techniques, applied iteratively throughout the research process.

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes across interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. Themes were derived both deductively (from the research objectives regarding origins, construction, and meanings) and inductively (from patterns emerging in elder narratives). Key themes identified included: migration and settlement patterns; colonial reorganization and inter-clan conflict; dry-stone construction techniques; the *opiding* as defensive innovation; the “Leopard Strategy” of warfare; coronation rituals and spiritual legitimacy; communal labour (*Awak*); heritage deterioration; and contested ownership claims. These themes structured the presentation of findings in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

3.8.2 Chronological Analysis

Chronological analysis was used to trace changes across four historical periods: precolonial (before 1850, including Luo migration from Shilluk), the Arab invasion period (circa 1850-1911), the colonial era (1911-1962, including the administration of “Bwana Gweno”), and the

post-independence and conflict period (1962-2025, including the LRA insurgency). This chronological framework, summarized at the end of Chapter Four, enabled the study to distinguish between different phases of construction, use, and meaning of the stone walls.

3.8.3 Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis was employed to compare the Gogo stone walls with other stone structures in Lamwo District (Agoro Hills, Lacic Hill, Abayo Hill, Lotuturu Hill), with other Ugandan sites (Fort Patiko, Gega walls), and with continental African sites (Thimlich Ohinga in Kenya, Great Zimbabwe). This comparison, presented in Chapter Five, allowed the study to identify the unique features of the Gogo walls specifically the *opiding* and dual-enclosure system and to propose a localized definition of stone walls as a distinct cultural tradition.

3.9 Problems Faced During the Study

The study faced several limitations, which were addressed through the strategies described below.

Transport and accessibility challenges: Reaching the remote areas of Lamwo District, particularly the hill sites of Gogo, Agoro, and Lotuturu, was constrained by poor road conditions, especially during the rainy season. The researcher countered this by seeking assistance from local area leaders who identified clear and safer paths within the district, and by scheduling field visits during dry periods where possible.

Recall bias and oral history reliability: The study's reliance on retrospective oral accounts was subject to recall bias, as elders were recounting events spanning multiple decades and, in some cases, events from before their lifetimes that were transmitted by their parents. To address this, triangulation was conducted across multiple informants (e.g., comparing Orach Solomon's narrative with Ojara Patrick's and Aboda Jackson's), and oral accounts were cross-referenced

with available documentary evidence and physical observations of the walls themselves. Contradictions were noted in the analysis (for instance, differing accounts of the precise migration routes) and presented as reflective of oral tradition's multivocality rather than as errors to be eliminated.

Language barriers: Although the researcher was proficient in Acholi, some technical terms related to stone construction required clarification. The researcher employed translators, and key Acholi terms (*opiding*, *cupoi*, *Awak*, *cel gogo*, *igang*, *nge-gang*) were retained in the thesis with English explanations to preserve cultural specificity.

Ownership disputes and access restrictions: The ongoing dispute between the Pamega clan and the wider Acholi community over ownership of the Gogo walls, documented in Chapter Six, created moments of tension during fieldwork. The researcher addressed this by maintaining neutrality, seeking permission from both parties when possible, and clearly distinguishing between observational data (physical measurements of walls) and contested claims (ownership narratives), which were presented as perspectives rather than facts.

Seasonal vegetation growth: During the time of the study, thick grasses at Agoro Hills hampered full documentation of the site, as noted in Chapter Four. The researcher acknowledged this limitation and recommended dry-season follow-up studies in the areas for further research.

3.10 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed the following strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative research.

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in the field (multiple visits to Orom West Village), triangulation of data sources (interviews, observation, documents), and member checking (returning to elders to verify quotations and interpretations).

Transferability was addressed through thick description of the study context, including detailed accounts of the physical setting, participant characteristics, and historical background, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other dry-stone heritage sites.

Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting all research decisions, from sampling to analysis, and through peer debriefing with academic supervisors at Gulu University.

Confirmability was achieved by acknowledging the researcher's positionality as an external investigator, reflexively documenting how personal assumptions might influence interpretation, and presenting divergent perspectives (such as the Pamega versus communal ownership claims) without privileging one over the other.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE STONE WALLS IN LAMWO DISTRICT

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the findings relating to the first objective of this study: to investigate the historical origins of the stone walls in Lamwo District. The discussion integrates primary data collected through oral narratives, key informant interviews, and participant observation with existing literature reviewed in Chapter Two. By corroborating field findings with scholarly works on Acholi history, African dry-stone architecture, and colonial historiography, this chapter situates the Gogo stone walls within broader regional and continental heritage frameworks while highlighting their unique characteristics.

4.1 Historical Identity and Settlement Patterns of the Acholi people in Lamwo District

4.1.1 Migration Narratives and Luo Origins

The historical and cultural perspectives on the Acholi people in Lamwo District, East Acholi, reveal that they are part of the Luo speakers who migrated from Palestine, through Egypt, Sudan, and then to Uganda. The main dispersal point was Shilluk in Sudan due to conflicts. Oral narratives and lived experiences from the elders interviewed in Lamwo Parish, Orom West Village in Palabek Sub-county indicate numerous and gradual movement patterns between 1200 AD and 1300 AD as a Luo group. These included Potika, Agoro and Lamwo clans. During key informant interviews with elders in Potika Trading Centre, Potika Sub-county, mixed narratives emerged about these migration patterns. Orach Solomon and Obol Thomas shared a narrative of movement from Shilluk to the Eastern part of Agoro. Orach Solomon was quoted saying that:

Our ancestors moved from Shilluk to East Agoro and rested at Orwa River in Lugege, then climbed Katomo hill and named the place 'Ilere'. They later

dispersed to other hills in Lamwo which they found more conducive. This was the Panyinga group of the Luo presently occupying Lamwo District in Padibe East.

This narrative outlines the Panyinga group's foundational narrative, tracing their migration route that begins at Shilluk in Sudan and moved through intermediate points like East Agoro and the Orwa River before the pivotal ascent of Katomo hill, which they named 'Ilere' as an act of territorial claim and memory. Following this, the group dispersed strategically to more conducive areas, ultimately settling and establishing the presence of this specific Luo subgroup in their current location in Padibe East, Lamwo District. This finding aligns with established historical scholarship on Acholi origins. Atkinson (1994, p. 112), in *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*, documents that the Acholi emerged from the Luo migrations that moved southward from the Bahr el Ghazal region, with Shilluk representing a critical nexus in the Luo dispersal.

In a related narrative, Ojara Patrick asserted the migration pattern of the Gem group, narrating that:

I have lived with the old stories of our parents, who migrated from Shilluk to Juba, to Kichenga, Lokung and finally to Odyé in Gem. However, due to smallpox, they dispersed to different places like Potika, Padibe, Palabek, Gem in Lamwo and other small groups moved further to Kisumu in Kenya due to power struggles and other needs like water and land for permanent settlement. That is why we have relatives in Kenya to this day.

These old stories passed down through generations outline the historical trajectory of the Gem community, which began with a migration from Shilluk through Juba and Lokung, culminating temporarily at Odyé in Gem. However, the disruptive forces of disease, colonial imposition,

and the perpetual search for a secure, conducive place to call home later forced them into a wide dispersal. This fracturing led to groups settling locally in places like Potika and Padibe, and also extended the community's geographical reach across international borders, explaining the presence of relatives in Kenya (Kisumu) to the present day. corroborates what Vansina (1985, p. 27) identified as the characteristic pattern of African oral traditions preserving historical consciousness across generations and geographical distances. The mention of relatives in Kenya up to the present day demonstrates how oral history serves as a living archive of kinship networks that transcend colonial borders a phenomenon documented by Kopytoff (1987, p. 15) in his analysis of African frontier societies, where dispersal did not sever connections but created extended clan systems across vast territories.

Equally, the elders' accounts of dispersal driven by smallpox epidemics, power struggles, and the search for water and land align with Harris's (1979, pp. 55-57) cultural materialism theory, which posits that material conditions, including disease ecology, resource availability, and conflict, shape settlement patterns and social organization. The smallpox reference is particularly significant, as it provides a specific epidemiological driver for population movement that complements the more commonly cited political and military factors in Acholi historiography (Finnström, 2008, p. 56).

4.1.2 Colonial Administration and the Creation of Chiefdoms

Following another narrative with Orach Solomon, he added that, *"The inhabitants here came from Shilluk, settled at Agoro, Lugede, and Olongo hill. Others further moved in great numbers to Padibe, Potika, and other parts of the present-day Lamwo due to colonial administrative policies."* This concise historical summary emphasizes that the area's inhabitants originated from Shilluk and followed a distinct migratory path, initially settling at key historical sites like Agoro, Lugede, and Olongo hill. This initial presence was followed by a major dispersal where

large numbers moved further inland to establish the current population centers of Padibe, Potika, and other parts of the present-day Lamwo District, thereby linking the community's deep ancestral past with its modern geographical footprint. The arrival of the Acholi and their settlement in Northern Uganda was organized during the colonial period by the British colonial administrator **John Rutherford Parkin Postlethwaite**, nicknamed "Bwana Gweno" by the Acholi people. Elders recalled that he was given the nickname "Bwana Gweno" because he liked chicken (gweno in Acholi), and oversaw the administrative formation of East Acholi, serving as the District Commissioner of Kitgum District in 1912-1913.

He then divided the Acholi speakers and placed them under different "Rwots" or chiefs. Specifically, Rwot Lamwo was assigned to the people who settled on the hills within the present-day Lamwo District. Narratives by Aboda Jackson, an 82-year-old elder and cultural leader, confirmed this finding, pointing out that:

My parents arrived here from Shilluk in Sudan due to conflicts. They kept on telling us stories of how they found the explorers and later on the colonial administration of 'Bwana Gweno', who was in charge of East Acholi Province. He gathered all the Acholi communities in Lamwo and placed them under chiefs (Rwot) for easy control. Rwot Ouna of Lamwo was the first chief, but other chiefs subsequently emerged; for example, Rwot Atudu, who mobilised other local chiefs under his rule as Rwot of Palabek. Palabek Chiefdom was very big, so Rwot Atuda ruled other smaller chiefdoms with the help of Rwot Paduat, Rwot Paracele, Rwot Lamwo, and Rwot Ayuu Alali. Due to inter-clan conflicts, Rwot Ouna decided to move with his people to the Orom hills, in the present-day Orom-West village in Palabek Sub-county. That is why people under Rwot Ouna decided to construct Gogo stone walls on Orom hills, to protect their

Chief (Rwot Ouna of Lamwo), from any perceived attacks by the other chiefs.

‘Gogo’ means a fence, and I am happy it has lived intact up to date.

This migration pattern from Shilluk in Sudan due to conflicts placed the Lamwo community's subsequent actions in the context of their relationship with the colonial administration of ‘Bwana Gweno’ in East Acholi Province. The findings reveal that Postlethwaite restructured Acholi society by consolidating communities under appointed chiefs (*Rwots*) for administrative convenience. This finding is consistent with colonial historiography of Northern Uganda. As Atkinson (2010, p. 156) notes, British indirect rule in Acholiland involved the strategic imposition of chiefs where centralized authority had not previously existed, fundamentally altering indigenous governance structures. Crucially, this imposition fuelled inter-clan conflicts, prompting Rwot Ouna and his people to relocate to the Orom hills for defence. The enduring response to this instability was the construction of the Gogo stone walls on the hills, a physical fence built not against the colonizers but to protect their chief from perceived attacks by the rival chiefs empowered by the new colonial political order, thereby demonstrating a local community’s strategic adaptation and resilience in the face of imposed authority.

In a unique observation, the above dynamic of stone walls is absent from Kinyera’s (2021, pp. 34-37) archaeological study of the Palabek cultural landscapes, which focuses on radiocarbon dating (placing construction around 1650 AD) but does not adequately address the colonial political context that intensified the need for such fortifications. The present study suggests a dual chronology: initial construction may date to the pre-colonial period (c. 1650 AD as Kinyera suggests), but the walls gained renewed strategic importance and perhaps additional fortification during the early colonial period (c. 1912-1913) when British administrative policies exacerbated inter-chiefdom tensions.

In a similar narrative by Aboda Jackson, he added that when inter-clan conflicts ended, Rwot Ouna moved to another hill called Ture, to practice farming with his subjects. They cultivated maize, sorghum (Gaya, Lawera) and ‘raa’ which were given to him by the British. It is also believed that he later died and was buried at his permanent residence in Ture, during the climax colonial rule in Acholi region, with his lineage continuing to date, under Patong clan for Lamwo Chiefdom. Aboda Jackson further mentioned that:

Rwot Ouna had seven wives from other tribes in Acholi; Atiak, Padibe, Lamwo and Sudanese tribes. Ouna’s family lineage extended to Rwot Bongojane, Rwot Adot Kaibaka, Rwot Okum Benzileri, and is currently under Rwot Okeny Charles. So, I am happy that I was born during the time of Rwot Adot Kaibaka, and today, I head the Pudye clan, which are assistants and advisors to the Rwot of Lamwo Chiefdom.

This narrative asserts the legitimacy and continuity of the Lamwo Chiefdom lineage, which began with Rwot Ouna, whose practice of taking seven wives from diverse tribes (including Atiak, Padibe, Lamwo, and Sudanese) demonstrates a political strategy of alliance building and influence expansion, a finding that parallels what Kopytoff (1987, p. 24) describes as the frontier strategy of African political formation, where marriage alliances created networks of obligation and loyalty that transcended clan boundaries. The narrative traces the succession through figures like Adot Kaibaka to the current Okeny Charles, expressing a personal link to this history. Furthermore, the Pudye clan, who function as the assistants and advisors to the Rwot of Lamwo Chiefdom highlights the hierarchical and delegated nature of governance within the chiefdom structure. This finding demonstrates what Miller (1987, pp. 13-17) would identify as the role of material culture (including the stone walls themselves) in legitimizing dynastic succession. The walls are not merely historical artifacts but active participants in the ongoing construction of political authority.

4.2 Historical origin of stone walls in Lamwo District

4.2.1 Pre-Colonial Defense Strategies and the Arab Incursion

The findings indicate that the stone walls of Lamwo District originated from pre-colonial defense strategies, with elders identifying the Arab invasion of East Africa and Northern Uganda in the 1850s as a critical catalyst. Otto Kenneth, a 75-year-old from Palabek Kal narrated those stones in general are associated to the early stone age life of the Luo ancestors, believed to be from Palestine, who used stones for religious purposes, for instance, constructing worship places, pyramids, and graves. This explains why the Luo speakers maintained the communal practice of settling around hills where stones were easily accessible. Oral narratives from other elders and key informants confirmed that the stone walls of Lamwo are deeply intertwined with the history of the wider Lamwo Chiefdom, and the individual Chiefdom of Palabek, one of the powerful chiefdoms in East Acholi land. This finding resonates with Caton-Thompson's (1931, p. 110) work at Great Zimbabwe, which established that dry-stone construction in Africa was an indigenous tradition rather than a technology introduced by external civilizations, a conclusion that overturned earlier Eurocentric attributions to Phoenicians or other non-African groups.

Key informant findings with Aboda Jackson, an elder and custodian at Orom West village in Lamwo Parish, Palabek Kal Sub-county, specified that when the Arabs entered East Africa and Northern Uganda in the 1850s, their invasion destabilised the Luo speakers in the region, causing insecurity that compelled local communities to settle on hills and construct stone walls (*cel gogo*). This was to protect themselves in communal setups against the powerful Arabs who used guns as weapons, which aligns with what Chirikure and Pikirayi (2008, p. 979) observed at Great Zimbabwe: that stone enclosures served defensive functions against external threats, though in the Lamwo case, the threat was specifically linked to gun-armed slavers.

Otto Kenneth described that; “*Inside these stone walls were called ‘igang’ for shelter and outside was called ‘nge-gang’ for hunting, fetching firewood and grazing animals.*” This narrative is an indication that the stone walls were the central organizing principle of the Acholi lifestyle. They created a linguistic and physical distinction between culture (inside) and nature (outside), serving as the pivot point around which daily survival and social identity revolved. This represents what Ingold (1993, p. 162) would identify as a “taskscape,” where the physical environment is organized according to culturally specific activities and social meanings. The wall did not merely enclose space; it created a conceptual boundary between domestic/cultural space and wild/natural space. This finding extends Thorson's (2002, p. 27) definition of stone walls as “culturally created objects discrete from [their] surroundings” by demonstrating that the cultural distinction operated on both physical and cognitive levels.

4.2.2 The Gogo Walls in Continental and Global Comparative Perspective

During a field visit to Palabek Kal Sub-county in Lamwo District, findings from participant observation and elders’ narratives, unearthed that Gogo stone wall in Lamwo Parish, Orom West Village, rests on Gogo hill, aligning with the above elders’ narratives. Most closely, they resemble Thimlich Ohinga in Kenya and Great Zimbabwe because they all feature house-like structures with formal entrances, corroborates Wandibba's (1986, pp. 45-47) documentation of Thimlich Ohinga as a dry-stone walled settlement with a single entrance (*ohinga*) and Pikirayi's (2001, p. 67) analysis of Great Zimbabwe as characterized by high curved stones. However, the present study identifies unique features that distinguish the Gogo walls from these better-known sites. Most significantly, the *opiding*—small, window-like apertures at the base of the walls designed for surveillance and as firing ports for *cupoi* (guns) and arrows represent a defensive innovation not documented at either Thimlich Ohinga or Great Zimbabwe. Wandibba (1986) makes no mention of such portholes at Thimlich Ohinga, and Ndoro (1997)

does not identify comparable features at Great Zimbabwe. The Gogo walls' *opiding* represent what Kabwijamu et al. (2025, p. 118) identified as a gap in the literature on East African stone architecture: the absence of detailed analysis of defensive features beyond general statements about fortification.

Elders interviewed from Palabek Kal Sub-county emphasised that the Gogo stone walls were constructed by people under the reign of Rwot Ouna of Lamwo, to protect him from any perceived attacks by the other chiefs from rival chiefdoms within Lamwo and from Sudan. Since then, the walls served as the royal residences (Gang Rwot) for the powerful Kings of Lamwo, until the colonial period when such chiefdoms became disintegrated. Elderly participants reiterated that they functioned as administrative hubs and symbols of centralized power, distinguishing the elite ruling class from the general population through architectural grandeur. Hence, from these findings, this study focused largely on Gogo stone walls, which, from the elders' narratives, are characterized as durable, dry-stone residential enclosures. In contrast, other regional structures serve different functions: Agoro Hills primarily consists of agricultural terraces rather than residential living spaces. On the other hand, Kitmoko Hill (Gega walls), unlike the dry-stone method, involved cemented stones and were built more recently in the 1960s to fence the cattle farm of former Agriculture Minister, Lakidi Erick.

From the review of existing studies and in comparison, to Africa's most famous masonry sites, the Gogo walls most closely resemble Thimlich Ohinga, documented by Wandibada (1986) as having one singular entrance (Ohinga), and the Great Zimbabwe, built with high curved stones as documented by Ndoro (1997), because they all feature house-like structures with formal entrances. Supporting findings from the participant observation confirm that the Gogo stone enclosures are architecturally distinct due to the presence of *opiding*. These are small, window-like apertures located at the base of the walls, specifically designed for surveillance and as

firing ports for defense. Furthermore, while many international and continental sites feature expansive, complex partitions, the Gogo layout is specifically dual-natured: it consists of two nearby but separate enclosures, one dedicated to the royalty and the other for the king's subjects. While Great Zimbabwe features the Hill Complex, Great Enclosure, and Valley Complex (Pikirayi, 2001, p. 72), these reflect different historical phases and social functions rather than the deliberate contemporaneous separation of royal and subject spaces observable at Gogo. This dual layout embodies what Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003, pp. 13-16) describe as the “spatialization of social hierarchy,” where architectural arrangements physically manifest and reproduce social distinctions.

In comparison with non-African sites, Western Stone Forts of Ireland (Bolton, 2009) and the Ming and Qing Dynasty walls of China (Waldron, 1990, p. 33), the study serves not to suggest influence but to highlight by contrast the distinctive characteristics of the Gogo walls. Unlike the static, high-status defensive enclosures of Ireland or the centralized, state-sponsored engineering of Chinese imperial walls, the Gogo walls are defined by localized, communal ecology, shifting cultivation, migratory patterns, and spiritual significance attached to natural landforms. This finding supports what Schmidt (1978, p. 71) argued: that African historical architecture must be understood on its own terms, not measured against European or Asian frameworks.

4.2.3 Indigenous Oral Testimony as Historical Evidence

Findings in an interview with Aboda Jakson, an 82-year-old elder and cultural leader in Orom West Village, his narrative stressed that the Gogo stone walls are the genuine stone walls in Lamwo District and Acholi land, arguing that:

These are not just rocks piled by tired hands; they are the Gogo, the silent guardians of our bloodline. Look closely at the base of these walls. Do you see the opiding? Our

grandfathers did not build windows for the wind; they built eyes for the spear and the cupoi (gun). While other tribes across the great lands built walls only to keep their cattle in or to show their pride, the Lamwo-Palabek people built a wall that could fight back. When the enemies came, our warriors did not need to stand on the rooftops; they knelt at the very foundation of their homes, protected by the earth's bones, and struck from the shadows of the stones. And see how the Gogo is divided? It is a map of our respect. One side for the Rwot (the King) and his greatness, and the other for the people who held him up. It is a house of two hearts beating close together. These walls have tasted the smoke of a thousand years and survived the long wars that followed. They stand today because they were built with the spirit of the Acholi dry stones that need no mud to hold them, only the strength of being placed exactly where they belong.

The above narrative is a powerful piece of oral history that elevates the Gogo stone walls from mere archaeological ruins to a living symbol of identity, military genius, and social harmony, which aligns with UNESCO's (2003, p. 7) concept of "living heritage," where tangible structures maintain intangible cultural significance for contemporary communities. It is a strong argument that the Gogo walls are outstanding because they are a triple-threat of heritage: they are a military tool (the *opiding*), a social blueprint (the *Rwot's* enclosure), and an engineering dry-stone resilience. This represents what Vansina (1985, p. 32) identifies as the distinctive value of oral testimony: it preserves not just facts but the "cultural meaning" and "emotional significance" of historical events.

In similar findings, the participant observations and measurements revealed that the Gogo stone walls, constructed without mortar, reach heights of seven feet, approximately 2.134 meters and a thickness of 0.8 meters, forming circular enclosures that can be up to 51.2 meters in diameter.

These measurements support Thorson's (2002, p. 55) classification of stone walls based on "form, material, and function" by demonstrating that the Gogo builders operated with codified, reproducible standards. Thus, this study builds on these unique characteristics and elders' narratives to argue that the Gogo stone walls are outstanding because they bridge the gap between monumental art and military functionality. Most importantly, they are not just walls; they are a sophisticated defensive system and a physical manifestation of social order, preserved through an ancient and masterful masonry tradition.

Figure 4: The 0.8 meters thickness of the Gogo stone walls



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya (middle) on 26th July 2025

Figure 5: The 2.134 meters height of the Gogo stone walls



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya (Right) on 26th July 2025

4.2.4 Challenging Colonial Myths of Northern Uganda

Other existing narratives by elders reveal that these stone walls are not merely architectural remnants but historical testimonies to the socio-political organisation of pre-colonial Acholi communities. This indicates that the existence of these stone walls challenges the colonial-era myth of Northern Uganda as a cultural vacuum. As Branch (2011, p. 89) has noted, Northern

Uganda has often been characterized in both colonial and post-colonial discourse as a peripheral region lacking the complex political organization found in central and southern Uganda (for instance, Buganda). Clearly, these stone structures suggest that Lamwo was part of a complex network of settlements, where clans established territorial boundaries and fortified their homesteads. The walls reflect a sense of permanence, contradicting the stereotype of nomadic or transient Acholi societies, as their construction implies long-term habitation, strategic planning, and a deep connection to place. A key informant narrative from an elder and cultural leader in Orom West Village, Aboda Jackson, aged 82 years, supported this finding, as he narrated that:

These stones were not laid in haste. My grandfather told me that our people built them when the clans first settled here, long before the white man penetrated our area, but operated in Kitgum, which was a colonial administrative unit of East Acholi Province. The idea of these walls was borrowed from the Luo speakers of Shilluk and marked where one clan's land ended and another began. It was not just about land it was about respect. You crossed a wall you knew whose ancestors you were walking among.

This narrative clearly validates that these walls, which borrowed their design from the Luo speakers of Shilluk, served a crucial function not merely for territorial demarcation between clans but as profound symbols of respect and social order. The walls evidence what Kopytoff (1987, p. 26) called the “internal African frontier”: the process by which African societies developed complex territorial organization and political structures without external (non-African) models. In this system, crossing a wall was a significant act that acknowledged not only the living clan's ownership but also the ancestors whose spiritual domain one was entering, illustrating that land was inseparable from lineage, identity, and moral obligation.

4.3 Other existing hills with supposed stone walls in Lamwo District

This study perceives that the historical and social organization of the Acholi people in Lamwo District is intimately tied to the landscape, where hills served as the foundation for military defense, political authority, and spiritual life. For clans like the Padibe and Palacam, these elevated sites were not just geographical features but the central pillars of their identity and survival. Findings from key informants and oral histories by elderly participants interviewed across the study identify the following significant hills in Lamwo Districts, all indicating early human settlement backed by evidence of stone use and or walls:

4.3.1 Agoro Hills: Pre-colonial Settlement

Existing oral narratives in this area reveal extensive evidence of pre-colonial settlement and construction. In an interview with Aboda Jackson, an elder from Potika Parish in Agoro Sub-county, he described Agoro hills as series of house platforms built on the sides of the hills. However, during the time of this study, a visit to the site was hampered due to the thick grasses and supposed deep ditch that surrounds the site. He specified that; *“These stone walls are up to 50 meters in length and two meters in height and are evidence of early settlement by our ancestors in hills within Lamwo.”* The study therefore observes that like Gogo stone walls, the Agoro hills walls offer evidence of long-term settlement in the region and insights into the social and political history of the Acholi people before the colonial era. However, functionally, Agoro appears to differ from Gogo: while Gogo walls are residential enclosures with defensive *opiding*, the Agoro terraces suggest an agricultural or mixed-use purpose. This functional diversity within the same district suggests that stone construction in Lamwo was not limited to a single purpose (royal defense) but adapted to multiple needs. This finding aligns with Connah's (2001, p. 72) observation that African stone architecture served “multiple functions including defense, territorial marking, livestock enclosures, and ceremonial purposes.”

4.3.2 Lacic Hill and the Padibe Clan: Military and Spiritual Sovereignty

In an interview with Nyeko Martin, the acting Prime Minister of Ker Kwaro Lokung, he recalled that Lacic Hill was a resting point for Arab traders who used it as their fort for ammunitions. For years, the hill has served as the strategic headquarters for the Padibe Chiefdom since the reign of Rwot Anyala. The chiefdom however reached its peak of influence under the leadership of Rwot Ogwok, who inherited his father's reign in 1862. He specified that; *"During the late 19th century, Ogwok transformed the political landscape of Northern Uganda by forming an alliance with Arab traders to acquire firearms."* While this alliance secured Padibe's borders, Nyeko reinforced that it also incited fierce rivalry with neighbouring leaders such as the Rwot of Payira, Paluga and the Rwot of Labong, leading to significant military confrontations at Lacic Hill. The insecurity that followed compelled Rwot Ogwok to construct a stone wall-like fence (Cel Gogo) to protect his subjects. This account corroborates the wider East African historiography of the late 19th century, where firearms fundamentally altered power relations. As Schmidt (1978, pp. 82-84) documented, the introduction of guns through long-distance trade networks created new forms of political centralization and military organization across East Africa. Ogwok's strategy of acquiring firearms to defend his borders, while simultaneously provoking rivalries, exemplifies the double-edged nature of this technological change.

Nyeko Martin added that the neighboring chiefs envied Rwot Ogwok due to his loyalty and close ties with the Arabs, the British and being the first civilized chief in Acholi land to wear descent clothes, sleep on a bed, and take Arb made coffee. Beyond its role as a fortress, Nyeko's narrative signals that the hill remains a sacred site protected by spirits; it continues to be a focal point for rituals aimed at securing rain, relief from epidemics, and protection from misfortune for the entire clan. This demonstrates continuity between pre-colonial and contemporary

spiritual practices. This aligns with Okot p'Bitek's (1985, p. 23) analysis of Acholi cosmology, where landscape features (hills, rivers, rocks) are not inert but active participants in community well-being. The site's dual function historical fortress and ongoing ritual center exemplifies UNESCO's (2003, p. 9) definition of intangible cultural heritage, where practices and representations are "constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment."

4.3.3 Abayo Hill: Divine Origin and Communal Healing

In contrast to the military focus of Gogo, Lacic, existing narratives emphasised that Abayo Hill is defined by its mystical and curative reputation within Acholi cosmology. Oral traditions narrated by Nyeko Martin assert that "*the hill fell from heaven*," marking it as a direct link between the earthly community and the divine. This heavenly origin necessitates the performance of the *Jok Abayo* ritual, a communal ceremony designed to cleanse the society of calamities or bad omens. The hill's significance is further reinforced by the presence of a water source at its base, which is locally believed to possess miraculous healing powers capable of curing chronic or otherwise incurable diseases, making it a site of pilgrimage for physical and spiritual restoration within the Lamwo community. This finding resonates with what Huffman (2009, p. 31) identified at Great Zimbabwe: the integration of natural landscape features (hills, water sources) into sacred landscapes where political and spiritual authority intersected. The requirement of specific rituals (the *Jok Abayo*) and the prohibition against participants who have consumed elephant meat demonstrate that access to the hill's spiritual benefits is governed by traditional codes of purity a characteristic of what scholars of African religion term "ritual specialization" (p'Bitek, 1971, p. 67).

4.3.4 Lotuturu Hill: Migration, Politics, and Agricultural Rituals

Lotuturu Hill highlights the migration history of the Palacam clan, who settled in the area after moving from present-day South Sudan, based on a narrative by Owali Joseph, an elder from

Potika Parish, near Lotuturu. This study confirmed that the hill's history reflects the changing tides of Ugandan governance, from its gazettement as a forest reserve by colonial administrators to its use as a strategic hideout by President Idi Amin during the 1970s. This finding is in agreement to the assertion by Alidri et al. (2025) who documented the ruins of Lotuturu hill, emphasizing that Lotuturu served as a defensive sanctuary for the Acholi people during 19th-century inter-ethnic conflicts and later during the colonial era, utilizing the hill's caves and vantage points as a natural fortress.

Today, the hill has transitioned into a vital agricultural resource with a prison farm and other individual coffee, cassava, and potato farms that sustain the economy of Lamwo District. Spiritual life remains centered on the land, with specific rituals performed to banish malevolent spirits and ensure bountiful harvests. These ceremonies are governed by strict traditional codes, such as the prohibition against participants who have consumed elephant meat, reflecting an ancient connection between dietary taboos and spiritual purity. The study views that the connection between agricultural rituals and dietary prohibitions (elephant meat) reveals what Sollitoe (1996, pp. 90-95) identified as indigenous knowledge systems where "ecological understanding, technical skills, and cultural logic" are intertwined. The prohibition is not arbitrary but reflects an ancient relationship between hunting taboos, spiritual purity, and agricultural fertility a relationship that the stone walls and hills of Lamwo District continue to embody.

4.4 Conclusion

The historical origin of the stone walls in Lamwo District is deeply rooted in Luo migration, pre-colonial defense strategies, and colonial-induced political reorganization. The Gogo walls emerged as a strategic adaptation to both external threats (Arab incursions with firearms in the 1850s) and internal rivalries (inter-chiefdom conflicts exacerbated by British indirect rule). The

walls functioned simultaneously as military fortifications, royal residences, administrative centers, and symbols of Acholi identity and resilience. The continuity of the Lamwo Chieftdom lineage from Rwot Ouna to the present Rwot Okeny Charles, preserved through oral tradition and material heritage, demonstrates that these structures are not mere archaeological ruins but living monuments that anchor Acholi political and spiritual authority. The existence of stone walls across multiple hills refutes colonial stereotypes of Northern Uganda as nomadic or culturally void, providing empirical evidence of long-term habitation, strategic planning, and sophisticated pre-colonial political organization. The Gogo walls, with their unique *opiding* and dual-enclosure design, represent an outstanding example of indigenous African engineering that deserves recognition as a distinctive heritage tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES USED DURING THE CONSTRUCTION OF STONE WALLS IN LAMWO DISTRICT

5.0 Introduction

This section discusses the findings related to the second objective of the study: analyzing the skills and techniques used in the construction of stone walls in Lamwo District. The discussion integrates oral testimonies from master builders and elders, participant observation data (including measurements and photographic documentation), and comparative analysis with other dry-stone traditions in Africa and globally. By examining structural mechanics, material selection, the innovative *opiding* feature, and indigenous pedagogical systems, this chapter demonstrates that the Gogo stone walls represent a sophisticated indigenous engineering tradition that challenges Eurocentric assumptions about pre-colonial African architecture.

5.1 Structural Mechanics and Stone Selection: The “Male and Female” Interlocking System

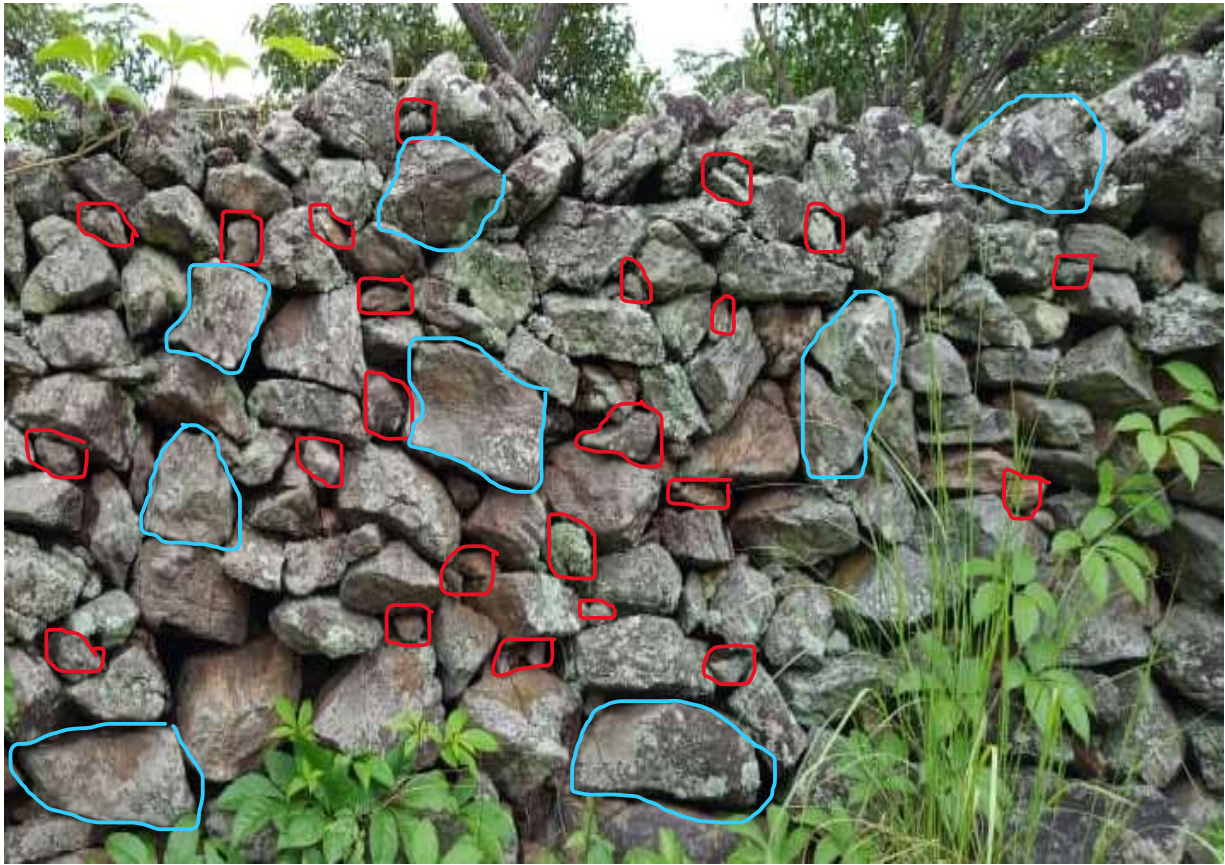
The study unearthed that the construction of the Gogo stone walls represents a refined application of dry-stone masonry, an engineering technique that relies exclusively on frictional resistance and the compressive strength of the materials. This finding places Lamwo within a distinguished tradition of African dry-stone architecture documented at Great Zimbabwe (Caton-Thompson, 1931; Chirikure & Pikirayi, 2008), Thimlich Ohinga (Wandibba, 1986), and other sites. Unlike modern mortared walls, which are sometimes made of cement and prone to cracking under seismic shifts or thermal expansion, these dry-stone structures possess an inherent flexibility that allows them to settle without catastrophic failure. The early builders demonstrated a high degree of spatial intelligence through their critical selection of stones based on geometric properties. Local elders interviewed in Orom West Village unanimously described a process of ‘listening to the stones’ during construction. These narratives suggest

that the selection of through-stones was a ritualized act. Oketayot Joseph, an elder from Orom West Village recounted that:

Master builders (often high-ranking clan members) could identify 'male' and 'female' stones, terms used to describe how different rock shapes interlocked. The male stones (protruding or angular) were fitted into the female gaps (recesses) to create a bond that the wind could not push.

From the above finding, this study uncovers specific technical knowledge that has not been extensively documented in previous scholarship: the classification of stones into "male" (large and protruding/angular) and "female" (small and recessed/gapped) types to create interlocking bonds. Equally, concept of "listening to the stones" during construction, as described by elders, aligns with what McEachren (2004, p. 147) dismissively characterized as "simple repetitive tasks" but which this study reveals as embodied knowledge requiring years of apprenticeship. Throughout the observation phase of the study, it was evident that the critical feature of this mechanical stability is the use of stones or larger rocks that span the entire thickness of the wall. These stones act as structural anchors, effectively tying the two outer faces together to prevent bellying or outward collapse. This design indicates a sophisticated, intuitive understanding of lateral earth pressure and gravity-based stabilization of the indigenous population of Lamwo Chiefdom in Orom West Village, Palabek County, Lamwo District.

Figure 6: Interlocked male (big and highlighted blue) and female stones (small and highlighted red) at Gogo stone walls



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

5.2 Materiality and Environmental Literacy: Granite, Basalt, and Ancestral Geology

The deliberate reliance on granite and basalt within Gogo stone walls is a testament to the builders' deep environmental literacy and understanding of material science. The study observed that these stones were not selected simply due to their local abundance but rather for their specific physical attributes: granite was utilized for its exceptional compressive strength to provide a stable, unyielding foundation, while basalt was preferred for its angular fragments, which allowed for tighter, more secure interlocking patterns. Elders in Orom West village explained that “stones were harvested from the hills because the hills were believed to be the bones of the ancestors.” This meant that choosing the hardest granite for foundations was a

way to ground the chiefdom in the strength of the past. This finding resonates with p'Bitek's (1971, p. 45) analysis of Acholi cosmology, where the physical landscape is animated by ancestral presence.

The elders' narratives describe communal labour parties known as *Awak*, where hundreds of clansmen would form human chains to move basalt from the hilltops. This finding aligns with Malinowski's (1922, pp. 132-135) functionalist framework, which argues that cultural practices (including construction techniques) exist to meet societal needs in this case, the need for coordinated collective action to achieve a shared security goal. The *Awak* system represents what Schmidt (1978, p. 71) documents elsewhere in Africa: the mobilization of clan-based labour for large-scale construction projects, demonstrating centralized authority capable of organizing hundreds of workers.

Furthermore, the extraction of these materials from the immediate hill environments reflects a low-impact engineering philosophy. For instance, Otto Kenneth, an elder, emphasised that the durability of the basalt was not just for physical defence, but a spiritual requirement; the wall had to be as permanent as the mountain itself to protect the royal lineage. This approach suggests that pre-colonial Acholi architects from Lamwo sought to harmonize their structures with the natural topography, utilizing sustainable resource management techniques that minimized the ecological footprint of their settlements. This finding supports Deetz's (1996, p. 45) argument that material culture "encodes" cultural values the permanence of the wall symbolized the permanence of the royal lineage. The wall's durability was not merely functional but ideological, serving to naturalize the chief's authority by linking it to the enduring geology of the hill.

Figure 7: Portions of basalt and granite



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

5.3 The “Opiding”: Engineering Defensive Portholes

From a structural engineering perspective, the *opiding* (portholes) represent the most technically complex feature of the Gogo stonewalls. From an engineering perspective, creating intentional voids at the base of a gravity-dependent wall where vertical load is highest requires sophisticated understanding of load redistribution. Aboda Jackson, an elder born during the reign of Rwot Adot Kaibaka (the third Chief to occupy Gogo stone walls palace), narrated that these portholes were the “*eyes of the wall.*” He added that:

The opiding were positioned at the base specifically so that defenders could lie flat on the ground. These portholes were guarded by the famous and fierce guards in the chiefdom. This position offered maximum protection while allowing them to fire the cupoi (muzzle-loading guns) or launch arrows at the ankles of approaching enemies.

This finding signals that the positioning of the *opiding* (portholes) at the base of the fortification was to allow elite, fierce guards to lie flat on the ground while defending the chiefdom. This low-profile stance provided maximum physical protection from incoming fire while offering a unique tactical advantage point to target the vulnerabilities of approaching enemies. By firing *cupoi* (muzzle-loading guns) or launching arrows from ground level, the defenders could specifically target the ankles of attackers an area usually left exposed by shields effectively disabling the enemy advance while remaining nearly invisible and shielded by the structure above them. This finding aligns with what scholars of African warfare have documented elsewhere: the use of terrain and fortifications to offset technological disadvantages. As Schmidt (1978, p. 84) notes, African societies adapted to the introduction of firearms by modifying defensive architectures and tactics. The *opiding* represents precisely such an adaptation: the low-angle trajectory neutralized the advantage of tall shields, while the ground-level position minimized defenders' exposure to incoming fire.

The study appreciated that including an intentional opening at the base of a gravity-dependent wall where the vertical load is at its peak requires precise execution of beam placement and load redistribution. Elders emphasised that this was purposely done to prevent the collapse of the stones above the aperture, hence builders employed elongated capstones or rudimentary corbelling techniques to bridge the gap, effectively diverting the weight to the vertical sides of the opening. The successful integration of these portholes suggests that the master builders

could accurately calculate the load-bearing limits of quartzite and basalt through experiential observation, balancing the need for defensive surveillance with the requirement for structural integrity. This finding supports Thorson's (2002, p. 75) observation that dry-stone builders develop “an intuitive understanding of stone physics” through generations of trial and error. However, Thorson's work focuses on New England's agricultural walls, which lack the defensive complexity of Gogo's *opiding*. The Gogo walls thus extend the documented range of dry-stone engineering complexity.

Figure 8: The structure of the opiding at Gogo stone walls



Source: *Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025*

5.4 Pedagogy: The Stool and the String

The observable standardization of wall dimensions across the district, specifically a thickness of approximately **0.8 meters** and a height of **2.134 meters** points to the existence of an indigenous oral and technical curriculum. Another elder, Okot Julius, described that:

My grandfather participated in the construction of these stone walls at Gogo. He would tell us that the height of a royal enclosure was measured against the height of a Rwot (King) seated on his traditional stool, because the wall had to be tall enough to hide the king from view but low enough for a standing guard to see over it.

This oral description of measuring with the body confirms that the 0.8m thickness and 2.134 meters height were not accidental but were part of a codified indigenous standard passed down through generations of apprentices who were taught that a wall is the shadow of its builder. To maintain uniform thickness, builders used strings made of animal hide or twisted fiber stretched between two stakes. This consistency suggests that engineering knowledge was governed by a structured system of apprenticeship, where the spatial logic and stone rules of construction were transmitted through tactile practice and oral tradition. This finding challenges Eurocentric historiography that dismisses African architecture as "vernacular" (implying untrained, intuitive, or inferior) rather than "monumental" (implying engineered, planned, sophisticated). As Chirikure and Pikirayi (2008, p. 990) argue regarding Great Zimbabwe, "the term 'vernacular' is inappropriate for structures that required centralized planning, specialized labour, and multigenerational construction." The same argument applies to Gogo: the standardized dimensions, specialized *opiding*, and codified apprenticeship system indicate planned, engineered construction, not spontaneous piling of stones.

Uniquely, the finding that the height of a royal enclosure was measured against the height of a Rwot seated on his traditional stool” reveals an indigenous system of measurement based on the human body and social hierarchy. This practice parallels what Ingold (1993, p. 176) terms “dwelling perspective,” where knowledge is embedded in practical engagement with the environment rather than abstract representation.

Figure 9: The 0.8m thickness of Gogo stone walls



Source: *Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025*

Figure 10: The 2.134 meters height of Gogo stone walls



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

5.5 Comparative Analysis: Gogo stone walls in regional and continental context

The comparison of Gogo walls with other Ugandan sites (Fort Patiko, Gega fence, Agoro Hills) reveals functional and technical distinctions. Fort Patiko (Baker, 1874, p. 203) and Gega walls (built 1960s) use mortar-bound construction, while Gogo and Agoro utilize dry-stone techniques. This distinction is significant because dry-stone construction requires greater skill in stone selection and fitting; mortar can compensate for poor fit, but dry-stone cannot. The

Gogo builders' mastery of dry-stone technique thus represents a higher level of indigenous engineering competence than the later, mortar-assisted colonial structures.

The comparison with Thimlich Ohinga (Wandibba, 1986) and Great Zimbabwe (Pikirayi, 2001) reveals both similarities and differences. All three share: (a) dry-stone construction without mortar, (b) undressed or minimally dressed stones, (c) formal entrances, and (d) likely defensive and status functions. However, the Gogo walls possess two unique features: (1) the *opiding* (defensive portholes) not documented at either site, and (2) the dual-enclosure system (royal vs. subjects) that differs from the complex multi-enclosure layout of Great Zimbabwe. These unique features justify the study's proposed localized definition of stone walls as "a distinct cultural tradition of dry-stone masonry, characterized by carefully stacked, undressed stones forming enclosures meant for both living and protection."

The study's critique of UNESCO (2018) and DSWA (2009) definitions which prioritize technical criteria (absence of mortar) over cultural utility is methodologically significant. As Smith (2006, p. 34) argues, heritage definitions are not neutral but reflect particular cultural values. The Gogo definition proposed by this study centers African priorities (defense, social hierarchy, ancestral spirituality) rather than Euro-American technical criteria. This move aligns with postcolonial heritage studies that advocate for "decolonizing" heritage frameworks (Lane, 2011, pp. 8-9).

The study's agreement with Thorson (2005) that stone walls are "culturally manufactured landforms" and with Gowlland (2024) that they constitute "lithic ecosystems and living heritage" provides theoretical grounding for the findings. The Gogo walls are not inert artifacts but active components of an ongoing relationship between the Acholi people, their ancestors, and the landscape a relationship that the walls themselves helped to shape and sustain.

Figure 11: Fort Patiko, built as a military fortification, and later became a hub for anti-slavery efforts



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 30th July 2025

Figure 12: Great Zimbabwe's high wall and entrance



Source: Digital archival research

Figure 13: Thimick Ohinga in Kenya with a single entrance



Source: Digital archival research

5.6 Conclusion

The construction skills and techniques demonstrated in the Gogo stone walls represent a sophisticated indigenous engineering tradition that challenges Eurocentric assumptions about pre-colonial African architecture. The dry-stone masonry method, “male/female” stone classification, through-stone placement, and *opiding* engineering reveal an intuitive yet codified understanding of structural mechanics, load redistribution, and material science. The integration of spiritual concerns selecting granite because hills were “the bones of the ancestors” and requiring wall permanence to “protect the royal lineage” demonstrates that construction was not merely functional but cosmologically embedded. The standardized dimensions and apprenticeship system provide empirical evidence of an indigenous technical curriculum transmitted without written blueprints, proving that sophisticated architecture does not require literacy. The Gogo walls extend the documented range of dry-stone engineering complexity, introducing defensive innovations (*opiding*) not found at better-known African sites. The proposed localized definition centering cultural utility and defensive design

contributes to decolonizing heritage frameworks, moving beyond Euro-American technical criteria (absence of mortar) to prioritize African priorities (defense, social hierarchy, ancestral spirituality). The Gogo walls thus stand as a testament to pre-colonial Acholi intellectual and technical sophistication.

CHAPTER SIX

SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STONE WALLS IN LAMWO DISTRICT

6.0 Introduction

This section discusses the findings relating to the third objective of the study: to explore the cultural, social, and symbolic meanings of the stone walls among local communities. Drawing on oral narratives, participant observation, and comparative analysis, the discussion examines how the Gogo walls functioned as military instruments, sacred boundaries, markers of social hierarchy, and in the contemporary period contested heritage and sites of cultural resistance. The findings demonstrate that the walls are not mere physical structures but “living archives” that encode Acholi cosmology, political authority, and collective memory.

6.1 Military Strategy and the ‘Opiding’

The study discovered that the use of portholes (*opiding*) reveals a sophisticated understanding of non-negotiable warfare. By positioning these apertures at the base of the wall, the Palabek defenders utilized a low-angle trajectory that rendered traditional shields designed for chest-high combat largely ineffective. This architectural choice suggests a centralized military command capable of training specialized guards for flat-ground defence. The placement of walls on rocky hills further highlights the use of natural topography as a force multiplier, transforming the landscape into a vertical fortress. Okello Dickson from Palabek Kal backed this finding with an assertion that:

Our grandfathers did not fight like men who wanted to be seen; they fought like the leopard that hides in the rocks. They built the Gogo (stone walls) with the opiding at the very bottom, just above the grass. I was told that the youngest, fastest warriors would lie on their bellies for hours, watching through those small holes. When the enemy came close, thinking they were safe behind their

tall shields, our men would strike at the ankles with the cupoi or a poisoned arrow. Once a man cannot walk, he cannot fight. The enemy would trip over their own fallen brothers, and that is how we kept the Padibe at bay without ever losing a man from our side.

Elder Okello's account reveals a shift in how we perceive pre-colonial warfare. It was not about glorious, open-field combat, but about calculated invisible tactics. The "Leopard" Metaphor indicates a cultural value placed on stealth and patience rather than brute force. The focus on the "ankles" confirms a sophisticated military logic stopping an advance by creating a physical bottleneck of wounded soldiers, which is more effective than killing a few individuals at the front. Thus, this technique of warfare illustrates the unique military significance of the Gogo stone walls, compared to other supposed stone walls in Lamwo District, which were primarily terraced formations rather than residential enclosures. This finding challenges the colonial stereotype of African warfare as disorganized or "primitive." As Finnström (2008, p. 112) notes in his ethnography of Acholi warfare, pre-colonial Acholi military culture emphasized "avoiding unnecessary exposure" and "using the landscape as a weapon." The Gogo walls physically manifest this doctrine.

Similarly, as Schmidt (1978, p. 86) documents elsewhere in Africa, the introduction of firearms did not necessarily favor invaders; fortified positions with covered firing positions (like the *opiding*) could neutralize the advantage of superior weaponry. The Gogo walls thus represent not passive defense but an active, intelligent military system.

Figure 14: The opiding used as a military strategy



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

Figure 15: The natural topography at Gogo stone wall as a force multiplier



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

6.2 Communal and Sacred Significance: The walls as spiritual filters

Spiritually, the Gogo walls were repeatedly mentioned by elders to function as a sacred boundary between the physical and spirit worlds. The mentioned coronation rituals for *Rwot Ouna* indicate that the stone walls were essential to the legitimacy of leadership; the chief was

not merely a political ruler but the guardian of the ancestral lithic archive. The ritual slaughter of five sheep to neutralize hostile spirits from rival groups like the Padibe and Payira demonstrates that the walls were seen as a spiritual filter, physically and energetically protecting the community from external pollution or metaphysical attacks. Elder Akello Imelda recounted that:

A Chief is not a Chief because he sits on a chair; he is a Chief because the stones recognize him. When Rwot Ouna was brought to the hill, he had to pass through the shadow of the great stone walls. We slaughtered five sheep not for food, but to wash away the bad air sent by those who envied our land. The blood was sprinkled on the lintels of the entrance. It was a message to the spirits of our ancestors who live within the cracks of the rocks: 'Here is your son, protect him so he can protect us.' If the stones did not feel his weight, his reign would not last a single harvest. That is why all our chiefs have lasted and ruled well, because the ancestors recognised and guided them.

The imaginary description of the coronation rituals which involved passing "through the shadow of the great stone walls" positions the walls within Acholi cosmology as what p'Bitek (1971, p. 67) terms "mediators between the living and the ancestors." Similarly, the ritual slaughter of five sheep "to wash away the bad air sent by those who envied our land" and the sprinkling of blood on entrance lintels correspond to documented Acholi purification practices (Atkinson, 1994, p. 156), but the specific integration with stone walls is a new finding. Elder Akello Imelda's statement "A Chief is not a Chief because he sits on a chair; he is a Chief because the stones recognize him" is profound in its implications. It suggests that the walls were understood as vehicles for ancestral agency. This finding aligns with what Miller (1987, pp. 13-17) terms the "social life of objects": material things are not passive but actively

constitute social relationships and political authority. The stones do not merely symbolize the chief's power; they *confer* it through recognition.

Figure 16: Rwot Ouna's drinking pot



Source: *Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025*

Equally, there were repeated mentions of hunting and harvest rituals by elders interviewed around Gogo hill, who recounted that these were common practices, including the naming of children, but these have since then since ceased due to modern alternatives of livelihoods and Christianity, where children are required to be baptized in the church.

Figure 17: The Communal grinding spot at the Gogo stone walls



Source: *Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025*

Figure 18: The 'omweso' which was a Leisure activity at Gogo stone walls



Source: *Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025*

Figure 19: Stone wall Fence separating Rowt Ouna's subjects and the kraal



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

Figure 20: Wild fruits still found at Gogo hill



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

6.3 Functional Land Use in Agoro and Orom

Much as the study focus was on Gogo stone walls, in Agoro and Orom hills, the transition from timber to stone for fences reflects a lithic adaptation. The rarity of wood forced a mastery of dry-stone masonry, where gravity and friction rather than mortar held the structures together. This unique ability extended to early public health strategies: by using stone walls to separate livestock from human quarters. Similar to what was observed in Gogo hills, this technique enabled the communities to create a hygienic barrier that likely mitigated the spread of zoonotic diseases, facilitating the growth of stable, sustainable settlements in otherwise harsh terrains. Elder Oyat from Agoro, confirmed this finding, relating that:

In the hills, the trees are small, and the wind is strong. We could not build fences of wood like they do in the flatlands, for the wood would rot or the cattle would push it over. We looked at the hills and saw that the Creator had already given us the teeth of the earth, the stones. We learned to stack them, so they leaned into each other, without any mud to hold them. We built the kraals high enough so the wild animals could not jump, and we kept the cows away from where our children slept. It was the stones that taught us how to live in a place where nothing else grows.

Elder Oyat's testimony provides an environmental explanation for the dry-stone masonry observed in Agoro and Orom. The finding that scarcity of timber in hill environments forced the "mastery of dry-stone masonry" provides an environmental explanation for the technological choice. Elder Oyat's testimony "We looked at the hills and saw that the Creator had already given us the teeth of the earth, the stones" reflects what Sollitoe (1996, p. 92) terms "environmental perception": indigenous communities do not simply adapt to their environment but interpret it through cultural frameworks. The stones are not obstacles but gifts, "teeth" that can be used to build.

The finding that stone walls separated livestock from human quarters, creating a "hygienic barrier" that "likely mitigated the spread of zoonotic diseases," reveals an indigenous public health strategy not previously documented in Acholi historiography. As Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003, p. 15) note, spatial organization often encodes health and purity concepts. The Gogo and Agoro walls represent an early form of what modern epidemiology terms "biosecurity" separating animal and human living spaces to reduce disease transmission. This finding challenges the stereotype of pre-colonial African settlements as unplanned or unsanitary.

6.4 The living archive versus contemporary decay: Heritage as healing

The findings on the contemporary significance present a paradox: while the community views the walls as a source of cultural healing post-LRA, the physical structures are in a state of "dilapidation." This reflects a shift in the value system where the walls once provided physical survival (military), they now provide psychological survival (identity). However, the lack of government oversight and the encroachment of squirrel hunters and cattle grazing represent a slow erasure of this heritage. During an interview session with Elder Lanyero Sylvia from Orom West Village, she lamented that:

It hurts my heart to see the boys chasing squirrels over the walls today, knocking down stones that have stood since before the white man came. During the time of the LRA, we hid in the shadows of these hills; the spirits of the walls kept us invisible when the rebels passed by. Now that there is peace, we are forgetting our protectors. The Pameya clan says the wall is theirs, but the wall belongs to the history of all Acholi. If we do not pick up the stones that have fallen and put them back, we are not just losing a wall; we are losing the map that shows us who we were before the world became loud.

The finding that the walls served as "sanctuary during the recent trauma of the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency" introduces a contemporary dimension absent from most archaeological studies. Elder Lanyero Sylvia's statement "During the time of the LRA, we hid in the shadows of these hills; the spirits of the walls kept us invisible when the rebels passed by" documents what Finnström (2008, p. 167) terms "existential uncertainty" in Acholi experience of the LRA war, and the role of landscape features as refuge. The walls were not merely historical monuments but active sites of survival during living memory.

The paradox that the walls provide "psychological survival (identity)" in the present even as they physically deteriorate ("dilapidation") reflects what Smith (2006, p. 56) terms the "authorised heritage discourse" vs. "lived heritage." For official heritage institutions, preservation means physical conservation; for the community, the walls remain significant even in ruin because they anchor identity. This finding addresses the gap identified in Chapter Two regarding "neglect of contemporary relevance" (Lane, 2011, pp. 8-9) the walls are not frozen in the pre-colonial past but continue to be used, interpreted, and valued.

The conflict between the Pamega clan and the wider Acholi community over ownership represents what Kopytoff (1987, p. 28) identifies as "disputes over the symbolic capital of the past." The walls are contested because they confer legitimacy to own the wall is to own the history of the land and, by extension, the right to speak for the ancestors. This finding supports Miller's (1987, p. 109) argument that material objects are "arenas for social struggle" where power, identity, and history are negotiated.

Figure 21: Cattle grazing at Gogo stone walls (section 2 for the Ouna's subjects)



Source: Field Photograph by the Researcher: Laker Angioleta Katya on 26th July 2025

6.5 Conflict and preservation: Cultural resistance and the future

From the narratives of majority of the elders, it was evident in their tones that the ownership dispute by the *Pamega* clan underscores the symbolic capital of the stone walls. This study identified that to own the wall is to own the history of the land. The community's grassroots efforts to re-assemble the stones and protect the surrounding forest are a form of cultural resistance, mirroring the historical resistance of their ancestors. The proposal for an academic center and a reconstructed palace suggests a desire to transition the site from a ruin of the past into a hub for future intellectual and economic growth. Oketayot Joseph a native of Orom West Village, he confirmed this finding, arguing that:

You see these stones? They are our birthright. They are the silent witnesses to every breath our ancestors took on this soil. When the Pamega clan speaks of ownership, they are not merely talking about boundaries on a map or a patch of earth. They know what we all know: to hold the keys to the wall is to hold the truth of our history. If you own the stone, you own the story. And if you lose the stone, you become a ghost in your own land. For years, we watched the forest try to swallow these ruins, and we watched the world try to forget us. But look at our youth now. When they go into the woods to gather the fallen stones, when they clear the brush from the old foundations, they are not just laborers. They are warriors. Every stone they lift back into place is an act of defiance. Just as our forefathers stood firm against those who sought to uproot us, we stand firm today by refusing to let our heritage crumble into dust. This is our resistance; we fight not with spears, but with preservation.

We do not wish for this place to remain a graveyard of memories. We look at these ruins and we see more than what was we see what will be. We dream of a reconstructed palace where the spirit of our leadership can breathe again. We imagine an academic center where our children, and the children of strangers, can come to learn that wisdom didn't start in a city far away it started right here, in the shade of these trees. We are turning our ruins into a foundation. We are building a bridge from the resistance of the past to the prosperity of the future.

The grassroots efforts to "re-assemble the stones" and "protect the surrounding forest" represent what the study terms "preservation as defiance." Oketayot Joseph's statement "Every stone they lift back into place is an act of defiance. Just as our forefathers stood firm against those who

sought to uproot us, we stand firm today by refusing to let our heritage crumble into dust" directly links contemporary heritage activism to historical resistance (against Arabs, colonial administrators, rival chiefs). This finding aligns with what p'Bitek (1985, p. 23) notes about Acholi cultural resilience: memory is not passive but active, requiring continuous effort.

The proposal for an "academic center and a reconstructed palace" indicates a desire to transition the site from ruin to "hub for future intellectual and economic growth." This vision aligns with UNESCO's (2003, p. 12) concept of "sustainable heritage management" that benefits communities economically and culturally. However, the Pamega clan's insistence that "preservation without rightful ownership is hollow" introduces a political dimension that heritage frameworks often avoid. As Ndoro and Pwiti (2001, p. 232) note, heritage management in Africa must grapple with "contested authorities and legitimate custodianship."

In a contrasting claim by Okwera Samuel, an elder from Pamega clan signals the existing tension between the two communities over ownership of the Gogo stone walls. He stated that:

The Gogo stone walls are not merely remnants of the past; they are the living testament of our lineage as Acholi. Each stone was laid by the hands of our forebears, and each wall carries the imprint of our clan's authority and sacrifice. To question our ownership is to question the very history of this land, for it was the wider Lamwo Chiefdom including the Pamega who defended it, preserved it, and passed it down through generations. The now existing clans are simply divisions of the past, but we are all Acholi of Lamwo. Others may speak of collective preservation, but we remind them that preservation without rightful ownership is hollow. We do not oppose the rebuilding of the stones or the protection of the forest, but these acts must be recognized as extensions of our stewardship. The proposal for an academic center and reconstructed palace

cannot erase our claim, it must honor it. Without the Pamega, the walls are stripped of meaning, reduced to ruins without voice. With us, they remain alive, carrying forward the authority of our Acholi ancestors into the future. The Gogo stone walls are equally ours as the Acholi formally under the wider Lamwo Chieftdom, and through them, the land itself speaks our name.

The contrasting narratives collective grassroots preservation vs. exclusive ancestral lineage reveal a fundamental tension between universal heritage (belonging to all Acholi/the nation) and particular heritage (belonging to a specific clan). This tension is not unique to Lamwo; similar disputes occur at Great Zimbabwe (Chirikure & Pikirayi, 2008, p. 988) and other African heritage sites. The study's conclusion that the walls are "a contested bridge where modern collective action must reconcile with deeply held claims of historical ownership" offers a framework for understanding such disputes not as obstacles to be resolved but as ongoing negotiations that are themselves part of the walls' living heritage.

6.6 Conclusion

The symbolic meaning of the Gogo stone walls transcends their physical presence, encompassing military doctrine, spiritual cosmology, social hierarchy, and contemporary identity. The "Leopard Strategy" encoded in the *opiding* reveals pre-colonial Acholi warfare as sophisticated, calculated, and adaptive not the claimed "primitive" combat of colonial stereotypes. The walls' role as spiritual filters, where ancestors "recognize" or reject chiefs through the medium of stones, demonstrates that material culture actively constitutes political authority rather than merely symbolizing it. The dual function of protecting against physical invaders and metaphysical threats (envy, curses) positions the walls as a uniquely integrated defense system one for the body and one for the soul. The contemporary significance of the walls as LRA sanctuaries and post-conflict healing sites challenges archaeological approaches

that treat heritage as frozen in the past; these walls remain “living archives” actively used, interpreted, and fought over. The ownership dispute between the Pamega clan and the wider community exemplifies broader tensions between universal heritage (belonging to all Acholi) and particular heritage (exclusive lineage claims), offering a framework for understanding contested heritage as dynamic negotiation rather than pathological conflict. The Gogo stone walls thus emerge as a tripartite heritage military technology, sacred boundary, and identity anchor preserved not merely as ruins but as living symbols of Acholi continuity, resistance, and resilience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

The following sections summarize the key findings from each chapter, present the conclusions drawn from the study, and offer recommendations for heritage conservation, policy, community engagement, education, and areas for further research.

7.1 Summary

7.1.1 Objective One

This chapter showed that the Lamwo stone walls arose from Acholi migration, settlement patterns, and colonial encounters. Oral traditions traced Acholi ancestry to Luo speakers migrating from Palestine through Egypt and Sudan, dispersing at Shilluk (1200–1300 AD). Two main groups emerged: the Panyinga, settling in Padibe East via East Agoro, Orwa River, and Katomo hill; and the Gem, moving through Juba and Lokung to Odyé, later spreading to Potika, Padibe, Palabek Gem, and Kisumu, Kenya.

Colonial reorganization under District Commissioner John R. P. Postlethwaite (“Bwana Gweno”) divided Acholi speakers under appointed chiefs. Rwot Ouna of Lamwo was assigned to hill settlements, but colonial imposition fueled inter-clan rivalries, leading to relocation to Orom hills where the Gogo stone walls were built for protection. Other notable sites included Agoro Hills (large house platforms), Lacic Hill (Padibe headquarters), Abayo Hill (ritual cleansing site), and Lotuturu Hill (colonial camp later used by Idi Amin). The chapter concluded that the stone walls’ origins span three eras: precolonial, colonial, and contemporary.

7.1.2 Objective Two

This chapter examined the construction of the Gogo stone walls, highlighting dry-stone masonry as the core technique, relying on friction and compressive strength without mortar.

Builders used “male” (angular) and “female” (recessed) stones to interlock, while through-stones anchored the walls against collapse. Granite provided foundational strength, basalt enabled tighter interlocking, and communal labour parties (Awak) transported materials, reflecting both engineering skill and cultural belief that hills were ancestral bones.

The most complex feature was the *opiding* (portholes), designed for defenders to fire at enemies’ ankles. Standardized dimensions of 0.8m thick and 2.134m height were maintained using animal-hide strings and measured against a seated chief’s stool. Comparisons with Thimlich Ohinga and Great Zimbabwe underscored continental significance, while the *opiding* and dual-enclosure system marked Gogo walls as uniquely distinctive.

7.1.3 Objective Three

This chapter examined the symbolic meanings of Lamwo’s stone walls, showing them as expressions of power, lineage, and cosmological order. Military use of the *opiding* revealed advanced strategy: low-angle attacks bypassed shields, ankle targeting created bottlenecks, and metaphors like Elder Okello Dickson’s “leopard in the rocks” emphasized stealth and patience.

Spiritually, the walls marked boundaries between physical and spiritual realms. Rituals, such as Rwot Ouna’s coronation with sacrificial blood on lintels, transformed them into protective filters against metaphysical threats. Functionally, stone kraals addressed timber scarcity, safeguarded livestock, and separated children’s sleeping areas an early public health measure.

Contemporary meanings were paradoxical: walls offered sanctuary during LRA trauma yet now face neglect, with youth damaging stones. Preservation debates revealed tensions communal narratives framed restoration as cultural resistance, while the Pamega clan asserted ancestral ownership, warning that “preservation without rightful ownership is hollow.”

7.2 Conclusions

7.2.1 Objective One

The chapter concluded that the Lamwo stone walls are inseparable from Acholi migration and colonial encounters, rooted in a historical continuum from Luo migration to the present. Colonial reorganization under Postlethwaite, which empowered rival chiefs, directly spurred defensive wall construction strategic adaptations against internal conflicts rather than colonizers. The study highlighted Acholi's sophisticated precolonial systems of political organization, territorial demarcation, and spiritual belief, countering colonial portrayals of Northern Uganda as a cultural vacuum. Multiple hill sites confirmed dry-stone masonry as a regional tradition serving military, political, spiritual, and agricultural roles. Continuity of Rwot Ouna's lineage to the present Rwot Okeny Charles reinforced Lamwo Chiefdom's legitimacy, with the Pudye clan as advisors. Generally, the walls stand as enduring testimonies of Acholi socio-political organization, permanence, and strategic planning, challenging stereotypes of nomadic societies.

7.2.2 Objective Two

The chapter concluded that the Gogo stone walls exemplify advanced indigenous engineering, challenging Eurocentric assumptions about the need for written blueprints. Their standardized dimensions demonstrated technical heritage preserved through collective memory and clan master builders' skills. Gendered stone classification reflected intuitive interlocking logic, while material selection showed environmental literacy and sustainable resource use. Communal labour (Awak) reinforced social cohesion, and the *opiding* feature revealed military sophistication, transforming walls into active defensive systems.

Placed within Africa's dry-stone architectural tradition, the Gogo walls stand out for their unique features, justifying recognition as outstanding heritage consistent with Thorson's view

of stone walls as cultural landforms and Gowlland's concept of lithic ecosystems and living heritage.

7.2.3 Objective Three

The chapter concluded that the Gogo stone walls embodied multiple roles military technology, spiritual sanctuary, political symbol, and contested heritage explaining their lasting significance. The *opiding* revealed advanced military philosophy rooted in stealth and tactical efficiency, while metaphors like the "leopard strategy" framed the landscape as a force multiplier. Spiritually, the walls functioned as "lithic scripture," inscribing legitimacy through rituals such as Rwot Ouna's coronation and were viewed as ancestral archives capable of protection. Contemporary meanings highlighted paradoxes: once offering physical survival, the walls now provide psychological resilience amid neglect and encroachment. Preservation debates exposed tensions between communal visions of cultural resistance and Pamega clan claims of ancestral ownership. Ultimately, the Gogo walls stand as a contested bridge where collective action must reconcile heritage stewardship with historical claims to shape their future significance

7.3 General Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrated that the Lamwo stone walls especially the Gogo walls of Orom West represent an outstanding African heritage tradition long overlooked in mainstream scholarship. Using oral narratives, participant observation, and physical documentation, the study established three key findings: the walls arose from Luo migration, colonial reorganization under "Bwana Gweno," and inter-clan conflicts; they embodied advanced dry-stone masonry techniques such as gendered stone classification, through-stone anchoring, and complex *opiding* portholes; and they carried layered symbolic meanings as military technology, spiritual sanctuary, political legitimacy, and contested heritage.

The research challenged colonial myths of Northern Uganda as a cultural vacuum, providing evidence of precolonial engineering, political organization, and symbolic systems. While comparable to Thimlich Ohinga and Great Zimbabwe, the Gogo walls were distinguished by unique features like the *opiding* and dual-enclosure system. Contemporary challenges included physical dilapidation, encroachment, and disputes between communal preservation efforts and Pameya clan claims of ancestral ownership.

The study concluded by supporting community visions to transform the site from a “graveyard of memories” into a reconstructed palace and academic center, preserving both physical structures and ancestral authority. The Gogo walls thus stand as silent guardians of Acholi heritage, carrying ancestral legitimacy into the future if present generations choose to restore and honour them.

7.4 New Knowledge

- i. Unique Architectural Typology: The Gogo walls represent a distinct African dry-stone masonry style defined by two global rarities: the *opiding* (low-angle defensive portholes for ankle-height fire) and a dual-enclosure system that physically separates royal quarters from those of subjects.
- ii. Standardized Indigenous Engineering: Challenging Eurocentric views on literacy and architecture, the study reveals that Acholi builders achieved precise, codified standards averaging 0.8m in thickness and 2.134m in height using body-based metrics and oral apprenticeship rather than written blueprints.
- iii. Functional Gendered Classification: The classification of stones into "male" (protruding) and "female" (recessed) was a functional engineering strategy rather than a mere metaphor. This system utilized interlocking lithic geometry and structural anchors to ensure wall stability without mortar.

- iv. The "Leopard Strategy" Doctrine: The walls facilitated a unique asymmetric military doctrine called the "Leopard Strategy." Defenders prioritized stealth and incapacitation by firing through base portholes at attackers' unprotected lower limbs, creating tactical bottlenecks rather than seeking high-visibility engagement.
- v. The Heritage Transition Paradox: While the walls transitioned from providing physical survival (military defense) to psychological survival (cultural identity post-LRA), this shift has led to a maintenance paradox: the lack of immediate military necessity has resulted in accelerated physical deterioration and neglect.
- vi. Heritage as Land Rights Representation: Claims of ancestral stewardship over the Gogo walls often function as strategic proxies for contemporary land disputes. Ownership of the historical narrative is used by clans to legitimize and negotiate modern territorial authority and land rights.
- vii. The *Awak* Labour Model: The construction utilized the *Awak* system, a sophisticated model of indigenous labour governance based on clan-based reciprocal obligation. This system integrated technical production, social bonding, and ritual practice into a single communal framework.
- viii. 10. Redefining the "Stone Wall": The study proposes a localized definition that moves beyond technical composition to include cultural utility. It defines Gogo-type walls as masonry enclosures that simultaneously integrate military defense, political hierarchy, and spiritual legitimation within a single architectural tradition.

7.5 Recommendations

The study presents the following recommendations are directed to relevant Ugandan institutions including the Uganda National Museum, Lamwo District Local Government, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and the Uganda National Archives as well as international heritage bodies. These proposals emphasize immediate conservation,

community empowerment, educational integration, legal reform, and cross-border collaboration to safeguard the Gogo walls as a living heritage:

- i. The Uganda National Museum, in collaboration with the Lamwo District Local Government, should prioritize immediate conservation measures. These include clearing invasive vegetation, reassembling fallen stones under the guidance of elders, erecting protective barriers, and establishing a joint management committee that incorporates both the Pameya clan and the wider Acholi community.
- ii. The Gogo stone walls should be nominated for recognition as a National Heritage Site, with subsequent consideration for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, justified by their unique *opiding* apertures and dual-enclosure system.
- iii. The community's vision for a reconstructed palace and academic centre should be realized as a museum, training facility, research hub, and cultural gathering space.
- iv. The Gogo stone walls should be incorporated into the Primary Seven and Senior Four History syllabi under the theme of "Pre-Colonial African Societies."
- v. The Uganda National Archives and academic scholars should systematically record oral testimonies from elders such as Aboda Jackson and Otto Kenneth to safeguard intangible heritage before it is lost.
- vi. The Uganda Museum and Monuments Act should be revised to define dry-stone walls as a distinct heritage category, requiring specialized conservation protocols and mandatory consultation with traditional custodians.
- vii. Lamwo District should designate the Gogo, Agoro, Lacic, Abayo, and Lotuturu hills as a Heritage Protection Zone, regulating quarrying, grazing, hunting, and construction activities.

- viii. The Uganda National Museum should establish partnerships with Kenya (Thimlich Ohinga) and Zimbabwe (Great Zimbabwe) to facilitate exchange visits, joint training, and comparative research.

7.6 Areas for Further Study

- i. The following identified areas of further study point to critical avenues for advancing knowledge. Pursuing these research directions will not only deepen scholarly understanding but also strengthen policy frameworks and community-based preservation strategies.
- ii. Absolute dating (radiocarbon, OSL) to verify construction timelines.
- iii. Subsurface surveys to locate foundations, artifacts, and Rwot Ouna's grave.
- iv. Comparative chronology of other Lamwo hill sites.
- v. Documentation of surviving master builders' apprenticeship systems.
- vi. Comparative analysis with contested sites (Kasubi Tombs, Nyero Rock Paintings, Bigo Bya Mugenyi).
- vii. Archival study of Arab trade networks and their influence on Acholi military tactics.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Elders and Cultural Leaders

Study Title: Historical Origin, Construction Techniques, and Symbolic Meanings of Stone Walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda

Researcher: Laker Angeoletta Katya, Gulu University

Section A: Demographic Information

Question	Response
1. Participant code	
2. Age	
3. Sex	Male / Female
4. Sub-county/village	
5. Clan affiliation	
6. Role in community (e.g., elder, cultural leader, clan head)	
7. Years of residence in Lamwo District	

Section B: Historical Origins (Objective 1)

1. Can you tell me the story of how your ancestors came to settle in this area?
2. Where did your ancestors migrate from before arriving in Lamwo District?
3. What do you know about the origins of the stone walls found in this district?
4. Who built these stone walls, and under whose leadership (which Rwot or chief)?
5. Are there oral narratives or songs that mention the construction of these walls? If yes, can you share them?
6. How do the stone walls at Gogo hill relate to other stone structures at Agoro, Lacic, Abayo, and Lotuturu hills?

7. What role did the colonial administration, particularly "Bwana Gweno" (John Rutherford Parkin Postlethwaite), play in the history of these walls?

Section C: Skills and Construction Techniques (Objective 2)

1. Can you describe how the stone walls were constructed?
2. What types of stones were used, and where were they collected from?
3. Were different stones used for different parts of the wall? If yes, how were they selected?
4. Did builders use any binding materials like mortar, or were the stones dry-stacked?
5. Have you heard of the terms "male stones" and "female stones"? If yes, what do these terms mean?
6. How did builders ensure that the walls remained stable and did not collapse?
7. What is the *opiding* (porthole), and how was it constructed?
8. How was the height and thickness of the walls measured? Were there traditional tools or body measurements used?
9. Was construction a communal activity? If yes, how was labour organized (e.g., *Awak* system)?
10. How were construction skills passed down from one generation to the next?

Section D: Cultural, Social, and Symbolic Meanings (Objective 3)

1. What do the stone walls mean to the Acholi people of Lamwo District today?
2. What role did the walls play in protecting the community during conflicts (e.g., Arab invasions, inter-clan wars, LRA insurgency)?
3. Can you describe the "Leopard Strategy" of defence associated with the *opiding*?
4. Were there rituals or ceremonies performed at the stone walls? If yes, please describe them (e.g., coronation rituals, cleansing ceremonies, harvest rituals).

5. What is the significance of the dual-enclosure system (separate spaces for the Rwot and for subjects)?
6. How do the stone walls distinguish between *igang* (inside shelter) and *nge-gang* (outside for hunting and grazing)?
7. Are there any taboos, prohibitions, or sacred beliefs associated with the walls?
8. How have the meanings and uses of the walls changed from the precolonial period to today?
9. Who currently owns or claims stewardship over the stone walls? Are there disputes over ownership?
10. What is being done to preserve the walls, and what challenges does preservation face?
11. Would you support the construction of a heritage centre and reconstructed palace at the site? Why or why not?

Section E: Closing

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about the stone walls that we have not discussed?

May I return to clarify any information if needed?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Local Historians and Teachers

Section A: Demographic Information

Question	Response
1. Participant code	
2. Age	
3. Sex	Male / Female
4. Sub-county/village	
5. Position (e.g., teacher, local historian)	
6. Years of teaching or researching history	

Section B: Historical Knowledge

1. What historical records (written or oral) exist regarding the stone walls of Lamwo District?
2. How are the stone walls presented in school curricula or local history lessons?
3. Do you know of any colonial documents, maps, or reports that mention these stone structures?
4. What is your understanding of the migration patterns of the Luo/Acholi people into Lamwo District?
5. How do the stone walls fit into the broader history of the Acholi people?

Section C: Cultural and Social Meanings

1. In your observation, how do community members today view the stone walls?
2. Are young people taught about the significance of these walls? If yes, how?
3. What role do the walls play in contemporary Acholi cultural identity?
4. Have you observed any changes in how the walls are used or valued over your lifetime?
5. What preservation efforts, if any, have you witnessed or participated in?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Youth and Community Members

Section A: Demographic Information

Question	Response
1. Participant code	
2. Age	
3. Sex	Male / Female
4. Sub-county/village	
5. Occupation	
6. Education level	

Section B: Awareness and Attitudes

1. Have you ever seen or visited the stone walls at Gogo, Agoro, Lacic, Abayo, or Lotuturu hills?
2. What have you been told about these walls by your parents, grandparents, or teachers?
3. Do you know who built the walls and why?
4. What do the stone walls mean to you personally?
5. Do you consider the walls important to preserve? Why or why not?
6. What activities currently take place near the stone walls (e.g., grazing, farming, hunting)?
7. Have you ever participated in any preservation or maintenance of the walls?
8. Would you be interested in learning traditional dry-stone construction techniques? Why or why not?
9. Do you think the walls could be used for tourism or education? How?
10. Is there anything else you think researchers or the government should know about these walls?

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Cultural Institutions and District Heritage Officers

Section A: Demographic Information

Question	Response
1. Participant code	
2. Position title	
3. Institution	
4. Years in position	

Section B: Institutional Knowledge and Policy

1. What is the official status of the stone walls in Lamwo District (e.g., protected site, documented, undesignated)?
2. Does your institution have any records, maps, or reports concerning the stone walls?
3. What is your understanding of the historical origins of these walls?
4. Are there any existing preservation or management plans for the walls?
5. What challenges does your institution face in protecting heritage sites like the stone walls?
6. What is your relationship with traditional custodians (elders, Rwots, clans) regarding heritage management?
7. Have there been any disputes over ownership or management of the stone walls? How were they addressed?
8. What resources (financial, technical, human) are available for heritage preservation in Lamwo District?
9. Would your institution support a nomination of the Gogo stone walls for UNESCO World Heritage status?
10. What recommendations would you offer for improving the preservation and documentation of these walls?

Appendix E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND ACADEMICS

Question	Response
1. Participant code	
2. Specialization	
3. Institutional affiliation	
4. Years of experience	

Section B: Professional Assessment

1. Are you familiar with the stone walls of Lamwo District? If yes, how would you describe them?
2. How do the Gogo stone walls compare to other dry-stone sites in Africa, such as Thimlich Ohinga or Great Zimbabwe?
3. What construction techniques do you observe in these walls, and how do they compare to other dry-stone traditions?
4. What is the significance of the *opiding* (portholes) from an archaeological perspective?
5. What dating methods would you recommend for establishing the chronology of these walls?
6. What conservation challenges do dry-stone walls typically face, and how might they apply to the Gogo walls?
7. How should indigenous knowledge and oral traditions be integrated with archaeological methods in studying sites like this?
8. What research priorities would you recommend for future studies of the Lamwo stone walls?
9. Do you consider the Gogo walls to be of national, continental, or global significance? Why?
10. What recommendations would you offer for heritage management and preservation?

Appendix F: Field Observation Checklist

Site Name: _____ Date: _____

GPS Coordinates: _____ Weather: _____

Section A: Site Description

Observation Item	Description
1. Location and accessibility	
2. Topographical setting (hilltop, slope, valley)	
3. Vegetation cover around walls	
4. Evidence of recent disturbance (grazing, hunting, farming)	
5. Overall site condition (excellent, good, fair, poor, ruinous)	

Section B: Wall Construction (Objective 2)

Observation Item	Measurement/Description
1. Wall height (measured in meters)	
2. Wall thickness (measured in meters)	
3. Length of wall/enclosure (measured in meters)	
4. Stone types observed (granite, basalt, other)	
5. Evidence of dry-stacking (no mortar visible)	Yes / No
6. Presence of through-stones (stones spanning full thickness)	Yes / No
7. Presence of "male/female" stone interlocking	Yes / No
8. Presence of <i>opiding</i> (portholes)	Yes / No
9. Number and dimensions of <i>opiding</i>	
10. Evidence of corbelling or capstones	Yes / No

11. Wall condition (intact, partial collapse, severe collapse)	
12. Evidence of recent repairs	Yes / No

Section C: Enclosure Layout (Objective 2 and 3)

Observation Item	Description
1. 18. Single enclosure or multiple enclosures	
2. 19. Evidence of dual-enclosure system (royal vs. subjects)	Yes / No
3. 20. Presence of formal entrances/gateways	Yes / No
4. 21. Dimensions of entrances	
5. 22. Evidence of internal structures (platforms, house foundations)	Yes / No
6. 23. Evidence of grinding spots (<i>omweso</i> or other features)	Yes / No

Section D: Surrounding Environment

Observation Item	Description
1. 24. Evidence of cattle grazing near walls	Yes / No
2. 25. Evidence of farming adjacent to site	Yes / No
3. 26. Evidence of squirrel hunting (disturbed stones)	Yes / No
4. 27. Water sources near site	Yes / No
5. 28. Paths/trails through or around site	Yes / No

Section E: Photographic Documentation

Photo Number	Subject	Direction Facing
1		
2		
3		

Appendix G: Document Review Checklist

Document Type	Specific Documents to Review	Information Sought	Accessed (Yes/No)
Colonial records	District Commissioner reports (Kitgum District, 1912-1913); "Bwana Gweno" correspondence	Colonial policies on land use, Acholi administration, mentions of stone structures	
Archival materials	Uganda National Archives; Kitgum District archives	Post-1962 records, independence-era land policies	
Previous research	Kinyera (2021); Alidri et al. (2025)	Historical and archaeological findings on Northern Uganda	
Academic literature	Studies on Thimlich Ohinga, Great Zimbabwe, dry-stone masonry	Comparative construction techniques and heritage management	
Policy documents	Uganda Museum and Monuments Act (Cap 46); National Heritage Policy	Legal framework for heritage protection	
Maps	Colonial and contemporary maps of Lamwo District	Location of stone walls, settlement patterns, territorial boundaries	
Oral tradition transcripts	Existing recorded oral histories from Acholi region	Migration narratives, clan histories	

Appendix H: Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants (English Version)

Study Title: Historical Origin, Construction Techniques, and Symbolic Meanings of Stone Walls in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda

Researcher: Laker Angeoletta Katya, Gulu University

Supervisor: Dr. Alidri Agatha, Gulu University

Contact: +256 776 761266

Part A: Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study: This study aims to investigate the historical origins of the stone walls in Lamwo District, analyze the skills and techniques used in their construction, and explore the cultural, social, and symbolic meanings these walls hold for local communities.

Why You Have Been Invited: You have been invited to participate because you are an elder, cultural leader, local historian, youth, community member, district officer, or academic with knowledge of or connection to the stone walls of Lamwo District.

What Participation Involves: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes. The interview will include questions about the history, construction, and meanings of the stone walls. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. You may also be photographed at the site if you consent.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question and may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality: All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in any reports or publications unless you explicitly give permission. Data will be stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated physical risks from participating. Some questions may touch on sensitive topics such as land disputes or colonial history. You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable. There are no direct personal benefits, but your participation will contribute to the preservation and recognition of Acholi heritage.

Use of Data: The information collected will be used for a master's thesis, academic publications, conference presentations, and heritage management recommendations. Audio recordings and photographs may be archived at Gulu University for future research.

Right to Withdraw: You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw, any data collected from you up to that point will be deleted upon your request.

Part B: Consent Statement

Please tick or initial each box if you agree:

	Statement
☐	I have read and understood the information sheet above.
☐	I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.
☐	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.
☐	I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview. (Optional)
☐	I agree to be photographed at the site. (Optional)
☐	I agree that anonymous quotations may be used in publications.
☐	I agree to participate in this study.

Signatures:

Participant name (print):

Participant signature:

Date:

Researcher signature:

Date:

Appendix I: Document 2: Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants (Acholi Version)

Lok me Yieru me Donyo i Piem

Nying Piem: Nongo gin makato, yaa me gero, ki tekwaro me kor kidi i Lamwo District, Northern Uganda

Lapac: Laker Angeoletta Katya, Gulu University

Gwok me Lok:

Yieru man en me nongo gin makato me kor kidi i Lamwo District, nono yaa me gero-gi, ki ngeno ki tekwaro ma gin-go bot jo Lamwo.

Gin ma Donyo i Piem tye ka keto:

Ibi penjo penjo ma okene i kom gin makato, yaa me gero, ki tekwaro me kor kidi. Penjo bi kawo dakika 45 nyaka 90. Ka iyie, wabirecodi dwon mamegi wek obed ature. Wabipoto c aleni bende ka iyie.

Yieru ma Manok:

Yieru man en manok. Iromoo wek iyie, bende iromoo wek i dwil penjo ma pe imito, kata wek iweye piem kare ma imito.

Kan gond: Nyingi pe bibedo i kwir kata gin mo ma okit ma oa i yieru man, labongo yieri mamegi.

Yot ki bal: Bal mo pe tye. Penjo mo twero balo nying kata kaka iwinyo, ento iromoo wek i dwil-gi.

Yie me Jonyo kata Weyo Piem: Itye ki twero weyo piem kare ma imito. Ka iweye,
gin ma imiyo bibur.

Yie me Lapac:

An _____ ayie ni an kin bedo i piem man.

Lacim: _____ Nino: _____

Appendix J: Document 3: Oral Consent Script (For Elders with Limited Literacy)

"Good morning/afternoon. My name is Laker Angeoleta Katya, a Master student from Gulu University. I am conducting a study on the stone walls of Lamwo District. I would like to ask you questions about the history of these walls, how they were built, and what they mean to the community.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. You can stop the interview at any time. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation so I do not miss any important information. The recording will only be heard by my supervisor and me. Your name will not be shared publicly unless you permit me.

Do you understand what I have explained? Do you agree to participate? Do I have your permission to record this interview?"

If yes, the researcher signs below:

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's verbal consent witnessed by: _____

Appendix K: Consent Form for Photographic Documentation

Study Title: Historical Origin, Construction Techniques, and Symbolic Meanings of Stone Walls in Lamwo District

Participant Code: _____ **Date:** _____

I, _____, give my consent for the researcher to take photographs of:

| ☐ | Myself || ☐ | The stone walls at my location

| ☐ | Cultural activities at the site | ☐ | Artifacts or objects in my custody

I understand that these photographs may be used in:

| ☐ | The master's thesis | ☐ | Academic publications| ☐ | Conference presentation | ☐ | Heritage management reports | ☐ | Museum exhibitions

Special conditions (if any): _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix L: Community Leader Informed Consent (For Gatekeeper Permission)

Study Title: Historical Origin, Construction Techniques, and Symbolic Meanings of Stone Walls in Lamwo District

To the Village/Clan/Sub-county Leadership:

I, [Researcher Name], request permission to conduct research in your community from [start date] to [end date]. The research involves interviewing elders, youth, and other community members about the stone walls in this area. I will also visit the stone wall sites for observation and measurement.

My responsibilities include:

- Respecting all local customs and protocols
- Seeking individual consent from each participant
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Sharing findings with the community upon completion
- Acknowledging the community's contribution in all publications

I request permission to:

- Conduct interviews within your community
- Access the stone wall sites
- Take photographs and measurements
- Audio-record interviews (with individual consent)

Community leader's decision:

☐ I grant permission for this research to be conducted.

☐ I grant permission with the following conditions: _____

☐ I do not grant permission.

Leader name (print): _____

Title/Position: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix M: Plagiarism Check

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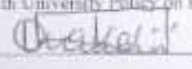
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This form must be completed and signed for all scholarly work produced.

Name: **LAKER ANGIOLETA KATYA (MS.)**
Personal File No.(staff) Reg. (student) **REG. No. 24/U/D65B/MAH/PS**
FACULTY/INSTITUTE: **EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES, GULU UNIVERSITY**
Depart: **HISTORY**

Title and bibliographic description of the work
**THE HISTORY OF STONE WALLS IN LAMWO DISTRICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA
(1850 – 2025)**

Declaration.

1. I understand what plagiarism is and I am aware of the University policy on this regard.
2. I declare that this **Dissertation** (thesis, Proposal, essay, assignment, paper, report etc.) is my original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for examination, award of a degree or publication. Where other people's work or my work has been used, this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with Gulu University requirements.
3. I have not sought or used the services of any professional agency to produce this work.
4. I have not allowed, and shall not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his/her own.
5. I understand that any false claim of this work shall result in disciplinary action in accordance with University Policy on Plagiarism.

Signature  Date 8th May, 2026

Originality Report

The article/thesis/document titled above have been subjected to plagiarism check and the level was found to be.....10% (percent) this is classified as:

☒ Minor
☐ Moderate
☐ Serious

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Clement Lutaya Naboto Claire (PhD)
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Appendix N: Introductory Letter

