

**THE HISTORY OF THE THUR PEOPLE IN ABIM DISTRICT,
NORTHERN UGANDA: 1885 - 2025**

BY

OKENGO LAZAROUS

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DECLARATION

I, Okengo Lazarous, hereby declare that this is my original work and has not been presented for any award in this University or any other Institution of higher learning.

OKENGO LAZAROUS

Sing: Okengo

Date: 18/OCT/2026

APPROVAL

This report has been submitted for examination with my approval as Research Supervisor.

DR. ALIDRI AGATHA

Sign: 

Date: 18.10.2026

DR. SEKISWA PETER MR.

Sign: 

Date: 18.10.2026

ONEK RICHARD AURE

Sign: 

Date: 18/10/2026

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Omara James, and to my encouraging mother, Ms. Ayoo Karumela Omara.

I also dedicate this work to my brothers Othii Emmanuel, Ocheng Alexy Jimmy, Obia Simon, and Owiny Samuel and to my dear sister, Awili Brenda Mercy, for their steadfast presence.

Finally, to my better half, Adiyo Irene, and our first daughter, Ayoo Lazaryne Tremayne, whose love and support are my greatest inspiration.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
APPROVAL	Error! Bookmark not defined.
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS	xvi
ABSTRACT.....	xvii
CHAPTER ONE	1
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.1.1 Historical Background	3
1.1.1a The Origin, Migration, and Settlement of the Thur People	5
1.1.2 Conceptual Background.....	6
1.1.3 Theoretical Background.....	7
1.1.4 Contextual Background	9
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	10
1.3 General Objective	12
1.4 Specific Objectives	12

1.5 Research Questions	12
1.6 Justification of the Study	13
1.7 Significance of the Study	14
1.8 Scope of the Study	16
1.8.1 Geographical Scope	16
1.8.2 Content Scope	16
1.8.3 Time Scope.....	16
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	17
CHAPTER TWO	20
REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	20
2.0 Introduction.....	20
2.1 The origin of the Thur people	20
2.2 The Organization of the Thur People.....	24
2.2.1 Political Organisation.....	24
2.2.2 Economic Organisation.....	25
2.2.3 Social Organisation	26
2.2.4 Military organisation.....	28
2.3 The historical interactions with neighbouring communities.....	29
2.5 Gaps in the Literature.....	32
2.6 Conclusion	35
CHAPTER THREE	37
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	37

3.0 Introduction.....	37
3.1 Research Approach	37
3.1.2 Research Design.....	37
3.2 Study Population.....	38
3.3 Sample Size Selection.....	39
3.3.1 Sampling Techniques	39
3.3.2 Sample Size.....	39
3.4 Methods of Data Collection	40
3.4.1 Oral Interview	40
3.4.2 Written Sources	41
3.4.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	41
3.4.4 Participatory Observation	41
3.5 Source of data.	41
3.5.1. Primary Oral Sources (Fieldwork Archives).....	42
3.5.2. Primary archival and documentary sources	42
3.5.3. Secondary Literature Sources	43
3.6. Research Procedure.....	44
3.6 Ethical Consideration.....	44
3.6.1 Research Clearance and Ethical Approval	45
3.6.2 Consent	45
3.6.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity.....	45

3.6.4 Mitigating Risks (Do-No-Harm).....	45
3.7 Data Analysis	46
3.7.1 Narrative Analysis.....	46
3.7.2 Content Analysis (Thematic Analysis).....	46
3.7.3 Chronological Analysis (Process Tracing).....	46
3.8 Data Presentation	47
3.9 Limitations and Delimitations of the study.....	47
CHAPTER FOUR.....	49
THE ORIGIN, MIGRATION, AND SETTLEMENT OF THE THUR PEOPLE	49
4.0 Introduction.....	49
4.1 Epistemology of Thur word	49
4.1.1. The origin of the Ethur people	52
4.1.2 The Ethur Hero Ancestor	55
4.1.3 The Migration and Settlement of the Thur people	57
4.1.4 Reasons for the Ethur migration from their cradle land	79
4.1.6 Factors that influenced Thur people to settle in present-day Abim District	88
4.1.7 Landmarks or places that are part of the Thur migration history	96
4.1.8 Conclusion	102
CHAPTER FIVE	104
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THUR PEOPLE	104
5.0 Introduction.....	104
5.1 Social organisation of the Ethur.....	105

5.1.1 Kinship and Family Structure	105
5.1.1a Bride wealth (<i>Lim Nyom</i>)	108
5.1.1b Wife Inheritance (<i>Lako Dhako</i>)	108
5.1.1 c Gender division of labour.....	110
5.1.2 Age Set System (Othem).....	112
5.1.2a Succession Mechanism	113
5.1.3 Marriage and Divorce	116
5.1.4. Childbirth, Naming, Burial and Dance	121
5.1.5 Indigenous Population Census.....	134
5.1.6 Indigenous Land and Resource Management	134
5.1.7 Calamity and Epidemic Management.....	140
5.1.8 Conclusion on Social Organization.....	142
5.2 Political Organisation of the Ethur	147
5.2.1 Leadership Structure	148
5.2.2 Traditional leadership and succession.....	155
5.2.3 Law, Order, and Conflict Resolution	155
5.2.3 a. The Ametho Disciplinary Council	158
5.2.3 b. Traditional Justice Mechanisms.....	161
5.2.3 Spiritual Aspects	81
5.2.4 Military Organization.....	83
5.3 Economic Organization	84

5.3.1 Primary Economic Activities	84
5.3.2 Disaster Management Framework	89
5.4 Conclusion	92
CHAPTER SIX.....	93
THE HISTORICAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE THUR PEOPLE AND NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES.....	93
6.0 Introduction.....	93
6.1 Nature of Inter-community Relationships	93
6.2 Categorical Analysis of Inter-Community Conflicts	94
6.2.1 Conflicts with the Jie (Northern Neighbours).....	95
6.2.2 Conflicts with the Acholi (Northwestern Neighbours)	96
6.2.3 Conflicts with the Langi (Western/Southwestern Neighbours)	98
6.2.4 Conflicts with the Bokora (Southeastern Neighbours)	100
6.2.5 Conflicts with the Iteso, Kumam, and Dodoth	101
6.3 Historical Alliances and Dispute Resolution	102
6.4 Ethur and the Colonial era	104
6.5 Post-Colonial Transition and Modernity.....	106
6.6 Conclusion	110
CHAPTER SEVEN	111
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	111
7.0 Introduction.....	111
7.1 Summary of analysis and discussion	111

7.1.1 Objective One: The origin of the Thur people	111
7.1.2 Objective Two: The organization of the Thur people	112
7.1.3 Objective Three: The historical interactions between the Thur people and neighbouring communities.....	113
7.2 Conclusion	115
7.2.1 Theoretical Conclusion	115
7.2.2 Historical Conclusion.....	116
REFERENCES	118
APENDICES.....	121
Appendix A: Research work plan	121
Appendix B: Ethur Anthem	122
Appendix C: Letter of Introduction	119
Appendix D: Consent Form	120
Appendix E: Assent Form.....	121
Appendix F: Research Questionnaire	122
Appendix G: Research Interview Guide	124
Appendix H: Map Showing Study Area	130
Appendix I: List of Participants.....	132
Appendix J: Personal Interview List.....	134
Appendix K: Chronological Synthesis of Ethur History	136

LIST OF ACRONYMS

FBO	-	Faith-Based Organisation
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
GoU	-	Government of Uganda
IKS	-	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
MA	-	Master of Arts
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
UHRC	-	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: The Thur leadership hierarchy	152
Table 2: Research Workplan	121

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Awer hill in Abim Town council where the Ethur settled before dispersal	60
Figure 2. The view of Labwor hills from southwestern direction.	88
Figure 3. Apau hills in Kiru where the Ethur had the first dispersal point to different Othem.	96
Figure 4: Places that are part of the Thur migration history	96
Figure 5. Ethur settlement pattern in Kiru subcounty, Abim District.	105
Figure 6. The Myel Bul among Ethur At Karamoja Cultural Events - 7th Edititon 2024 in Abim District.....	124
Figure 7: A Chart Showing the Thur Political Leadership Structure	148
Figure 8: Invitation Letter for the Rwoth Okello Ngolryeko Mathias Aryon IV of Thur land	153
Figure 9: Rwoth Okello Ngolryeko Mathias Aryon IV of Thur land - The Current Leader of the Thur (Installed on 15 th March 2025).....	154
Figure 10: Tyen Bithu in Kiru for Ametho disciplinary assemblies	159
Figure 11. Smelting house (Hot theth) of the Ethur from Morulem	87
Figure 12. The defensive shield used by the Ethur against the Lango community.....	99
Figure 13: Evidence of Historical Interactions between the Thur People and Neighbouring Communities	102

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Thur (Ethur) People – An ethnic group in Abim District, Northern Uganda.

Elders – Senior members preserving community knowledge.

Clan – Sub-groups within the Thur with shared ancestry.

Mitho - A specific herbal medicine applied by elders to preserve the body before burial.

Punyo lyel - The age mates or "age bracket" of the deceased who are culturally responsible for the burial.

Matho yath- A ritual performed 3–4 days after burial to symbolically "wash away" the bitterness of death.

Joobo buru - A ritual involving the sacrificial slaughter of goats and the symbolic shaving of the family's heads.

Keetho lyel - The Last Funeral Rites, typically held about a month after death during a new moon.

Codo thol - Literally Breaking the Rope; a final ceremony held one year later to sever the tie with the deceased.

Ebolo oboke i wie - The act of throwing leaves over the bodies of those killed in war who cannot be buried at home.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the history of the Thur (Ethur/Jo'Abwor) people in Abim District, Northern Uganda, from 1885 to 2025, addressing a critical gap in Ugandan historiography where this minority community has remained largely undocumented. Guided by three objectives, the study traced Thur origins, migration, and settlement; examined their social, political, and economic organization; and analyzed their historical interactions with neighboring communities. Grounded in Jan Vansina's oral tradition theory, Cheikh Anta Diop's multidisciplinary framework, and Ali Mazrui's Afrocentric perspective, the study adopted a qualitative historical design. Data were collected from 79 purposively sampled participants in Abim District comprising 39 elders and male clan leaders, 17 women, 13 educated youth, 7 local government officials, and 3 ritual specialists to achieve saturation. Primary data from semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation were triangulated with documentary analysis and analyzed thematically. Key findings establish the Thur as a Western Nilotic Luo group that migrated from Bahr-el-Ghazal and Ethiopia, settling in the Labwor Hills around the 15th century, with their name derived from *Thur* ("hill"). The community developed a sophisticated socio-political structure anchored in a patrilineal clan system and an Age Set system (*Othem*) that regulated governance, defense, and social cohesion. Economically, the Thur maintained a regional monopoly on iron smelting, supplying tools and weaponry to the neighboring Jie, Acholi, Lango, and Bokora. Inter-community interactions featured trade alliances and conflict, regulated via indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms such as *Ekithil* peace talks, ritual oaths, curses, and cultural songs. The study concludes that the Thur served as both the technological engine and diplomatic pivot of northeastern Uganda.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study examined the Thur, an ethnic minority in Karamoja, Northeastern Uganda, focusing on their social, political, and economic organisation through a qualitative historical approach. The Ethur, a small community in Abim District, remains among Uganda's least documented groups, with much of their history preserved orally. This lack of scholarship has obscured their identity, origins, and relations with neighbours. Today, uncertainty persists over whether the Thur are Acholi or Karimojong, contributing to identity crises and social exclusion. Subsequently, Chapter One includes the introduction, background to the study, problem statement, objectives, research questions, justification, scope, limitations, and theoretical framework.

1.1 Background to the study

The Thur, also called 'Ethur', are an ethnic community found in Abim District within the Karamoja sub-region of Northern Uganda, and speak Leb Thur, a language distinct from, but related to, Acholi and Lango. They are situated at the border of Kotido to the North and East, Napak to the Southeast and South, Otuke to the Southwest, and Agago District to the West (Ajwang, 2023). As one of Uganda's indigenous communities, the Thur possess a rich cultural heritage, yet their history remains largely undocumented, with much of it transmitted orally across generations. Their population was recorded at 98,348 in 2014 and 112,952 in 2024 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014 & 2024). The absence of the Thur from mainstream historical discourse has contributed to the erasure of their cultural memory and obscured their role in regional and national developments. This underscored the critical need to reconstruct and document their past in ways that affirm their identity and contributions, while providing a

comprehensive background through historical, contextual, conceptual, and theoretical foundations.

The period 1885–2025 is particularly significant for studying the Thur. The year 1885 marked intensified colonial penetration and missionary activities in Northern Uganda, shaping the political, social, and economic structures of many communities, including the Thur (Amone, 2017). It also introduced profound changes such as colonial administration, Christianity, and integration into wider Ugandan society (UNESCO, 1962). Extending the study to 2025 allows for a fuller historical reconstruction, capturing both colonial and postcolonial experiences as well as contemporary transformations in the lives of the Thur people. Up to this time, their historic encounters remain under-documented, despite global and generational shifts that continue to shape their identity and place within Uganda's cultural landscape.

The history of the Thur people is essential for preserving their indigenous knowledge and for understanding their identity, resilience, and cultural survival in the face of external pressures. Their relationships with neighbouring groups such as the Jie, Acholi, Iteso and Lango have shaped patterns of conflict, cooperation, trade, and intermarriage. Similarly, their internal political, economic, and social organisation offers valuable lessons about indigenous governance systems and adaptation to changing environments.

This study, therefore, sought to document and analyze the history of the Thur people in Abim District from 1885 to 2025. By tracing their origin, examining their political, economic, and social organisation, and exploring their relationships with neighbouring communities, the research contributes to filling the existing gap in Ugandan historiography. Furthermore, the study preserves the Thur's cultural heritage for future generations and provide a basis for comparative studies with other ethnic groups in Uganda and East Africa.

1.1.1 Historical Background

The Thur people, also known as *Ethur*, are part of the Luo-speaking Nilotic ethnic groups in Uganda. Among the Acholi, they are referred to as Labwor. The people speak Lëb Thur, a language of the Western Nilotic sub-branch of the Nilo-Saharan family which falls under the Chari-Nile as the major language grouping (Ajwang, 2023; Meyerson, 2023). They comprise Western Nilotic: Luo, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk (Greenberg, 1963, p. 85; Greenberg & Kemmer, 1990, pp. 124, 489; Whitmire, 2013, p. 15). The Thur, according to the Greenberg Linguistic classification, belong to the Eastern Sudanic family, and the Western Nilotic branch, which includes: Burun, Shilluk, Anuak, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Luo, Jur, and Bor (Greenberg, J. H. 1963, p. 85). Often the Thur are misunderstood to be historically related to Eastern Nilotic groups such as the Karamojong proper, Jie, Dodoth, Lango, Kumam, and Pokot (Greenberg, J. H. 1963, p. 86). Welmers (1956) attributes these misunderstandings to the “Comparative and historical studies in African language hampered by ignorance and confusion” (Welmers, 1956, p. 556).

The *Ethur* are officially recognized in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. They are listed as a distinct indigenous community under item number 33 of the Third Schedule. While there is sometimes a misconception that their status was only finalized during the 2005 constitutional amendments, they were actually included in the original 1995 framework. The 2005 amendment (Constitution Amendment No. 2 Act) expanded the total number of recognized indigenous groups from 65 to 74, but the *Ethur* had already secured their place on the list a decade earlier.

The *Ethur* as a minority tribe in Uganda was promulgated in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. This is notable in the Third Schedule inclusion, which listed the 65 indigenous communities as of February 1, 1926. This movement was spearheaded by the local intellectuals and political giants of Thur land, central figure in this struggle was Hon. Omwony Ojwok, the then-Member of Parliament for Labwor County, who leveraged his position in the 7th Parliament to advocate

for the dignity of his constituents. Alongside local elders and cultural leaders like Obonyo Jo'Abwor, Obura Clement, Ojwok presented rigorous evidence of the unique Leb-Thur language and the community's historical permanence in the region.

Today, this constitutional inclusion is a primary driver of development and social integration. It directly paved the way for the creation of Abim District in 2006, shifting the administrative center of gravity from Kotido to the heart of Thur land and ensuring that government resources were no longer filtered through a distant regional hub (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). By securing "Citizenship by Birth" under Article 10, the Ethur gained unfettered access to national identification, recruitment into the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), and senior civil service roles, thereby fostering a deep sense of national belonging and political agency. Furthermore, this recognition has sparked a renaissance in the preservation of Thur traditions and iron-working history, contributing to the rich tapestry of Uganda's national heritage while ensuring the Ethur are no longer a "peripheral" people but active participants in the nation's future (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Conclusively, the Ethur were never absent from Uganda, but colonial and early post-colonial administration rendered them invisible by merging Labwor into Karamoja. The 1995 Constitution corrected that by listing Ethur as a distinct indigenous community, a status achieved through evidence to the Constituent Assembly and championed by Abwor-born leaders like Omwony Ojwok, Obonyo Jo'Abwor, Obura Clement, and other Ethur leaders across the District. Inclusion did not solve all marginalisation, as Labwor leaders still decry unequal appointments, but it gave Ethur the legal basis to claim citizenship, contest elections, and demand services. Their case shows that constitutional recognition is necessary but not sufficient, administrative unbundling, district creation in 2006, and active local leadership are required to translate the Third Schedule into development.

1.1.1a The Origin, Migration, and Settlement of the Thur People

i) The Luo Tradition

According to the Luo oral tradition, the origin and migration are traced back to Bar-el-Gazel in present-day South Sudan, as part of the wider 15th-century Luo migration (Mathew, 1953, p.19; Atkinson, 1994). This migration brought several Nilotic groups into Uganda, with the Thur eventually settling in the Labwor Hills of present-day Abim District.

Oral traditions further elaborate that the Thur were once part of the Acholi people, referred to as Acholi-Labwor, distinguished by their fierce wartime behavior and distinct accent. Their migration path led them through regions like Karenga, Kotido, and Kaabong before hostile encounters with the Karimojong prompted their abrupt southward retreat. The phrase “*Ring wunu lang othuro jo oko*,” which inspired the name “*Thur*”, embodies this moment of panic and rapid displacement.

ii) The Kebhu Tradition

The Kebhu tradition in the West Nile region asserts that the Thur were part of the Kebhu migration. The tradition claims that under the leadership of Kebunzu II, Kebhu descendant of Aliga and Zamba in the Sudan moved to present day Metu Mountain in Moyo in the year 1150AD. From Metu, they moved East via Loropi (meaning sloping to the river), crossing the River Nile at present day Laropi. Using the Sudds, they crossed into West Acholi land and settled on Mount Langia in Kitgum District and are currently settled in Labwor Hills and are today known as the Ethur (Ethuria) (Kebhu Cultural Institution, 2021). However, due to the undocumented history of both the Kebhu and Thur people, their history is stored in memory which is affected by memory loss, which calls for further investigation.

iii) The Acholi Tradition

The Acholi tradition considers the Thur as the Luo group who migrated direct from South Sudan and settled in the Labwor hills in present day Abim District. The Acholi also refer to the Thur as the Acholi-Labwor. The Ethur are culturally and linguistically related to the Acholi with a unique Luo dialect, adopting blends of the Acholi, Karimojong, and Lango (Tosh, J. 1978).

Throughout history, the Thur people have maintained their distinct identity in spite of regional pressures. Their economy revolved around subsistence farming, blacksmithing, pottery, and cattle keeping (Tosh, 1978, pp. 267-269). They have also experienced continuous conflict, particularly due to cattle raids from neighboring groups like the Jie, Bokora, Dodoth, and Karimojong (Simiyu, 1995, p. 155).

1.1.2 Conceptual Background

A rigorous historiographical analysis of the Ethur (Labwor) people requires a clear operationalization of the core concepts, indigenous institutions, and socio-spatial dynamics that have historically defined their societal evolution. Rather than viewing ethnic identity, political organisation, and economic production through static or exogenous frameworks, this study grounds its analysis in the lived realities, indigenous terminologies, and localized governance mechanisms of the Ethur community. The conceptual background provides the operational definitions and contextual boundaries for the key concepts underpinning this thesis, demonstrating how geographical adaptation, metallurgical innovation, indigenous governance, and diplomatic architectures synthesized to sustain Ethur socio-cultural resilience across historic transformations.

Ametho: Fortified inselberg settlements in the Labwor Hills providing physical defense and socio-spatial sanctuary.

Cultural resilience: The capacity of core *Leb-Thur* linguistic and institutional structures to endure colonial disruptions and modern social change.

Ethnogenesis. The historical formation of a distinct Ethur identity through Lwo migrations, Kebhu metallurgical assimilation, and Ateker contact.

Indigenous governance (*Othem*): Multilevel communal fireplace councils (*Dhogola, Kaka, Abiro*) directing local law, judicial consensus, and leadership (*Jagi*).

Indigenous iron smelting (*Theth*): Traditional furnace iron-smelting generating regional industrial leverage through the production and trade of hoes (*kweri*).

Oral historiography: The systematic methodology (*Vansina, p'Bitek, Diop, Achieng*) of validating indigenous oral traditions, ritual knowledge, and community memory as rigorous historical evidence.

Peace architecture (*Ekithil*): Traditional reconciliation rituals, blood-compensation, and trade-friendships maintaining inter-ethnic diplomacy.

Chief (*Rwoth*): The overall leadership of the settlement and the Thur community.

1.1.3 Theoretical Background

This study was drawn on the theoretical insights of Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986) from Senegal, who emphasized a multidisciplinary approach blending linguistic, anthropological, and archaeological methods as vital for engaging with communities that have been historically underrepresented in written national histories (Moore & Diop, 1989, p. 410). Given the scarcity of archival documentation on the Thur, Diop's framework allowed the integration of cultural practices, language structures, and physical evidence, such as settlement patterns and artifacts, to construct a credible and holistic historical narrative. This approach challenged the dominant historiographies that prioritize major ethnic groups like the Baganda or Banyankole and instead validates the presence and historical contributions of minority ethnicities such as the Thur.

Jan Vansina, a Belgian scholar, legitimized oral tradition as a critical source of African history. He considers oral tradition as a history by passing the past through generations (Vansina, 1985, 27). His methodological approach to evaluating oral narratives provided a foundation for gathering and analysing stories, genealogies, songs, and proverbs shared by Thur elders and community members. These oral accounts were systematically cross-checked for internal consistency and historical credibility, to ensure academic rigor while preserving the community's memory (Vansina, 1985, 29). Vansina's perspective was especially relevant in the context of non-literate or marginally documented societies, as it affirmed that historical truth could be preserved and transmitted orally, especially in communities like the Thur whose stories remain largely unwritten.

Ali Mazrui. (2005) *"The Re-invention of Africa"* called for indigenous-centred histories that restore dignity and agency to African peoples, further reinforcing the study's objective. His critique of Eurocentric and state-centred historical models encouraged a re-centering of historical narratives around the lived experiences and perspectives of the Thur. By foregrounding the voices, values, and worldview of the Thur community, this research sought to reframe their past not as a peripheral or supplementary account but as a central and meaningful contribution to Uganda's diverse historical landscape. In doing so, Mazrui's framework enabled a reclamation of historical identity and a challenge to the structures that have silenced smaller ethnic communities like the Thur people in the national memory. Okot p'Bitek's cultural critique added a layer of postcolonial analysis. His concept of the '*clash of cultures*' (p'Bitek, 1984) emphasized how colonialism disrupted African cultural systems and imposed alien structures, often devaluing the local knowledge systems that sustained communities like the Thur.

1.1.4 Contextual Background

The Thur people, also known as *Ethur*, are part of the Luo-speaking Nilotic ethnic groups in Uganda. Among the Acholi, they are referred to as Labwor. The people speak Lëb Thur, a language of the Western Nilotic sub-branch of the Nilo-Saharan family which falls under the Chari-Nile as the major language grouping (Ajwang, 2023; Meyerson, 2023). They comprise Western Nilotic: Luo, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk (Greenberg, 1963, p. 85; Greenberg & Kemmer, 1990, pp. 124, 489; Whitmire, 2013, p. 15). The Thur, according to the Greenberg Linguistic classification, belong to the Eastern Sudanic family, and the Western Nilotic branch, which includes: Burun, Shilluk, Anuak, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Luo, Jur, and Bor (Greenberg, J. H. 1963, p. 85). Often the Thur are misunderstood to be historically related to Eastern Nilotic groups such as the Karamojong proper, Jie, Dodoth, Lango, Kumam, and Pokot (Greenberg, J. H. 1963, p. 86). Welmers (1956) attributes these misunderstandings to the “Comparative and historical studies in African language hampered by ignorance and confusion” (Welmers, 1956, p. 556).

The *Ethur* are officially recognized in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. They are listed as a distinct indigenous community under item number 33 of the Third Schedule. While there is sometimes a misconception that their status was only finalized during the 2005 constitutional amendments, they were actually included in the original 1995 framework. The 2005 amendment (Constitution Amendment No. 2 Act) expanded the total number of recognized indigenous groups from 65 to 74, but the *Ethur* had already secured their place on the list a decade earlier.

The *Ethur* as a minority tribe in Uganda was promulgated in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. This is notable in the Third Schedule inclusion, which listed the 65 indigenous communities as of February 1, 1926. This movement was spearheaded by the local intellectuals and political giants of Thur land, central figure in this struggle was Hon. Omwony Ojwok, the then-Member of Parliament for Labwor County, who leveraged his position in the 7th Parliament to advocate

for the dignity of his constituents. Alongside local elders and cultural leaders like Obonyo Jo'Abwor, Obura Clement, Ojwok presented rigorous evidence of the unique Leb-Thur language and the community's historical permanence in the region.

Geographically, the Thur live in Abim District, located in the transitional zone between the Karamoja pastoralist belt and the Luo-speaking communities of northern Uganda. Abim's neighbors include Kotido, Moroto, Agago, Otuke, and Nakapiripirit, which have historically influenced the Thur through trade, conflict, intermarriages, and cultural exchange.

Despite these interactions, the Thur community preserved its distinct language, oral traditions, and socio-political structures. Their marginal representation in national and scholarly discourses underscored the need for a focused historical inquiry.

The overarching research question guiding this study was: "What is the historical trajectory of the Thur people in Abim District from 1885 to 2025?" This question aimed to trace their socio-cultural, economic, and political developments, shedding light on an underrepresented group in Uganda's historical narrative.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ideally, national historical narratives, academic literature, and educational frameworks in a diverse nation like Uganda should comprehensively document and represent all ethnic groups, regardless of their population size or political dominance. A holistic historiography should recognize distinct cultural identities, territorial demarcations, unique socio-political organizations, and historical contributions, ensuring that minority communities are accurately portrayed, preserved, and integrated into national memory, policy, and development planning.

It is recognized that the Thur (Ethur/Jo'Abwor) people exist as a distinct ethnic group in Abim District, Northern Uganda, possessing their own unique language (*Leb Thur*), socio-cultural institutions, and defined territorial boundary. Furthermore, scholars of African and Ugandan

history have documented that mainstream historical accounts heavily prioritize politically dominant groups such as the Baganda, Banyankole, and Acholi (Atkinson, 1994; Reid, 2002), while broader studies on the Karamoja sub-region frequently highlight pastoralism, cattle raiding, and conflict (Dyson-Hudson, 1966).

Despite the distinct existence of the Thur, there remains a lack of comprehensive, community-centered historical documentation and empirical analysis regarding their historical evolution from 1885 to 2025. Specifically, little is scholarly known about: the precise ancestral migration routes, clan settlement patterns, and foundational traditions of the Thur, the internal workings of their historical social, political, and specialized economic structures such as their iron-smelting industry, the unique ways in which the *Ethur* adapted to, resisted, or negotiated identity under British colonial indirect rule, missionary interventions, and post-independence state formation policies, and the indigenous mechanisms like *Ekithil*, ritual oaths, peace songs they employed to navigate inter-group relations with neighbouring communities like the Jie, Acholi, Lango, and Bokora.

The severity and persistence of this documentation gap are demonstrated through several critical manifestations like historical erasure and misclassification of the Ethur, where in majority of national historical texts and administrative records, they are routinely subsumed under generic regional labels like Karamoja or blended with neighbouring pastoral groups, masking their distinct agricultural and metallurgical identity and leading to structural marginalization in policy and development planning. The Thur historical narrative relies predominantly on unrecorded oral traditions, the ongoing loss of elderly knowledge keepers, clan leaders, and ritual specialists directly threatens the permanent disappearance of these indigenous knowledge systems (Vansina, 1985). Existing state-centered analyses like Mamdani, 1996, generalized Northern Ugandan colonial and post-colonial experiences, failing to account for how smaller, non-centralized ethnic groups like the Thur uniquely experienced

and responded to state imposition and regional conflicts. Anthropological and historical scholarship on the Karamoja sub-region overwhelmingly focuses on pastoral dynamics and disarmament, this leaves an acute empirical void regarding agricultural and iron-producing communities like the Thur.

Against this background, this study systematically closed the knowledge gap by constructing a detailed, community-centered historical narrative of the Thur people from 1885 to 2025. By synthesizing oral accounts with archival and secondary sources through an interdisciplinary framework (Vansina, Diop, and Mazrui), the study retrieved unrecorded oral traditions, documented indigenous socio-economic systems, and highlighted the Thur's historical agency, cultural resilience, and central role as a technological and diplomatic hub in northeastern Uganda.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective was to reconstruct the history of the Thur people in Abim District, Northern Uganda from 1885-2025.

1.4 Specific Objectives

This research aimed to:

- i. To trace and critically examine the origin, migration, and settlement of the Thur people.
- ii. To examine the social, political, economic and cultural organization of the Thur people.
- iii. To explore the historical interactions between the Thur people and neighbouring communities.

1.5 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. What were the origins, migration routes, and settlement patterns of the Thur people?

- ii. How were the Thur people socially, politically, economically, and culturally organized?
- iii. What was the nature and dynamics of the historical interactions between the Thur people and their neighbouring communities?

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is justified by the urgent need to document and preserve the rich and unique history of the Ethur (Labwor) people, a minority community that has historically been underrepresented and peripheralized in mainstream Ugandan historical literature. In an era of accelerating globalization, rapid social transformation, and cultural assimilation, many indigenous identities, technologies, and governance systems risk extinction or misrepresentation. By systematically analysing the Ethur people's historical experiences from 1885 to 2025, this study ensures that their collective voice, metallurgical achievements, and socio-political agency are restored to regional and national historiography.

Furthermore, this research aligns directly with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrating the contemporary developmental relevance of indigenous historical scholarship for example, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities (Target 11.4 Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage). By documenting the physical furnace sites (*Theth*), defensive citadels (*Ametho*), and oral archives of the Ethur, the study contributes directly to strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard indigenous cultural heritage in Northeastern Uganda, SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Target 16.6 & 16.7 – Inclusive and Representative Decision-Making): The research analyzes traditional governance councils (*Othem*) and peace covenants (*Ekithil*), providing historical evidence to inform inclusive policy-making, conflict transformation, and social reconciliation in the post-conflict Karamoja sub-region. SDG 4: Quality Education (Target 4.7 – Appreciation of Cultural Diversity): By generating empirical knowledge on pre-colonial metallurgy and trade diplomacy, the study provides localized educational content that supports the Uganda Lower

Secondary Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and fosters global citizenship through the appreciation of indigenous scientific heritage. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: The inquiry highlights pre-colonial African metallurgical innovation (*Theth*), refuting Eurocentric notions of technological passivity and providing a historical foundation for community-led industrial pride and heritage-based economic development.

Furthermore, the study supports efforts in cultural preservation, education, and reconciliation, especially in a post-conflict region like Karamoja, where understanding local histories could help inform more inclusive development policies. It was also essential for community empowerment, as a well-documented history fosters a stronger sense of identity and pride among present and future generations of the Thur people.

Ultimately, this study is essential for community empowerment. A rigorously documented history fosters a stronger sense of identity, self-worth, and cultural continuity among present and future generations of the Ethur, equipping them to engage confidently in national development and regional diplomacy.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The research contributed to the following;

The study is significant in preserving the cultural heritage and historical identity of the Thur people in Abim District, whose experiences have long been underrepresented in Uganda's national history. By documenting their origins, societal structures, and evolution from the colonial period to the present, the research helps safeguard valuable oral traditions and cultural practices that are at risk of disappearing. This contributes to a more inclusive and accurate national narrative, enriching Uganda's historical scholarship with a focus on a lesser-known indigenous group.

This study addresses a notable gap in Uganda's national historiography, which has historically underrepresented frontier and mountain communities like the Ethur (Labwor). By systematically documenting Ethur history through oral traditions (*Vansina*), interdisciplinary material culture (*Diop*), and decolonial frameworks (*Mazrui*), the study expands the body of academic literature on Central Luo migrations, indigenous metallurgy (*Theth*), and Nilotic-Ateker inter-ethnic relations. Furthermore, it validates the use of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as rigorous, methodologically sound historical data.

The findings provide critical empirical insights for local government officials, policy makers, and development planners within Abim District and the broader Karamoja sub-region. Understanding traditional governance mechanisms (*Othem*), clan leadership structures (*Jagi*), and indigenous peace architectures (*Ekithil*) offers actionable blueprints for designing culturally sensitive policies. Recognizing these native dispute-resolution protocols can enhance contemporary conflict mediation, land administration, and community-led security frameworks across northern frontier corridors.

In alignment with Uganda's Lower Secondary Competency-Based Curriculum and higher education frameworks, this research generates authentic, localized historical content. It provides educators, textbook authors, and curriculum developers with detailed primary data regarding local technological history (furnace iron-smelting and the *kweri* trade), indigenous governance, and cultural resilience. Integrating these localized narratives into History and Political Education subjects fosters critical historical thinking and grounds learners in their local context.

By centering the voices of Ethur elders and custodians of tradition, the research safeguards at-risk oral histories, traditional metallurgical techniques, and cultural practices against generational erasure. Documenting these practices strengthens local identity, fosters civic pride

among youth, and provides a scholarly foundation for local cultural heritage conservation, cultural tourism, and community-led preservation initiatives in the Labwor Hills.

By highlighting the historic role of the Ethur as a diplomatic and commercial bridge between Luo and Ateker societies, the study promotes regional understanding, inter-ethnic respect, and national integration within Ugandan society, reaffirming the constructive role of minority indigenous communities in shaping national history.

1.8 Scope of the Study

1.8.1 Geographical Scope

The study was geographically limited to Abim District in Northern Uganda, home to the Thur people. The study focused on communities within this district where they have historically settled. While references were made to surrounding areas for context, the primary investigation centred on Abim District.

1.8.2 Content Scope

The study focused on the historical origin, political, and socio-economic organization of the Thur people. It examined their origins, traditional organizations, and interactions with neighbouring communities. The research used both oral histories and written records to reconstruct their historical experience.

1.8.3 Time Scope

The time scope of this study covers the period from 1885 to 2025, tracking the continuous settlement, historical trajectory, and institutional adaptation of the Ethur (Labwor) community in North-Eastern Uganda. The baseline year of 1885 serves as a pre-colonial benchmark coinciding with the geopolitical era of the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) by which time the Ethur had fully consolidated their settlements within the high-altitude inselbergs (Othem) of the Labwor Hills, established their distinct Leb-Thur linguistic identity, operated a mature

decentralized governance system, and maintained a thriving regional industrial monopoly in furnace iron-smelting (okoro) that supplied trade hoes (kweri) across Northern Uganda. The intervening century captures major structural transformations, including British colonial indirect rule, forced lowland resettlement, the suppression of traditional smelting, and post-independence socio-political realignments. The end point of 2025 captures contemporary institutional realities within present-day Abim District such as modern land tenure dynamics, local governance, and the current state of Indigenous Knowledge Systems while enabling a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of how Ethur cultural identity and socio-political resilience have adapted into the present day.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was built on the integration of many theories to guide the data collection, interpretation, and historical reconstruction of the Thur people from 1885 to 2025. These theories collectively provided a foundation for an inclusive, indigenous-centered, and methodologically sound approach.

This study is grounded in Jan Vansina's theory of oral tradition, which asserts that oral narratives are not merely subjective memories or folklore, but structured, methodologically valid sources of historical knowledge (*Vansina, 1985, p. 190*). Vansina emphasized that when oral traditions are critically collected, categorized, and cross-analyzed across variant testimony chains, they systematically reveal collective experiences, institutional shifts, and social structures over long temporal horizons. Applying this theory, the study draws upon testimonies from Ethur elders (*Jagi*), custodians of *Othem* councils, traditional storytellers, and local leaders to reconstruct key historical processes such as migration routes, settlement dynamics, leadership systems, and episodes of resistance treating oral accounts as methodologically comprehensive historical data. The primary strength of Vansina's framework lies in its capacity to systematically decode pre-literate histories and validate community memory as legitimate

academic evidence where archival documentation is sparse or non-existent. However, its main limitation stems from the vulnerability of oral tradition to memory loss, chronological minimising, selective exaggeration across generations, and potential political manipulation by contemporary lineages seeking to legitimize chieftaincy or land claims.

To complement oral accounts with tangible material and contextual evidence, the research adopts Cheikh Anta Diop's theory of interdisciplinary historical reconstruction, which advocates for integrating diverse forms of cultural evidence, including historical linguistics, naming patterns, material culture, technological traditions, and environmental context (*Diop, 1974, 1987*). Diop's model allows the research to move beyond oral testimony by validating community-based knowledge systems that help trace the spatial and cultural trajectory of a society. Through this lens, the study integrates material culture (furnace iron-smelting sites, *Ot Theth*, and forged hoes, *kweri*), linguistic markers (*Leb-Thur* dialect), and topographical adaptation (*Othem*) to build a holistic narrative of Ethur identity, social evolution, and historical connections to broader Luo-speaking groups across the Nilotic region. The key strength of Diop's interdisciplinary approach is that it fosters a multi-dimensional narrative by cross-verifying oral accounts with tangible material evidence, thereby mitigating the limitations of single-method historical research. Conversely, its primary weakness is that it demands high expertise across distinct academic fields such as linguistics, archaeology, and metal work and risks generating speculative linkages if material artifacts or linguistic shifts are correlated with specific historical periods without precise archaeological dating.

Finally, Ali Mazrui's theory of Afrocentric intellectual decolonization informs the political and philosophical orientation of this study (*Mazrui, 1986, p. 13*). This perspective prioritizes indigenous voices, centers local epistemologies, and actively resists colonial silencing by empowering African communities to articulate their own historical trajectories. The study therefore serves as an epistemological corrective to historical marginalization by

acknowledging the Ethur as active historical agents rather than passive subjects of history, thereby contributing a balanced, inclusive narrative to Ugandan national historiography while affirming the analytical value of African epistemologies (*Othem, Ekithil*) in academic discourse. The main strength of Mazrui's decolonial framework is its capacity to counter Eurocentric biases and empower indigenous populations by placing their native philosophies and governance structures at the center of academic inquiry. Nevertheless, a notable weakness of this theory is its tendency toward ideological over-defensiveness or romanticization of pre-colonial indigenous institutions, which can obscure internal social hierarchies, political rivalries, or gendered inequalities within traditional governance systems.

Together, these theories provided a deeper theoretical foundation that aligned with the study's goal of historical recovery, community empowerment, and epistemic justice for the Thur people.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

The Literature reviewed were organized thematically and analytically to provide a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and justify the relevance of this study. This chapter critically examined what scholars have written about the Thur people if any, Northern Uganda's ethnography, oral history methodologies, underrepresented histories, and African historiography.

2.1 The origin of the Thur people

African historiography establishes that pre-colonial population movements were not merely chaotic demographic shifts, but deliberate socio-economic adaptations driven by environmental pressures, technological transformations, and political realignments. The vast historical arch of Sub-Saharan Africa most notably the epic Bantu expansion from 1000 BCE illustrates how migratory movements systematically reshaped cultural landscapes through the diffusion of agriculture, metallurgy, and linguistic systems (Ehret, 2002). Parallel to these Bantu dynamics, Nilotic and Central Sudanic migrations from the Nile Basin into East Africa generated complex cultural frontiers characterized by fluid inter-group borrowing, trade, and intermarriage (Mazrui, 1986, p. 13).

However, a critical historiographical challenge arises when attempting to reconstruct these early population dynamics in regions where primary written sources are non-existent. Early colonial historiography frequently distorted African migrations by applying rigid, racialized, and static tribal models. In opposition to this colonial underrepresentation, Jan Vansina (1985, p. 190) established that oral traditions serve as structured, methodologically sound repositories of historical truth. Vansina's framework demonstrates that community memory when subjected

to rigorous comparative analysis reveals genuine structural changes over time. Within the East African context, Ali Mazrui (1986, p. 13) further argued that African migrations were inherently intellectual and political processes rather than simple physical relocations. Grounding the study of Ethur origins within this dual framework (Vansina, 1985; Mazrui, 1986) allows this thesis to reject external, static interpretations and instead evaluate Ethur ethnogenesis through the community's own historical memory, migration narratives, and institutional adaptations.

When examining the specific origins of the Ethur (Labwor) people, existing literature reveals an enduring historiographical debate concerning their exact linguistic and ancestral roots. On one side of the debate, early ethnographic studies and oral histories rooted in the Nilotic tradition assert that the Ethur represent an integral branch of the Central Luo migration from Bahr-el-Ghazal in South Sudan (Tosh, 1978, p. 10; Gervase, 1953, p. 32). According to this perspective, the Ethur dispersed alongside the ancestors of the Acholi, Alur, and Lango before establishing permanent settlements within the Labwor Hills (Tosh, 1978, p. 24). Local oral accounts strongly reinforce this Luo connection, maintaining that the Ethur were historically regarded as an agile, brave warrior subgroup of the broader Acholi cluster (Ajwang, 2023).

Conversely, a secondary historiographical thread links the Ethur to the pastoralist movements of the Ateker cluster comprising the Karamojong, Jie, and Turkana, who migrated into North-Eastern Uganda from the borderlands of Ethiopia and South Sudan between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Lamphear, 1992, p. 18). Scholars operating within this Ateker-centric framework argue that the spatial location of the Labwor Hills placed the Ethur within the immediate orbit of Ateker pastoralist expansions (Lamphear, 1992; Simiyu, 1995, p. 42).

This thesis argues that viewing Ethur origins as a rigid binary choice either strictly Central Luo or purely Ateker is historiographically blemished. Instead, this study contends that Ethur

ethnogenesis is best understood as a composite, multi-directional historical synthesis. The Ethur successfully synthesized a Central Lwo linguistic foundation (*Leb-Thur*) with structural, socio-economic, and metallurgical borrowings from neighbouring Central Sudanic groups such as the Kebhu and Ateker pastoralists. This synthesis allowed them to construct a unique, resilient cultural identity at the intersection of diverse Nilotic frontiers.

A major weakness in existing national historiography is the frequent omission of indigenous etymologies, which carry profound historical data regarding community trauma, territorial settlement, and inter-ethnic perception. Local oral traditions preserve crucial narratives explaining how the terms *Ethur* and *Labwor* emerged (Ajwang, 2023). According to oral accounts, during their early south-bound migrations from South Sudan, the community temporarily settled across present-day Karenga, Kotido, and Kaabong before facing abrupt, unprovoked pastoralist attacks by advancing Karamojong groups (Ajwang, 2023). The panicked warning issued by elders during these surprise raids “*Ring wunu lang othuro jo oko*” (Run for your lives, enemies have attacked us unexpectedly) crystallized into the ethnonym *Ethur* (or *Thur*), symbolizing a people forged through sudden displacement and strategic survival (Ajwang, 2023).

Simultaneously, the designation *Labwor* (or *Acoli-Labwor*) reflects how neighbouring Luo groups perceived the community's defensive stubbornness (Ajwang, 2023). Acoli oral traditions recall that when the Ethur retreated into the formidable, rocky ranges of the Labwor Hills, their fiercer neighbours compared their defensive bravery to lions (*Labwor* or *Atunya* in Luo dialects), thereby naming both the people and the mountain territory after the lion's sanctuary (Ajwang, 2023). This thesis argues that these indigenous etymologies are not mere folk etymologies rather, they serve as crucial historical markers that illustrate how the Ethur used geographic adaptation retreating into the natural mountain stronghold (*Ametho*) to transform a period of military vulnerability into a permanent, fortified socio-political identity.

The natural fluidity that characterized pre-colonial Ethur identity and inter-ethnic relations was severely disrupted by the imposition of British colonial rule in the early twentieth century. Operating through policies of indirect rule and arbitrary administrative demarcation, colonial authorities systematically misconstrued the fluid social structures of Northern Uganda (Barber, 1968, p. 152). In the case of the Ethur, the colonial state forcibly relocated populations from their defensive mountain strongholds (*Ametho*) into lowland farming settlements to facilitate taxation and labor control (Barber, 1968). Furthermore, by administratively lumping the agrarian and metallurgical Ethur into the broader, pastoralist-dominated Karamoja District, colonial administrators underrepresented the Ethur, misrepresenting them as backward while ignoring their complex oral traditions and specialized industrial economy (p'Bitek, 1984, p. 113).

In the post-independence era, this administrative mismatch left the Ethur vulnerable to broader regional instability. Caught in the peripheral buffer zone between the armed livestock raiding corridors of the Karamojong and political tensions with neighbouring Lango and Acholi communities, the Ethur were repeatedly subjected to displacement and security threats (*Mkutu*, 2008, p. 178). Yet, as *Ali Mazrui* (1995, p. 8) noted in his concept of the African condition, post-colonial dysfunction has been continually met by deep-seated indigenous resilience. The Ethur adapted to state neglect and regional conflict by falling back on their ancestral mountain terrain, maintaining their linguistic integrity *Leb-Thur*, and utilizing traditional council governance (*Othem*) to preserve social cohesion. By analysing this trajectory from 1885 to the modern era, this thesis positions the Ethur not as passive victims of colonial and post-colonial policy, but as active historical agents who continually navigated external shocks to safeguard their ancestral homeland in the Labwor Hills.

2.2 The Organization of the Thur People

In African historiography, the political, socio-economic, and military organization of indigenous non-monarchical societies has historically revolved around kinship, clan topologies, and localized council systems (Mamdani, 1996, p. 55). Early colonial ethnographic literature frequently misrepresented decentralized societies in Northern Uganda as stateless or disorganized because they lacked centralized monarchies (Mamdani, 1996; Barber, 1968). However, post-colonial scholars demonstrated that agro-pastoral and pastoralist communities across the Nilotic and Ateker corridors operated under highly sophisticated, structured, and resilient systems of clan-based authority (Atkinson, 1994, p. 123; Dyson-Hudson, 1966, p. 41). While mainstream literature has extensively covered neighbouring groups such as the Acholi (Atkinson, 1994) and the Jie (Gulliver, 1952, 1955), the internal organizational structures of the Ethur (Labwor) people of Abim District have remained severely under-researched and peripheral in national historiography. Evaluating the Ethur's organizational background requires moving beyond comparative analogies to critically analyze their unique indigenous institutions specifically the *Othem* (clustered settlement council), *Rwothi* (lineage leaders), *Theth* (furnace metallurgy), *Ekithil* (peace architecture), and *Cath ki winyorok* (diplomatic trade alliances).

2.2.1 Political Organisation

Traditional political authority among the Ethur was decentralized, democratic, and deeply consensus-driven. Unlike the centralized Rwodi (chiefs) of the Acholi (Atkinson, 1994, p. 128) or the purely age-set dominant structures of the pastoralist Ateker cluster (Gulliver, 1952, p. 22; Dyson-Hudson, 1966), political life among the Ethur was anchored in the *Othem* (the communal fireplace council). The *Othem* operated as a multi-tiered judicial, administrative, and legislative institution structured across three primary levels: *Othem Dhogola* (Household /

Lineage Level), this resolved immediate domestic affairs, inheritance, and intra-family grievances, *Othem Kaka* (Clan Level), this managed land allocation, inter-family feuds, marriage protocols, and customary law enforcement within the clan system and *Othem Abiro* (Supreme Council), this was a collection of the supreme leadership of the seven clustered Labwor hill settlements and they convened lineage heads (*Rwoth*) from across the Labwor Hills to address inter-clan conflicts, declare defensive mobilization, ratify trade alliances (*Cath*), and execute ritual peace ceremonies (*Ekithil*). Decision-making within the *Othem* was led by the *Jagi* (singular: *Jago* lineage elders and clan heads), whose authority depended not on autocratic coercion, but on moral integrity, rhetorical skill, ancestral wisdom, and proven leadership (Atkinson, 1994; Webster, 1979).

This indigenous governance structure was radically disrupted during the early twentieth century by the imposition of British colonial rule (Mamdani, 1996, p. 109). Through indirect rule, British administrators imposed bureaucratic Warrant Chiefs, co-opting or bypassing the traditional *Jagi* and disrupting the consensus-building functions of the *Othem* (Barber, 1968). Post-independence administrative reforms and national decentralization further shifted formal political power toward Local Council (LC) systems (*Abim District Local Government, 2019, p. 17*). Nevertheless, this thesis argues that despite a century of state restructuring, the *Othem* remains an active parallel institution in Abim District, maintaining significant moral legitimacy in customary land adjudication, clan reconciliation, and cultural preservation.

2.2.2 Economic Organisation

The pre-colonial economy of the Ethur was uniquely diversified compared to the predominantly pastoralist economies of the neighbouring Jie and Karamojong (Dyson-Hudson, 1966, p. 63; Gulliver, 1955, p. 49) or the purely agrarian systems of the Lango and Acholi. While the Ethur practiced crop farming (sorghum, millet, sesame) and livestock rearing (cattle, goats, sheep),

the engine of their regional economic power was their specialized indigenous metallurgy (*Thet*) (Sutton, 1985; Herring, 1974).

Operating within the mineral-rich deposits of the Labwor Hills, Ethur blacksmiths and furnace smelters established a near-monopoly on iron production across Northern Uganda (Herring, 1974). The forged iron hoe (*kweri*) served not merely as an agricultural tool, but as a primary currency for trade, bride-wealth payments, and diplomatic tribute across Acholi, Lango, and Karamoja (Herring, 1974; Sutton, 1985). This industrial advantage transformed the Labwor region into an essential commercial crossroads, granting the Ethur strategic diplomatic leverage and insulation from aggressive neighbour incursions.

Colonial economic policy deliberately dismantled this indigenous industrial base (Mamdani, 1996, p. 75). British administrators banned traditional furnace smelting to eliminate local competition against imported European steel and enforced hut taxes to push local labor into colonial cash-crop or wage markets (Mamdani, 1996; Barber, 1968). In the post-colonial era, particularly during the late twentieth-century Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency and Karamoja cattle-raiding corridors, the Ethur economic landscape was further destabilized, forcing reliance on subsistence farming and development aid (*Ocan, 2004, p. 27*). This study contends that the suppression of *Thet* systematically demoted the Ethur from a regional industrial hub to a peripheral agrarian economy, highlighting a major structural transformation in their historical trajectory.

2.2.3 Social Organisation

Social organization among the Ethur is fundamentally anchored in the *Kaka* (clan) topology, which functions not merely as a passive kinship category, but as the primary, active locus of individual identity, territorial tenure, and collective socio-legal obligation (*Gulliver, 1955, p. 34; Atkinson, 1994, p. 95*). Far from being a static remnant of ancestral heritage, clan affiliation

directly governs the material realities of Ethur life by establishing customary land usage rights, directing lineage inheritance, and providing the binding jurisdictional framework for dispute settlement. Crucially, social cohesion is maintained through strict marital exogamy, which prohibits unions within one's patrilineal clan or maternal lineage (*Gulliver, 1955*). This thesis argues that Ethur exogamy is not merely a biological or moral taboo; rather, it represents a deliberate socio-political strategy. Solemnized through the transfer of bridewealth (*Lim*), exogamous marriages convert potential territorial rivalries into durable, cross-cutting economic and diplomatic alliances across clans and neighbouring ethnic polities.

Unifying this intricate social architecture is *Leb-Thur*, a distinct Central Lwo dialect that embodies the community's complex historical interactions (*Webster, 1979; Ajwang, 2023*). While early colonial linguists often dismissed minority dialects as minor variations of major language groups, this study contends that *Leb-Thur* is an essential historical source. Enriched by structural, lexical, and phonetic borrowings from neighbouring Ateker and Central Sudanic, *Leb-Thur* serves simultaneously as a linguistic bridge across regional frontiers and an indisputable emblem of Ethur cultural sovereignty (*Webster, 1979; Ajwang, 2023*). Historical continuity and civic socialization were systematically sustained through oral pedagogy, initiation rites, and age-graded social duties, wherein elders functioned as active custodians of normative values (*Okot p'Bitek, 1984, p. 17; Vansina, 1985*).

Equally vital to the Ethur social order is their indigenous cognitive and spiritual system, which is centered on ancestral veneration and a high creator god, mediated through ancestral spirit intermediaries (*Mbiti, 2015, pp. 78–85*). Ancestral spirits (*Joki* or *Tipu*) are conceptualized as active, omnipresent guardians of the moral and ecological order (*Mbiti, 2015*). They possess the spiritual agency to bestow communal prosperity or enforce punitive afflictions whenever customary laws, *Othem* council decrees, or lineage taboos are transgressed (*Mbiti, 2015*). Consequently, ritual sacrifices and libations performed at clan ancestral shrines (*Abila*) are not

mere symbolic routines; they serve as critical socio-spiritual mechanisms designed to expiate guilt, reconcile human conflicts, and restore equilibrium between the living community and the spiritual realm (*Mbiti, 2015; Okot p'Bitek, 1971*).

While contemporary forces such as Western schooling, Christian evangelism, and post-colonial urbanization have undeniably altered traditional spiritual expressions, shifted gender roles, and reconfigured youth identity, this research explicitly counters the narrative of total cultural erosion. Instead, this thesis demonstrates that core structural elements specifically clan solidarity, exogamous marital alliances, and ancestral reverence continue to function as resilient, living pillars of Ethur social cohesion in contemporary Abim District.

2.2.4 Military organisation

Unlike expansive military states with centralized standing armies, the military organization of the Ethur was defensive, situational, and deeply integrated into their physical environment and clan networks. Early colonial observers frequently misinterpreted non-monarchical defensive systems in Karamoja and the surrounding corridors as disorganized or purely reactive (Barber, 1968). However, this study argues that the Ethur maintained a highly deliberate, specialized military doctrine designed for territorial defense, livestock protection, and industrial preservation rather than imperial expansion (Gulliver, 1955, p. 80).

Central to this defensive strategy was the utilization of high-altitude inselberg strongholds, known in local historiography as *Ametho* (Webster, 1979; Baker, 1958). Capitalizing on the natural topography of the Labwor Hills, the Ethur transformed these granite inselbergs into fortified mountain sanctuaries. This research contends that *Ametho* was not merely a passive place of retreat; it was an active force multiplier. By positioning their populations, livestock, and vulnerable furnace iron-smelting (*Theth*) infrastructure within these high-altitude citadels,

the Ethur effectively neutralized the cavalry-like open-plain raiding tactics of neighbouring pastoralist groups, securing their survival across volatile centuries (*Webster, 1979*).

Tactical mobilization was organized through localized, age-based warrior cohorts drawn from the clans. Command within these cohorts was strictly non-hierarchical and situational. Rather than maintaining a permanent military caste, the *Othem* council appointed proven war leaders or tactical strategists on an ad-hoc basis during times of imminent threat (*Knighton, 2005*). Crucially, military engagement was regulated by spiritual protocols. Spiritual elders performed protective rites and consulted ancestral spirits (*Joki*) at clan shrines (*Abila*) to seek sanction and divine protection before deploying youth cohorts, warfare was strictly operationalized to defend clan boundaries, secure trade passes, and protect metallurgical assets rather than to subjugate neighbouring communities (*Gulliver, 1955, p. 80*). Following combat, returning warriors underwent rigorous spiritual cleansing ceremonies to remove the moral pollution of bloodshed. This ritual de-escalation served as a crucial prerequisite for transitioning from active defense to diplomatic negotiations, enabling the *Othem* council to execute formal peace covenants (*Ekithil*) with external adversaries (*Lamphear, 1976*).

This thesis posits that by combining natural topographical architecture (*Ametho*), specialized iron weaponry (*kweri* and forged spears), situational leadership, and ritual sanctioning, the Ethur forged an exceptionally resilient defensive model. This indigenous military organization ensured their long-term territorial integrity and cultural sovereignty amidst the intense regional instabilities of pre-colonial and colonial Northern Uganda.

2.3 The historical interactions with neighbouring communities

The historical interactions between the Ethur and their neighbouring communities most notably the Central Luo societies of Acholi and Lango to the west and south, alongside the Ateker groups (Jie, Bokora, and Teso) to the east have historically oscillated between peaceful

commercial interdependence and sporadic violent confrontation. Mainstream colonial historiography frequently reduced inter-ethnic relationships in Northern Uganda to simplistic, primordial animosities centered on chronic cattle raiding (*Barber, 1968*). However, this study argues that Ethur external relations were defined by a calculated, highly adaptive diplomatic and economic doctrine dictated by environmental necessity, trade imperatives, and strategic survival. Rather than acting as passive victims caught in a volatile buffer zone, the Ethur actively leveraged their geographical position in the Labwor Hills and their specialized furnace iron-smelting (*Theth*) monopoly to establish symbiotic trade networks (*Cath*) that made them indispensable to both Luo agriculturalists and Ateker pastoralists (*Herring, 1974; Webster, 1979*).

A major historiographical weakness in existing literature is the superficial treatment of the complex identity paradox surrounding the Ethur within the Karamoja sub-region. While the Ethur share deep linguistic and historical affinities with Lwo-speaking groups, their spatial inclusion within the broader administrative boundaries of Karamoja frequently created localized friction with pastoralist groups like the Karamojong (*Peterson, 2012, pp. 188–190*). Popular accounts and colonial-era records often mischaracterized the Ethur as encroachers on pastoral lands (*Wikipedia, 2023*).

This thesis strongly rejects that characterization, arguing instead that the Ethur maintained an ancient, legitimate territorial baseline anchored in their high-altitude inselberg citadels (*Ametho*). Inter-group tensions were not rooted in inherent ethnic hostility, but rather in ecological competition over pasture and water during severe droughts, alongside the militarization of livestock raiding in the late twentieth century (*Mkutu, 2008, p. 178*). Crucially, whenever armed conflict flared, traditional peace architectures specifically the execution of ritual covenants (*Ekithil*) mediated by *Jagi* (clan elders) and spiritual leaders served as the

primary mechanism to de-escalate violence, enforce restitution, and reopen regional trade routes (*Lamphear, 1976; Kole, 2017*).

The administrative trajectory of the Ethur underwent a profound structural transformation with the granting of district status to Labwor County, which officially culminated in the creation of Abim District on July 1, 2006 (*District Report, 2007, p. 4; Peterson, 2012*). For nearly a century, colonial administrative boundaries and post-independence central governance had subsumed the Ethur under larger, pastoralist-dominated district structures such as Kotido District, resulting in political marginalization, resource under-allocation, and the erosion of their distinct historical narrative (*Peterson, 2012*).

This study contends that the establishment of Abim District was not merely a routine administrative decentralization exercise, it represented a watershed moment of historical justice and political self-determination. Achieving district status provided the Ethur with an institutional platform to assert their distinct identity, exercise political agency within the Ugandan state framework, negotiate land tenure boundaries with neighbouring local governments, and secure proportional representation in national governance.

In the contemporary era (2006–2025), the Ethur have increasingly channelled their political agency into deliberate institutional and cultural revitalization. A paramount example of this cultural resurgence was the landmark *Athuko Ke'thur* gathering held in January 2025 (*Enuru, 2025, p. 14*). This historic assembly brought together clan leaders (*Jagi*), custodians of *Othem* councils, youth representatives, and cultural intellectuals from across Abim District to systematically address generational cultural erosion, safeguard the *Leb-Thur*, and formulate strategies for heritage preservation (*Enuru, 2025*).

This research highlights the *Athuko Ke'thur* as empirical proof of living institutional resilience. By actively mobilizing indigenous council frameworks to address modern challenges ranging

from land administration to youth civic identity the Ethur demonstrate that their heritage is not a static artifact of the past, but a dynamic, self-renewing force capable of steering socio-economic development and reinforcing community cohesion in present-day Uganda (*Mazrui, 1986*).

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

A critical synthesis of historical, anthropological, and sociological literature reveals that scholarly engagement with the Ethur (Labwor) people has previously been fragmented, peripheral, and secondary to the study of larger neighbouring polities. Existing historiography covering Northern Uganda has predominantly focused on four key areas:

Regional historians (*Webster, 1979; Herring, 1974; Lamphear, 1992*) have extensively documented the macro-level movement of Lwo and Ateker groups from South Sudan and Ethiopia into Northern Uganda. However, within these works, the Ethur are primarily treated as an incidental byproduct or a mere passing waypoint of the broader Central Lwo dispersal or Ateker expansion, rather than a distinct focal point of historiographical inquiry.

Scholars such as *Atkinson (1994)* and *Gulliver (1952, 1955)* focused heavily on analysing the centralized chiefdoms (*Rwodi*) of the Acholi or the pastoralist age-set networks of the Karamojong and Jie. Where the Ethur are mentioned, their institutional setups are usually presented through brief comparative generalizations rather than deep, internal structural analyses.

Historians and political scientists (*Barber, 1968; Mamdani, 1996; Peterson, 2012*) have analyzed British indirect rule, forced lowland resettlements, disarmament campaigns, and the political isolation of the Karamoja sub-region. While these works establish the macro-policy framework of colonial state-building, they focus on state-level dynamics, paying little attention

to how minority agrarian and metallurgical communities like the Ethur uniquely navigated these impositions.

Contemporary literature (*Mkutu, 2008; Ocan, 2004*) has concentrated on security issues in Northeastern Uganda, specifically armed livestock raiding, the proliferation of small arms, LRA insurgencies, and development interventions. In these accounts, the Ethur appear largely as passive victims in a volatile buffer corridor between Karamoja and the Acholi/Lango sub-regions.

Despite these scholarly contributions, existing literature exhibits profound empirical, thematic, and methodological gaps regarding the historical trajectory of the Ethur from 1885 to 2025. This thesis directly addresses five major historiographical gaps:

Mainstream national historiography has persistently subsumed Ethur history under the dominant narratives of either the Acholi to the west or the Karamojong to the east. Earlier scholars reduced Ethur identity to a binary choice by either viewing them strictly as a branch of the Acholi (*Acoli-Labwor*) or as pastoral Ateker defectors. There is a total lack of localized literature that evaluates Ethur ethnogenesis as a composite, multi-directional historical synthesis one that intentionally integrated Central Luo (*Leb-Thur*), Central Sudanic metallurgy, and Ateker socio-spatial alliances into an autonomous, distinct identity within the Labwor Hills.

While regional survey works acknowledge that furnace iron-smelting (*Theth*) occurred in the Labwor Hills (*Sutton, 1985; Herring, 1974*), existing studies treat this metallurgy merely as a localized economic activity or simple craft. There is a glaring gap in understanding how iron production specifically the forged hoe (*kweri*) trade monopoly served as a crucial instrument of diplomatic immunity and geopolitical leverage. Literature has failed to examine how *Theth* allowed a non-monarchical minority community to command regional trade networks (*Cath*) and maintain peaceful equilibrium with surrounding, militarily superior pastoralist groups.

In the study of African indigenous governance, non-centralized societies in Northern Uganda are frequently depicted as lacking formal legal or administrative systems (*Mamdani, 1996*). While pastoralist age-sets have been extensively researched, the internal, multi-tiered council governance of the Ethur specifically the *Othem* (fireplace council) and lineage heads (*Jagi*) remains unexamined in academic literature. Furthermore, existing conflict-resolution literature on Northeastern Uganda focuses almost exclusively on modern state interventions or pastoral elders' meetings, leaving a profound gap regarding the indigenous peace architecture (*Ekithil*) and ritual reconciliation protocols that the Ethur historically deployed to de-escalate frontier warfare.

Military historiography of Northern Uganda has focused almost exclusively on open-plain cavalry tactics, cattle raids, or modern guerrilla insurgencies. The defensive doctrine of the Ethur specifically their strategic utilization of high-altitude inselberg (*Ametho*) in the Labwor Hills has received virtually no scholarly attention. Existing literature fails to document how the Ethur synthesized physical topography (*Ametho*), situational command, and metallurgical weaponry into a specialized, resilient defensive force multiplier that protected their industrial infrastructure and preserved their territorial sovereignty across centuries of regional flux.

Methodologically, much of the available literature relies heavily on colonial archival records that reflect Eurocentric biases, misrepresenting the Ethur as "backward" or peripheral (*p'Bitek, 1984*). Moreover, no study has provided a comprehensive, longitudinal analysis spanning from the pre-colonial baseline of 1885 through colonial displacement, post-independence struggles, the landmark creation of Abim District in 2006, up to modern cultural revitalization movements like the *Athuko Ke'thur* (2025).

By centering indigenous oral traditions (*Vansina, 1985*), interdisciplinary material evidence (*Diop, 1974, 1987*), and Afrocentric decolonial frameworks (*Mazrui, 1986*), this thesis directly

bridges these historiographical voids. It moves the Ethur from the margins to the center of academic discourse, presenting them not as passive victims of regional forces, but as active historical agents who used industrial innovation (*Theth*), council governance (*Othem*), mountain defense (*Ametho*), and peace diplomacy (*Ekithil*) to forge and defend their ancestral homeland in Abim District.

2.6 Conclusion

The history of the Ethur (Labwor) people from 1885 to 2025 exemplifies a complex historical trajectory shaped by ancient population movements, specialized industrial technology, adaptive governance, and profound socio-political transformations. Methodologically and theoretical grounded in the frameworks of Jan Vansina (1985), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974, 1987), and Ali Mazrui (1986), this literature review has demonstrated that oral traditions, material culture, and indigenous epistemologies are essential for reconstructing African histories that were systematically distorted, marginalized, or omitted by Eurocentric colonial historiography. Early regional studies most notably by scholars such as Vansina, Christopher Ehret, John Tosh, and Okot p'Bitek provided foundational insights into broad Nilotic and Ateker migrations, ethnolinguistic evolution, and the impact of external administrative disruptions. However, as this chapter has established, these macro-level narratives consistently treated the Ethur as a peripheral footnote, subsuming their distinct identity under dominant neighbouring polities like the Acholi or Karamojong.

Consequently, significant historiographical gaps persist within existing literature. Methodologically, previous works have relied heavily on colonial administrative records or brief comparative surveys, failing to engage in deep, locally grounded field research within the Labwor Hills. Theatrically, core indigenous institutions such as furnace iron-smelting (*Theth*) as diplomatic leverage, the multi-tiered council governance of the *Othem*, the mountain defense

(*Ametho*), and the ritual peace architecture (*Ekithil*) have been either oversimplified or entirely neglected. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracing the Ethur's continuous institutional adaptation across the colonial era, post-colonial regional security crises, the landmark creation of Abim District in 2006, and contemporary cultural revitalization movements such as the *Athuko Ke'thur* of 2025 remain non-existent.

This study directly addresses these voids by providing an empirical, localized, and decolonial historical reconstruction. By integrating oral testimonies from custodians of tradition (*Jagi*), interdisciplinary material evidence, and archival sources, this thesis moves the Ethur from the historiographical margins to the center of academic inquiry. In doing so, it presents a comprehensive, dignified, and rigorous account of how the Ethur actively deployed cultural resilience, technological innovation, and political agency to forge, defend, and sustain their ancestral homeland in Abim District.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlined the methodological framework adopted for the study on “The History of the Thur People in Abim District, 1885–2025.” It comprehensively detailed the research design, the definition of the study population, the sampling strategy employed, the methods utilized for data collection, the step-by-step research procedure, the ethical considerations addressed, the data analysis techniques applied, and the strategy for data presentation. The primary purpose of this chapter was to document the systematic planning and execution of the study to ensure high standards of credibility, validity, and ethical rigour, particularly considering the reliance on primary oral history and archival reconstruction.

3.1 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative approach given the inherent historical and cultural nature of the research questions. This approach facilitated the combination of oral history, archival research, participant observation, and rigorous analysis of secondary sources. The qualitative paradigm was deemed most appropriate because the study's objective was to explore the lived experiences, historical narratives, oral traditions, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) of the Thur people, data which could not be effectively quantified. Qualitative research methodology enabled the attainment of a deep understanding of cultural meaning, social organisation, and historical interpretation through the prioritisation of rich, narrative, and subjective accounts (Creswell, 2014, p186).

3.1.2 Research Design

This study adopted a Historical qualitative research design , specifically the historical approach situated within an interparent paradigm. This design was appropriate because it allowed the

study to systematically reconstruct the chronology, events and transformations of the Thur people from 1885-2025 using archival documents, colonial records, and oral histories as primary sources of evidence. The interpretivist lens further emphasizes the need to recognize that historical accounts are socially constructed through memory and narrative, requiring deep interpretation rather than mere interpretation of facts.

3.2 Study Population

The study population comprised various categories of individuals residing within and around Abim District who were essential repositories of knowledge necessary for reconstructing Thur history. The population was structured as follows:

1. **Thur Community Members:** This core group included elders, clan leaders, ritual specialists, women, youth, farmers, herders, and traders. All these members played a significant role in preserving and transmitting the community's history. Elders and clan leaders were specifically targeted as key knowledge bearers of origin narratives, genealogies, and customary governance.
2. **Neighbouring Communities:** The population was extended to include members of proximate communities, notably the Jie, Bokora, Acholi, and Lango, whose interactions with the Thur (trade, conflict, intermarriage) were critical to addressing the study's objective on inter-community relations.
3. **Custodians of Documentary/Archival Materials:** This institutional category comprised local government officers, religious leaders, and district administrators who held valuable administrative records about governance, land tenure, missions, and settlement patterns relevant to the study period.

3.3 Sample Size Selection

The study employed a qualitative, non-probability sampling strategy, with the sample size guided by the principle of data saturation rather than statistical representativeness.

3.3.1 Sampling Techniques

The study combined three main techniques:

Purposive Sampling: This technique was used for the deliberate selection of information-rich persons, such as established elders, clan leaders, and ritual specialists, who possessed deep, specific knowledge regarding the Thur's history and oral traditions of origin (Bernard, 2018).

Maximum Variation Sampling: This was applied to ensure the capture of diverse and heterogeneous perspectives across key demographic variables, including age, gender, and clan affiliations. This included incorporating accounts from men, women, youth, farmers, herders, and traders, thus avoiding the over-representation of a single sectional view within the community (Creswell, 2014).

Snowball Sampling: This was employed strategically to identify participants who were less visible or initially harder to access, such as specific ritual custodians or individuals with unique intermarried family histories. Yet they had rich knowledge of the Thur history. This relied on referrals and networks established with initial participants (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98).

3.3.2 Sample Size

The study interviewed 79 participants which was reached at by non-statistical method, and the level of saturation which is when no new information is being got from the research participants. The saturation level helps to ensure comprehensive breadth and depth of historical information, with the final number being determined by the saturation point the stage at which further interviews yielded little or no new information. These participants were categorized based on their specific knowledge areas and the data collection methods used.

Key categories included elders and male clan leaders (39), who were approached through in-depth interviews to gather data on origin narratives, genealogies, and governance structures. Ritual Specialists and Custodians (03) provided information on ceremonies, taboos, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) through focused interviews.

Women (17) with Traditional Knowledge and the Youth (13), both who had formal education and non-formal education, participated in both individual interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to offer perspectives on kinship, rituals, and identity changes. Furthermore, Local Officials and Key Informants (07) were engaged through key informant interviews to access archival and administrative memory. Finally, three separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), each comprising 12 participants selected from the 79 participants, were conducted to capture collective memory, consensus, and intra-group debate. These were drawn directly from the women and youth already counted in the total number of participants.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

To achieve robust triangulation, the study employed multiple data collection methods drawn from qualitative and historical traditions.

3.4.1 Oral Interview

Oral history interviews constituted the core of the study, as Thur history was largely preserved and transmitted orally by clan elders who are considered the custodians of culture and customs. This included oral history and life histories as narrated by the clan elders, clan leaders, and ritual specialists.

Interviews were conducted in the local language, audio-recorded (with consent), and used semi-structured interview guides with open-ended and probing questions to capture rich, narrative accounts of origins, organisation, and inter-community relations (Vansina, 1985, p. 63).

3.4.2 Written Sources

Written sources were essential for contextualisation, corroboration, and establishing chronological frameworks. The study reviewed published ethnographies, historical monographs, academic theses, Non-Government Organizations (NGO) reports, Journal articles and newspapers related to Northern Uganda and the Karamoja sub-region. A Document Review Matrix was used to critically appraise and synthesise this contextual information (Tosh, 2015, p. 124)

3.4.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs complemented individual interviews by capturing collective memory and facilitating inter-subjective discussion. A total of three FGDs were organised with homogeneous groups for example separate sessions for elders, women, and youth, each comprising 12 participants selected from the total number of participants reached. A Focus Group Discussion interview guide was prepared and used to guide the discussions, including thematic prompts, ground rules, and activities designed to elicit consensus or highlight disagreements on key historical themes (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

3.4.4 Participatory Observation

During the ethnographic stay and study, participant/Direct Observation was concurrently employed during cultural ceremonies, council meetings, dance, and markets, with detailed field notes and Observation Checklists used to systematically record practices, behaviours, and interactions.

3.5 Source of data.

The sources of data for this study on the Ethur are elaborated across three primary categories; Primary oral sources, Primary, Documentary sources, and Secondary literature sources.

3.5.1. Primary Oral Sources (Fieldwork Archives)

Primary oral data forms the core empirical foundation of this study. It captured the living memory, indigenous epistemologies, and historical consciousness of the Ethur people. Collected over a six-month field engagement (May–Nov 2025) across Abim District including Kiru Town Council, Morulem, Alerek, Abim, and Orwamuge sub-counties. These primary oral sources were gathered using the following qualitative tools:

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Purposively sampled oral testimonies from customary clan leaders (*Jagi*), elders, ritualists, traditional blacksmiths (*Ethet*), chief-makers (*Awirwoth*), and clan advisors such as representatives from the Kuku, Kajimo, Kalanga, Kapuru, Koguth, and Jo' Karwoth clans. These informants provided firsthand accounts of clan migration routes, lineage genealogies, furnace iron smelting techniques (*Theth*), and military/governance structures (*Othem* and *Ametho*).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interactive sessions conducted with age-set cohorts, female craft artisans, men, and community elders. These discussions generated consensus data on collective historical experiences, including famine coping mechanisms during the *Lerengelag* famine, inter-ethnic trade alliances (*Cath*), and communal hunting practices (*Dwar*).

Indigenous vernacular texts and oral traditions. Unwritten historical archives preserved in *Leb-Thur*, including clan songs, proverbial philosophy, ancestral libation incantations (*Abila*), and ritual narratives. This supported the collection of participants' memories, experiences, and oral stories which were later transcribed into English language.

3.5.2. Primary archival and documentary sources

To corroborate, contextualize, and cross-check oral traditions against official written records, the study systematically consulted primary colonial and post-colonial archival repositories like;

Gulu University Africana Library & Archives. Specialized regional collections containing early missionary accounts, regional anthropological notes, and unpublished historical monographs on Northern Uganda.

Abim District Local Government Administrative Records. Official local government policy documents, district development plans, gazetteers, and administrative minutes tracing the institutional evolution of Abim District from its former status under Kotido District to its formal establishment in 2006.

Online archives. For official colonial administrative files, including Karamoja District Annual Reports, Provincial Commissioner Northern Province Handover Reports, and early British intelligence/taxation surveys (1898–1962). These documents provided contemporaneous written perspectives on British colonial policy, administrative border demarcations of Labwor County, disarmaments, and early commercial regulations.

Cultural Institution Documents. Published and manuscript records from indigenous cultural institutions, such as the *Kebhu Cultural Institution* records (2021) and *Athuko Ke'thur* cultural documentation.

3.5.3. Secondary Literature Sources

Secondary sources provided the historiographical framework, theoretical foundation, and comparative regional context necessary to analyze the primary data:

Published books and academic monographs. Classic regional historiographical works by scholars such as J.B. Webster, E.J. Herring, John Lamphear (e.g., *The Scattering Time*, 1992), Jan Vansina (*Oral Tradition as History*, 1985), Ali Mazrui, Okot p'Bitek, and Cheikh Anta Diop.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles. Published historical, ethnographic, and archaeometallurgical research focusing on Nilotic and Ateker migrations, iron smelting technology in East Africa,

and pre-colonial inter-ethnic relations across the Karamoja Cluster, Acholi, and Lango frontiers.

Theses and Dissertations. Master's and doctoral studies from Makerere University, Gulu University, and international institutions covering the pre-colonial and colonial history of Northern Uganda.

3.6. Research Procedure

The research procedure was executed in a series of four interrelated phases designed to ensure systematic data generation, verification, and interpretation. Preliminary Visit was held in February 2025 and it involved establishing rapport and gaining access by meeting with local leaders, cultural custodians, and district officials to formally introduce the research and negotiate access permissions (Creswell, 2014). Identification of Participants centred on the selection of information-rich cases through the application of purposive and snowball sampling to identify elders, women, youth, and key informants necessary for diverse perspectives. Data Collection effectively from March to June 2025, which was dedicated to systematic data gathering, lasting approximately seven weeks, during which semi-structured interviews, FGDs, sustained participant observation, and systematic archival reviews across multiple repositories were conducted. Data collected was transcribed, translated, coded and organized in themes. Data verification sometimes called member Checking which focused on cross-checking and ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the data by comparing oral testimonies against archival sources, conducting follow-up interviews, and returning summaries to selected participants for clarification and validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to strict ethical standards, prioritising the well-being and rights of the Thur community and participants.

3.6.1 Research Clearance and Ethical Approval

Formal ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant university research ethics committee and permissions were secured from Abim District authorities prior to the commencement of data collection. This guaranteed adherence to institutional and legal standards.

3.6.2 Consent

All participants were provided with clear, understandable information about the study's purpose, objectives, methods, and potential risks and benefits. Consent forms were written in the local language or explained orally for participants with limited literacy.

3.6.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms and coding systems in transcripts, field notes, and publications. Sensitive information, particularly regarding inter-clan disputes or rituals, was anonymised. Raw data was stored securely on encrypted devices, accessible only to the researcher and authorised supervisors.

3.6.4 Mitigating Risks (Do-No-Harm)

The study operated under the Do-No-Harm Principle, actively avoiding the exposure of participants to psychological, social, or political harm.

Sensitive Topics such as historical conflicts or land disputes were approached with caution, and findings were presented in ways that prevented stigmatization or community conflict.

Cultural Sensitivity: The researcher conducted reflexive memos throughout fieldwork to monitor personal assumptions and cultural influence, ensuring that activities respected the cultural norms, values, and customs. Reciprocity was ensured by sharing findings with the community in summary form (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327).

3.7 Data Analysis

After the data had been transcribed and cleaned up, the researcher employed a qualitative, interpretive approach to data analysis, integrating analytical methods; narrative analysis, Content or thematic analysis and chronological analysis.

3.7.1 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis was applied primarily to the life-history interviews and detailed personal accounts. This involved studying and making sense of the structure, content, and performance of individual stories to understand how participants made sense of their past, focusing on identity, causation, and transformation over time.

3.7.2 Content Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

Systematic content analysis, specifically thematic analysis, was used to identify recurring ideas, concepts, and patterns within the entire dataset (interviews, FGDs, field notes, documents).

Coding: Data was coded both inductively (themes emerging from accounts) and deductively (codes guided by research objectives).

Categorisation: Codes were grouped into broader categories such as “origin narratives,” “political organisation,” “economic practices,” and “inter-community relations” as supported by Braun & Clarke (2006).

3.7.3 Chronological Analysis (Process Tracing)

After transcribing the data, I subsequently translated it from Leb-Thur to English and thereafter, cleared the transcript by identifying causal links between historical transformations, and situate the Thur’s history within broader regional dynamics. Oral testimonies, archival records, and secondary literature were critically compared to construct verified timelines of migration, governance changes, conflicts, and alliances.

3.8 Data Presentation

The study presented data in a clear, structured, and accessible manner, ensuring that findings were comprehensible and logically connected to research objectives.

Thematic Presentation: Data was organised thematically around the core research objectives for example, origin, migration, and settlement of the Thur people, Political, social and economic organisation of the Thur people, and historical interactions and relationships of the Thur people with the neighbouring communities, using illustrative examples and direct quotations from interviews and archival records to support conclusions.

Chronological Sequencing: Findings related to change and continuity were presented in a chronological sequence (1885–2025) using timelines and narrative descriptions to contextualise key events and socio-economic transformations.

Integration of Sources (Triangulation): Data presentation explicitly integrated and triangulated information from oral histories, archival documents, and observation, highlighting both convergent and divergent perspectives for a nuanced historical reconstruction.

Narrative Use: Life histories and illustrative case examples were incorporated to provide depth and humanised accounts of historical processes, giving voice to participants and preserving cultural nuance (Vansina, 1985, p. 12).

Visual Aids: Tables, charts, genealogical charts, and thematic matrices were employed to organise complex qualitative data systematically, facilitating comparison across clans, time periods, and sources.

3.9 Limitations and Delimitations of the study.

Limitations comprise the unavoidable external constraints and potential obstacles that lay beyond the researcher's direct control, while the delimitations are the specific methodological strategies implemented to mitigate their impact on the findings.

Reconstructing historical events stretching back to 1885 relied heavily on oral traditions from elderly custodians (*Jagi*), presenting an inherent risk of memory decay, chronological conflation, and loss of knowledgeable elders. To overcome this inhibition, the researcher applied Jan Vansina's (1985) method of rigorous internal and external source criticism, systematically cross-checking individual oral testimonies against independent clan narratives, colonial archival files, and surviving physical metallurgical sites.

A second major limitation was the scarcity and Eurocentric bias of available secondary literature and colonial archival records. Colonial administrators frequently subsumed the Ethur under larger neighbouring polities or mischaracterized minority frontier communities as "backward" footnotes to the Acholi or Karamojong. This constraint was mitigated by employing Cheikh Anta Diop's interdisciplinary reconstruction and Ali Mazrui's decolonial framework to critically re-evaluate colonial archives, balancing state-centric records with indigenous epistemologies, oral histories, and material culture evidence.

Linguistic and translation distinctions also posed a challenge, as translating complex, idiomatic *Leb-Thur* concepts, proverbs, and specialized metallurgic terminology into academic English risked diluting subtle cultural and historical meanings. To address this, key indigenous terms including *Othem*, *Jagi*, *Theth*, *kweri*, *Ametho*, and *Ekithil* were retained in their original native phrasing throughout the thesis, accompanied by detailed contextual definitions and analytical commentary.

Finally, physical terrain accessibility and logistical challenges in navigating the remote, rugged landscape of the Labwor Hills to reach isolated clan elders and ancestral furnace sites created operational delays, particularly during adverse weather. The researcher mitigated these field constraints by designing flexible fieldwork schedules, engaging local guides, and leveraging parish-level administrative and traditional networks to facilitate safe movement, build community trust, and ensure comprehensive data collection across Abim District.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGIN, MIGRATION, AND SETTLEMENT OF THE THUR PEOPLE

4.0 Introduction

This chapter critically traces the origins, migration corridors, and early settlement trajectories of the Ethur (Labwor) people in Abim District, Northern Uganda. Moving beyond passive historical narration, this inquiry analyzes the complex historical processes through which diverse migrant streams converged upon the Labwor Hills to forge a unified, specialized agro-industrial society. The empirical foundation of this chapter is anchored in extensive fieldwork conducted across Abim District, synthesizing firsthand oral testimonies gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), in-depth qualitative sessions, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with customary clan elders (*Jagi*), traditional blacksmiths (*Theth*), ritual leaders (*Won Adwar*), and age-set custodians (*Field Data, 2025*).

4.1 Epistemology of Thur word

A critical historical inquiry into the ethnogenesis of any community must first interrogate the linguistic and epistemological origins of its name. The ethnonyms *Thur*, *Ethur*, and *Jo'Abwor* carry profound historical, ecological, and geopolitical significance, encoding centuries of environmental adaptation, defensive strategy, and identity construction in Northeastern Uganda.

Primary oral data collected across Abim District reveals that the name *Thur* is rooted directly in the indigenous *Leb-Thur* lexicon, where the root word "*Thur*" literally translates to "hill," "elevated ground," or "highland topography" (*Field Data in Abim Town Council, 2025*). According to key informant Ayen Jackson, the designation *Ethur* (the people of the hills) was applied to the ancestral migrant groups who entered and settled within the rugged Labwor range in present-day Abim District (*Field data in Morulem Subcounty, 2025*). Oral testimonies

emphasize that settlement on these elevated terrains was a deliberate socio-military calculation. The ancestral Ethur prioritized high-altitude locations framed by natural rock barriers to guarantee the physical security of their households and livestock herds (*Lim*). These strategic vantage points functioned as natural watchtowers, allowing scouts (*Otok*) to observe and intercept advancing hostile groups from the surrounding lowlands.

Simultaneously, alternative oral traditions highlight a deeper, trans-regional historical memory regarding the origins of the ethnonym. Key informant Odunge Stephen asserted that the ancestral groups carried the names *Ethur* and *Jo'Abwor* across early migratory corridors originating from Ethiopia, traversing the Sudanic expanse, before establishing permanent settlements in Northern Uganda (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). Furthermore, the designation *Jo'Abwor* (literally, "the people who turned back" or "the people of the rock shelters") emerged as an exonym and endonym describing those who branched off from the broader Western Nilotic (Luo) migratory stream to occupy the rocky heights of the Labwor range.

Secondary historical literature and regional linguistic studies confirm the close interplay between topography, language, and ethnic nomenclature in Nilotic expansion (*Webster, 1979; Crazzolara, 1951*). Scholars of Lwo migration note that group names frequently reflected ecological niches occupied during settlement phases or specific socio-industrial roles assumed along migratory corridors (*Herring, 1974*).

In regional historiography, the term *Labwor* (from which "Jo'Abwor" is derived) appears in early colonial administrative records to designate both the geographical mountain range and the people inhabiting Labwor County (*Lamphear, 1992*). Colonial ethnographers often conflated *Ethur* and *Labwor*, treating the terms interchangeably without fully untangling their distinct linguistic roots. However, comparative Nilotic dialectology demonstrates that the prefix "E-" or "Jo-" attached to "*Thur*" serves as an indigenous demographic marker,

distinguishing the highland agro-industrialists from neighbouring lowland pastoralists like the Jie (*Lango, Olok*) and Karamojong (*Ateker*) (Cany, 1972).

In evaluating these epistemological narratives, I contend that the name *Thur* is not merely a passive geographical label, but a condensed historical monument that encodes the community's primary strategy for survival. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology of oral tradition analysis, the narrative provided by Odunge Stephen linking *Ethur* and *Jo 'Abwor* to ancestral roots in Ethiopia and the Sudanic belt should not be dismissed as literal geography, but interpreted as a telescoped historical memory of long-distance Nilotic and Sudanic migrations from the Nile Valley corridors.

Furthermore, interpreting this etymology through Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary framework, I argue that the designation *Ethur* represents an indigenous concept of topographical weaponization. The ancestral *Ethur* did not retreat to the hills out of weakness or disorganized flight; rather, they consciously selected high-altitude rocky environments (*Thur*) to construct a defensive and industrial sanctuary. The hills provided three indispensable assets like; Military advantage elevated surveillance posts that neutralized open-plain pastoralist cavalry and raiding tactics, immediate spatial access to high-grade iron ore (*Lelo*) deposits and dense hardwood timber required for high-heat furnace metallurgy (*Okoro*), and a distinct physical and linguistic boundary (*Leb-Thur*) that shielded a demographically smaller group from cultural absorption by surrounding *Ateker* and *Lwo* populations.

Therefore, the epistemology of the word *Thur* synthesizes environment, technology, and military defense, establishing the foundational logic for the *Ethur*'s historical trajectory in Abim District

4.1.1. The origin of the Ethur people

The origin and ethnogenesis of the Ethur¹ represent a foundational debate within the broader historiography of Nilotic and Ateker expansions across Eastern Africa. Settled within the Labwor Hills of present-day Abim District in Northeastern Uganda, the Ethur are a Western Nilotic, Luo-speaking community. Yet, their strategic geographical location at the intersection of the Luo-speaking agrarian west for example, Acholi and Lango and the Ateker-speaking pastoralist east like Jie and Karamojong has generated persistent historical and linguistic mischaracterizations in regional literature.

Primary oral traditions preserved by customary clan elders (*Jagi*) across Abim District affirm that the Ethur are a distinct, early-branching cohort of the central Lwo migration stream (*Field Data, in Alerek Subcounty, July, 2025*). According to local oral narratives, during the southeasterly movement of the Nilotic groups from the Bahr el Ghazal corridor, the ancestral Ethur frontline executed a deliberate directional shift toward the Karamoja frontier before curving westward into the Labwor range and adjacent Acholiland. The earliest consolidated settlement of this group was established at the historic Apau Hill, which served as an initial defensive and residential staging ground (*Field Data, FGD, July 2025*).

In Ethur collective memory, the community is proudly identified by the endonym and exonym Jo'Abwor (the Abwor people). While external observers have often translated *Jo'Abwor* descriptively to mean "the people who turned back" or "took shelter in the rocks," clan elders emphasize an empowering metaphoric etymology: *Jo'Abwor* is derived from the lion (*Kibwor*), symbolizing the lion-like bravery, martial resilience, and tactical independence of the ancestral founders who defended their highland domain (*Field Data, FGD 2025*). Surrounding Acholi

¹ People of Thurland

communities historically referred to them as *Acholi Labwor*, reflecting both their shared Lwo linguistic heritage and their distinct highland territorial identity.

Furthermore, oral testimonies collected during Focus Group Discussions in July 2025 challenge the popular notion that the Ethur were mere latecomers or passive followers in the regional peopling of the Karamoja borderlands. Customary elders explicitly assert that in the chronological sequence of regional movements, the ancestral Ethur actually led the migration corridor into the Labwor range, followed subsequently by the Ateker-speaking Jie and Bokora cohorts (Field data *FGD*, July 2025).

In formal African linguistic classification, Greenberg (1963, p. 85) places Lëb-Thur squarely within the Western Nilotic sub-branch of the Eastern Sudanic family under the broader Nilo-Saharan phylum. This positions the Ethur alongside major Luo-speaking and Western Nilotic language communities, including the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Anuak, Alur, Acholi, Lango, and Kenya Luo (Greenberg & Kemmer, 1990, pp. 124, 489; Whitmire, 2013, p. 15).

Despite this clear Western Nilotic linguistic foundation, historical and ethnographic accounts have frequently conflated or misunderstood the Ethur as being genealogically or structurally identical to Eastern Nilotic (Ateker) groups such as the Karamojong proper, Jie, Dodoth, Pokot, or Eastern Nilotic-influenced groups like the Lango and Kumam (Greenberg, 1963, p. 86). Scholars like Welmers (1956, p. 556) attribute these persistent historiographical confusions to the historical scarcity of rigorous comparative linguistic studies in African language groups, coupled with superficial colonial classifications that conflated geographical proximity with ethnic lineage. Because the Ethur lived in close economic, martial, and marital proximity to the Jie and Karamojong, colonial administrative reports repeatedly mislabelled them as an Ateker branch rather than an independent Luo-speaking agro-industrial polity.

In analysing these primary oral accounts alongside comparative linguistic models, I argue that the confusion surrounding Ethur origin in existing literature stems from a fundamental analytical error which is the failure to distinguish between genealogical language origin and sociocultural synthesis.

Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary methodology which mandates the cross-examination of linguistic structures, settlement geography, and material culture it becomes evident that the Ethur constructed a unique dual identity. Linguistically and genealogically, *Leb-Thur* plainly anchors the Ethur within the Western Nilotic Luo family tree. However, their physical positioning on the Karamoja frontier required them to adopt flexible socio-cultural mechanisms.

Interpreting the oral claim of leading the migration ahead of the Jie and Bokora through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of historical agency, I contend that the ancestral Ethur were not fleeing external pressures, but were operating as pioneering pathfinders. By arriving first in the Labwor Hills, they secured the primary iron-bearing geological formations (*Lelo*) at Apau and Thoror Hills before Ateker pastoralists occupied the surrounding plains. The metaphor of *Kibwor* (the lion) reflects this strategic reality where the Ethur established an unquestionable engineering and defensive sanctuary while maintaining their Lwo linguistic integrity and developing a sophisticated system of trade diplomacy and mutual dependency with the incoming Ateker pastoralists.

The historical evidence fundamentally dismantles the long-held colonial refugee paradigm which reduced the Ethur to a passive Luo displaced Ateker remnant by establishing a new model of composite ethnogenesis. Rather than originating from a single ancestral line, the Ethur emerged as a multi-layered socio-industrial synthesis that integrated pre-Lwo Central Sudanic metallurgists (*Kebhu*, dating back to c. 1150 AD), Western Nilotic Lwo royal and governance lineages (*Jo' Karwoth* and *Kajimo*), Ateker defensive cohorts *Kalanga*, and Eastern Cushitic

ritual specialists *Jokuju*. This multi-ethnic convergence was anchored by an ancient Nilo-Saharan linguistic core *Leb-Thur* whose deep historical validity was empirically demonstrated in the 21st century through direct mutual linguistic intelligibility between Ethur elders and an indigenous southwestern Ethiopian delegation at the 2024 Karamoja Cultural Gala in Kotido.

4.1.2 The Ethur Hero Ancestor

The conceptualization of hero ancestors within Ethur oral traditions presents a fascinating, complex historical archive. Unlike centralized African polities that anchor their genesis in a single, mythical founding monarch, the Ethur narrative of heroic ancestry is decentralized, clan-centric, and socio-politically adaptive. This fluidity reflects both the segmentary lineage structure of the community and its historical capacity to absorb diverse socio-cultural influences along its migratory and settlement corridors.

Primary oral narratives collected from clan custodians across Abim District reveal that early Ethur society was led not by an absolute monarch, but by a constellation of autonomous clan heads, military strategists, and ritualists (*Field Data, in Morulem Subcounty, Orwamuge Subcounty, Kiru Town council and Awach Subcounty, 2025*). Among the *Kalanga* clan, oral accounts preserve the memory of Langa, an ancestral leader who commanded *Jo' Kalanga* (literally, the people of Langa). A segment of this lineage subsequently established settlements at Amyel in present-day Agago District, illustrating the fluid movement of Ethur clan segments across the Karamoja-Acholi borderlands (*Field Data, in Morulem, 2025*).

Similarly, military leadership and spatial security during the expansion into the Labwor range were spearheaded by lineage commanders such as Aryon of the *Kochero* clan and Logo of the *Kangwet* clan. These military figures led their respective cohorts to establish permanent territorial footholds in contemporary Atunga, Morulem, and Awach within Abim District. Crucially, oral traditions single out Aryon who led the people prior to their territorial segmentation into the *Otheme*: the five historical administrative and settlement clusters of

Emenkeko, Emonyanga, Atunga, Oporoth, and Kiru, as a paramount heroic figure (*Field Data, in Abim 2025*). Aryon is acclaimed in Ethur collective memory as *Amura Apolon* (the Great Wise Leader), functioning as a foundational hero ancestor who harmonized military defense with socio-spatial organization.

Concurrently, a distinct spiritual tradition connects Ethur ancestral origins to biblical patriarchs, specifically identifying Abraham as an ultimate hero ancestor. According to Akori John, a ritual high priest (*Won Abila*) and custodian of clan defense and security from the *Kapuru* clan, the foundational hero ancestor of the Ethur received a direct divine calling from God (*Obanga*). To seal this covenant and secure ancestral protection, the hero ancestor performed an altar sacrifice of a ram/sheep (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 2025*). This tradition continues to inform contemporary ritual performances and sacrificial practices executed by *Kapuru* clan ritualists to guarantee community security and spatial harmony.

In African historiography, the coexistence of localized ancestral narratives alongside Abrahamic or Hamitic origin stories is a well-documented phenomenon (*Vansina, 1985; Mazrui, 1986*). Scholars of East African Nilotic migrations note that non-centralized, segmentary societies frequently organize their historical memory around functional leaders such as war leaders, rainmakers, and clan founders rather than a single dynastic lineage (*Webster, 1979; Crazzolara, 1951*).

Furthermore, the introduction of Abrahamic hero narratives into indigenous oral traditions often reflects what post-colonial historians identify as the "syncretic re-interpretation" of African genesis (*p'Bitek, 1971*). With the spread of Christian missionary education and biblical literacy during the colonial era, indigenous custodians sought to validate their cultural identity and ritual practices such as animal sacrifice and covenantal altars by aligning them with patriarchal traditions in the Old Testament, thereby shielding indigenous rituals from colonial demonization.

In analysing these dual hero traditions, I argue that the absence of a single, monolithic hero ancestor in Ethur oral history is not a sign of historical ambiguity or narrative weakness. Rather, it represents the empirical reality of composite ethnogenesis.

Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology of source criticism, figures like Langa, Logo, and Aryon (*Amura Apolon*) represent real, historical lineage heads who operated during specific epochs of migration and settlement. Aryon's title, *Amura Apolon*, marks a critical institutional milestone which is the transition from nomadic clan movement to permanent socio-spatial governance under the *Otheme* structure. He was a functional hero whose authority was rooted in wisdom, diplomatic synthesis, and spatial planning.

Interpreting the Abrahamic narrative through Ali Mazrui's (1986) *Triple Heritage* framework and Okot p'Bitek's (1984) cultural critique, I contend that the invocation of Abraham by ritualists like Akori John represents a dynamic synthesis of indigenous ritual philosophy and post-colonial cultural resilience. The core practice of sacrificing a ram for communal defense and spiritual covenant is an authentic, pre-colonial Ethur ritual (*Abila*). By articulating this practice through the familiar narrative of Abraham, the Ethur ritualists executed a strategic intellectual defense. They preserved the legitimacy of indigenous security rituals by demonstrating their moral alignment with universal spiritual frameworks. Thus, Ethur hero ancestry synthesizes practical historical leadership of Aryon with spiritual continuity like *ritual covenants*, maintaining community cohesion across generations.

4.1.3 The Migration and Settlement of the Thur people

a. Main Thur Migration Narrative

The main migratory trajectory of the Ethur constitutes a pivotal geographical and temporal archive within Northern Ugandan historiography. Rather than reflecting a localized, short-distance displacement, the main Ethur migration narrative traces an extensive trans-regional

arc across the Horn of Africa, the Nile Valley corridors, and the Karamoja Cluster, culminating in the permanent occupation of the Labwor range during the eighteenth century.

Primary oral traditions preserved by customary clan elders (*Jagi*) and chiefs across Abim District trace the ancestral origins of the main Ethur migratory stream back to Ethiopia (*Field Data, 2025*). According to these collective accounts, the ancestral group moved from the Ethiopian highlands into the Sudanic belt, establishing a major historical settlement at Thulelo a strategic staging area situated along the borderlands of modern-day South Sudan and the Kidepo valley corridor.

From Thulelo, the migratory vanguard advanced southward into Murwarinol in contemporary Karenga District, subsequently establishing residential footholds at Locom in present-day Kaabong District and Kopus territories currently occupied by the Dodoth, an Ateker pastoralist group who followed the early Ethur migratory path (*Field Data, 2025*).

Crucially, oral archives emphasize that during this southward movement from Thulelo, the ancestral Ethur migrated in direct company with the ancestral Jie people as far as contemporary Kotido. From the Karamoja plains, the Ethur path traversed a sequence of key geographical waypoints, moving through Angolol, Kapetha, Thikidany, Chamkok, Thoror, and Mata in present-day Kotido District. The stream then crossed into Akul in Wilela within present-day Abim District, where they established a consolidated highland settlement in the Awer Hills prior to their subsequent clustered dispersion into the *Otheme* territorial units (*Field data interview in Abim Town council, 2025*). Oral genealogies and generational reckoning date these major migratory movements and highland consolidations to the period between c. 1733 and 1760.

In regional historiographical literature, the period between c. 1733 and 1760 corresponds directly with what scholars identify as the major drought-driven migrations and structural realignments across the Karamoja Cluster (*Webster, 1979; Herring, 1974; Lamphear, 1976*).

Historians examining Nilotic and Ateker expansions note that environmental stress across the Sudanic and Kidepo corridors pushed diverse agro-pastoral cohorts southward along established mountain ranges and riverine valleys (*Crazzolara, 1951*).

Scholarship on the peopling of Karamoja (*Lamphear, 1992*) confirms that the route through Karenga, Kaabong, and Kotido served as a primary historical thoroughfare for early Nilotic and Ateker groups. Furthermore, regional chronologies developed through generational age-set analysis validate that the mid-eighteenth century (c. 1730s–1760s) witnessed intense competition for defensible eco-zones, leading specialized tool-making and agricultural groups to branch off from open-plain pastoralists and secure highland sanctuaries like the Labwor range (*Herring, 1974*).

In my considered opinion as a historian embedded in the region's socio-cultural matrix, the detailed sequence of physical waypoints from Thulelo and Murwarinol to Thoror and the Awer Hills demonstrates the remarkable accuracy and empirical reliability of Ethur oral archives when evaluated through Jan Vansina's (*1985*) methodology of oral historiography. I contend that the geographical precision preserved by the elders is not a random collection of ancestral myths, but an accurate mental map of a deliberate, highly calculated eco-strategic migration corridor.

I strongly reject the conventional historiographical assumption that minority groups like the Ethur were mere passive refugees fleeing pastoralist expansion. In applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (*1987*) multidisciplinary framework, I argue that the joint migration of the Ethur alongside the Jie as far as Kotido proves that the ancestral Ethur operated as environmental pathfinders and technological partners rather than subordinates. It is my view that their decision to branch off at Kotido to occupy the Awer Hills and Thoror range between c. 1733 and 1760 was a masterstroke of spatial and economic engineering.

Interpreted through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of indigenous historical agency, I maintain that securing the Awer Hills at Akul allowed the Ethur to transition from mobile migrants into an unassailable highland trade power. By occupying high-altitude rock fortresses (*Othem*) well-supplied with iron ore (*Lelo*) and hardwood timber, the Ethur intentionally transformed themselves into the indispensable technological engine of Northeastern Uganda, guaranteeing their long-term survival and political autonomy.

Figure 1. Awer hill in Abim Town council where the Ethur settled before dispersal



Source: *Photograph from the field by the Researcher, August 25, 2025.*

b. The Second Migration Narrative

Complementing the main northern migration arc, a second distinct migratory stream accounts for the arrival of specific specialist lineages and metallurgical clans into the Labwor range. This narrative provides crucial empirical evidence for the composite nature of Ethur ethnogenesis, tracing an eastern migration corridor that bypassed the central Sudanic routes.

Primary oral evidence provided by Owilli Moses Emojong, the custodian of clan security for the *Kuku* clan, details a direct eastern migratory trajectory (*Field Interview data, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). According to this oral account, a specialized section of the ancestral Ethur migrated directly from the Ethiopian highlands, traversing the eastern corridor through present-day Kenya before entering Uganda.

Upon crossing into eastern Uganda, this migratory stream initially established a major temporary settlement in contemporary Moroto (*Field Interview data, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). From the Moroto staging area, the group moved westward across the Karamoja plains in organized clusters. They eventually arrived in Koya within present-day Abim District, where they established dispersed, fortified settlements around the Apau Hills a strategic, elevated terrain that physically separates contemporary Koya and Kiru (*Field Interview data, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*).

In East African historiographical literature, the eastern corridor via Kenya, Mount Elgon, and the Karamoja plains represents a well-documented migration route for early Cushitic, Nilotic, and specialist artisan groups (*Webster, 1979; Lamphear, 1992*). Regional scholars examining the peopling of Karamoja (*Herring, 1974; Crazzolara, 1951*) note that early metallurgical and ritual lineages frequently moved along eastern trade and mountain corridors, utilizing volcanic peaks such as Moroto and Napak as spatial landmarks and defensive sanctuaries during transit.

Furthermore, comparative ethnographic research across the Karamoja Cluster (*Lamphear, 1976*) confirms that groups possessing specialized technical skills particularly high-heat iron smelters and blacksmiths often migrated in smaller, highly mobile clan clusters rather than massive demographically dense waves. This allowed them to navigate diverse ethnic territories by offering specialized tools and ritual services in exchange for safe passage through eastern pastoral corridors.

In my considered opinion as a historian of Northern Uganda, this second migration narrative preserved by the *Kuku* clan provides the missing link in explaining how the Ethur acquired their early metallurgical dominance. I contend that the eastern corridor through Kenya and Moroto was not a random wandering, but a purposeful movement of specialized iron-smelting guilds seeking high-grade ore deposits (*Lelo*) along the volcanic formations of eastern Uganda.

I strongly argue that the arrival of the *Kuku* clan via Moroto and their subsequent settlement at the Apau Hills represents a classic instance of technological insertion. Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary model, it is my view that these eastern migrants brought advanced furnace technology (*Theth*) directly into the Labwor range. When they converged with the Lwo-speaking streams arriving from the north, they did not fight for dominance; instead, they integrated their specialized industrial skills into the emerging *Leb-Thur* social structure.

Interpreting this spatial pattern through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of historical agency, I maintain that choosing the Apau Hills between Koya and Kiru was a deliberate military and industrial calculation. By settling on elevated, defensible ridges surrounded by iron fields, the *Kuku* clan established an early work sanctuary. This enabled them to smelt iron tools in total security while serving as an indispensable supplier to both western farmers and eastern pastoralists, thereby solidifying the Ethur's regional status as the Technological Pulse of Northeastern Uganda.

c. The Third Migration Narrative

Adding a crucial third dimension to the ethnogenesis of the Ethur, this narrative articulates the deep, continuous historical linkages between the ancestral Ethur and Western Nilotic (Lwo) cohorts along the Acholi borderlands. It provides compelling empirical evidence of a direct

migration stream from the northern Sudanic corridors into the northwestern sector of the Labwor range.

Primary oral evidence provided by Oyugi Benjamin Amos, the *Awirwoth*, Head of Chief-Makers and senior member of the royal council from the *Kajimo* clan, offers a distinct Western Nilotic perspective on Ethur settlement (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). According to this high-level institutional account, the ancestral Ethur migrated from the Sudanic belt, moving in close proximity and as intimate geographical neighbour to the ancestral Acholi cohorts.

Tracing their movement along this northwestern corridor, this migratory vanguard bypassed the open eastern Karamoja plains and advanced directly toward the northern ridges of the Labwor range. They established their primary, consolidated settlement at Wii-Awer Hills near contemporary Alerek in present-day Abim District (*Field interview, from Kiru, in July 2025*). As custodians of royal succession (*Awirwoth*), the *Kajimo* clan preserves this spatial narrative to explain the early establishment of royal governance and council authority (*Othem*) at the base of the Alerek hill sanctuaries.

In Northern Ugandan historiography, the spatial corridor connecting Southern Sudan, Agago, and Northern Kitgum to the Alerek borderlands in Abim District is recognized as a major historical axis of Lwo movement (*Webster, 1979; Crazzolara, 1951*). Regional scholars (*Herring, 1974*) note that Lwo-speaking groups moving southward along the Agago River valley maintained dense trade, marital, and political networks with the occupants of the Labwor Hills.

Furthermore, historical research on royal clan lineages in Northern Uganda (*Webster, 1979; Atkinson, 1994*) highlights that chief-making traditions (*Ker*) and royal council frameworks (*Awirwoth*) among the Ethur shared structural parallels with the *Rodi* and *Rwot* court traditions

of the eastern Acholi chiefdoms such as Pader, and Puranga. The permanent settlement around Wii-Awer Hills in Alerek is documented in regional surveys as an early strategic seat of political authority, positioning the Ethur royal clans to command both the agricultural valleys of Agago and the industrial furnace sites of the Labwor range (*Lamphear, 1992*).

In my humble opinion as a historical researcher, the narrative presented by *Awirwoth Oyugi Benjamin Amos* provides essential clarity on how political order and royal governance were institutionalized during Ethur migration. I contend that the stream arriving via the Sudan-Acholi corridor was the principal bearer of the Central Lwo political architecture, introducing formal chief-making protocols (*Awirwoth*) and royal lineage prestige (*Jo' Karwoth*) into the Labwor Hills.

I strongly argue that establishing a primary settlement at Wii-Awer Hills near Alerek was a deliberate geopolitical calculation. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) framework of institutional evolution, it is my view that the *Kajimo* clan and their allied cohorts selected Wii-Awer because it commanded the northwestern gateway into the Labwor range. By controlling Alerek, the Ethur royal elite maintained uninterrupted trade, diplomatic, and linguistic ties with the Acholi chiefdoms to the west, while simultaneously securing the northern flank of the Labwor range against external incursions.

Interpreting this spatial pattern through Ali Mazrui's (1986) concept of cultural synthesis, I maintain that the settlement at Wii-Awer Hills represents the political anchor of Ethur ethnogenesis. Here, Lwo political institutions (*Awirwoth and Othem*) were firmly planted, creating a governance framework capable of harmonizing the eastern artisan groups (*Kuku* at Apau) and central agricultural clans into a unified, sovereign Ethur polity based in present-day Abim District.

d. The Fourth Migration Narrative linking Ethur to Somalia

According to Akori John, from the Kapuru clan, the adviser to elders in key decision making, who is in charge of ritual practices and performance, and also serves as the ritualist, and head of defense and security of his clan, he asserted that the Ethur were historically linked to the Somali people who were nicknamed the Jokuju meaning people who arrived from Somalia in the East (Kuju literally meaning East).

The fourth migratory narrative introduces a fascinating Horn of Africa dimension to the historiography of Ethur ethnogenesis. Preserved within specialized ritual lineages, this narrative extends the eastern frontier of Ethur mobility beyond the Karamoja and Kenya corridors, connecting the historical memory of specific clans to ancestral movements originating from the Somali coast and the eastern Cushitic zone.

Primary oral evidence provided by Akori John a senior ritualist, advisor to the council of elders, and custodian of defense and security within the *Kapuru* clan asserts a historical lineage link connecting ancestral Ethur cohorts to the Somali people of the eastern Horn (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 25, 2025*). According to this specialized oral account, these eastern migrants were historically designated by the endonym and exonym *Jokuju* literally, "the people from the East". In the *Leb-Thur* lexicon, the root word "*Kuju*" specifically denotes the eastern cardinal direction or the eastern horizon.

Oral traditions preserved by the *Kapuru* clan record that the *Jokuju* frontline traversed long-distance trade and pastoral routes from the Somali frontier, moving across the arid expanses of the eastern Horn into northern Kenya and Karamoja before integrating into the Labwor range (*Field Data, in Kiru Ton Council July 2025*). Within Ethur collective memory, these eastern cohorts are credited with bringing specialized knowledge of arid-land livestock husbandry, complex medicinal herbalism, and specific ritual practices designed to safeguard communities

against external spiritual and physical threats functions that the *Kapuru* clan continues to perform within the Ethur socio-religious architecture.

In broader East African historiography, long-distance interaction, trade, and demographic blending between Eastern Cushitic (Somali / Rendille / Oromo) populations and expanding Nilotic cohorts across the Horn and Northern Kenya are well-documented historical phenomena (*Webster, 1979; Ehret, 1971; Lamphear, 1992*). Linguistic and historical anthropologists note that centuries of pastoral mobility along the eastern corridors facilitated the absorption of Cushitic ritual concepts, age-set terminology, and veterinary practices into Western and Eastern Nilotic groups (*Crazzolara, 1951*).

Furthermore, scholarship on the Karamoja Cluster (*Lamphear, 1976*) acknowledges that minority groups inhabiting strategic mountain sanctuaries like the Labwor range frequently acted as demographic magnets. They absorbed small, specialized migrant bands including eastern pastoralists and traders fleeing ecological collapse or conflicts in the eastern plains who brought distinct cultural skills into the host community in exchange for industrial tools and permanent sanctuary.

In my considered opinion as a historian of Northern Uganda, the *Jokuju* narrative articulated by Akori John should not be viewed as a literal claim that the entire Ethur population is Somali in origin. Rather, I contend that this tradition represents a genuine historical memory of early Eastern Cushitic specialist groups (*Jokuju*) who were absorbed into the Ethur environment during their long migration through the eastern corridors.

I strongly argue that the narrative of the *Jokuju* offers striking empirical support for my composite Ethnogenesis Model. Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary framework, it is my view that early Ethur society operated as an open, integrative socio-industrial complex. When the eastern *Jokuju* cohorts arrived with specialized herbal, ritual, and

defensive expertise, the Ethur did not reject them as aliens, instead, they integrated them into dedicated ritual lineages like the *Kapuru* clan, assigning them critical roles in community security and spiritual defense (*Won Abila*).

Interpreting this synthesis through Ali Mazrui's (1986) *Triple Heritage* framework, I maintain that the presence of the *Jokuju* stream proves that the Ethur were not a monolithic Luo tribe, but a sophisticated cultural synthesis. By harmonizing Luo governance (*Jo' Karwoth*), Sudanic metallurgy (*Kuku*), Ateker martial tactics, and Eastern Cushitic ritual science (*Jokuju/Kapuru*), the Ethur constructed a resilient, multi-layered identity that enabled them to dominate the geopolitical and economic landscape of the Labwor Hills.

e. The Fifth Migration Narrative linking Ethur to Ethiopia

Providing a critical institutional capstone to the migration historiography, the fifth narrative articulates the overarching ancestral cradle of the Ethur across the Ethiopian-Sudanic expanse. Crucially, this narrative illuminates the internal socio-political dynamics of migration, detailing how specific pioneer clans assumed organizational custodianship over the heterogeneous migrant streams as they advanced into Northern Uganda.

Primary oral data collected from high-ranking customary leaders in Kiru Town Council provides direct testimony regarding the ancestral origin and internal leadership of the migrating cohorts (*Field Data, in Kiru Ton Council, 2025*). According to Odunge Stephen, the deputy clan head and senior advisory committee member of the *Kuku* clan, the Ethur are fundamentally an amalgam of diverse clans who originated from the Ethiopian highlands and the Sudanic belt (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). He explicitly asserted that during their long-distance south-westerly movement into present-day Uganda, these various migrating clusters advanced under the active leadership, protection, and organizational care of the *Kuku* clan.

This narrative of early clan guardianship is reinforced and cross-validated by royal clan custodians. Owilli John, the paramount chief (*Rwot*) and institutional leader of the *Kajimo* clan, confirmed during field interviews that the *Kuku* clan played a foundational vanguard role during the migration, acknowledging their historical position within the broader *Jo'* framework (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). In Ethur socio-political organization, the designation *Jo'* refers to the core ancestral groupings that established the foundational clan matrices prior to territorial settlement in the Labwor range.

In broader Eastern African historiography, the Ethiopian highlands and the Upper Nile/Sudanic basin are universally recognized as the primary macro-cradles for both Nilotic and Central Sudanic migrations (*Crazzolaro, 1951; Greenberg, 1963; Webster, 1979*). Regional historians examining the peopling of Northern Uganda (*Herring, 1974; Lamphear, 1992*) emphasize that long-distance population movements were rarely homogenous tribal marches. Instead, they consisted of multi-clan alliances led by specific pioneer clans who possessed specialized ritual, military, or technological expertise required to navigate hostile corridors.

Furthermore, scholarship on clan governance in non-centralized African polities (*Vansina, 1985; Atkinson, 1994*) notes that pioneer clans who safely guided migrant clusters across ecological frontiers typically retained permanent institutional prestige. In the case of the Karamoja-Acholi borderlands, clans that controlled metallurgical production such as the *Kuku* naturally assumed protective custodianship over traveling cohorts, as their forged iron tools and weapons were essential for both physical defense and clearing settlement forests (*Lamphear, 1976*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, this fifth migration narrative preserved by Odunge Stephen and Paramount Chief Owilli John provides the most explicit empirical confirmation of my composite Ethnogenesis model. I contend that the explicit

acknowledgement of the Ethur as a "mixture of clans" directly dismantles the colonial myth that the Ethur were ever a static, single-origin Lwo or Ateker tribe.

I strongly argue that the narrative of the *Kuku* clan providing "care and guardianship" during the migration from Ethiopia / Sudan highlights a crucial socio-industrial reality. Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary model, it is my view that the *Kuku* clan served as the technological and military shield of the migrating groups. Because the *Kuku* were the master custodians of high-heat furnace iron smelting (*Theth*), they equipped the advancing streams with iron spears (*Tong*) for defense and iron hoes (*Kwe*) for subsistence. Their leadership was not based on tyrannical monarchical force, but on indispensable technical utility and protective care.

Interpreting this institutional dynamic through Jan Vansina's (1985) framework of clan synthesis, I maintain that the convergence of the *Kuku* as industrial guardians and the *Kajimo* as royal political makers created a balanced, bi-focal governance structure. The *Kuku* secured the physical and technological survival of the heterogeneous Ethiopian-Sudanic migrants, while the *Kajimo* provided the political and chief-making architecture (*Awirwoth*). This dual custodianship successfully transformed a diverse migrant flux into the unified, resilient Ethur polity that permanently occupied the Labwor Hills.

f. The sixth migration narrative according to Kalanga clan

The sixth migratory narrative provides a critical Western Nilotic (Lwo) genealogical anchor for the Ethur, explicitly linking their movement to the classical Nile Valley dispersal points. Preserved within the oral tradition of the *Kalanga* clan, this narrative details a south-easterly trajectory that traversed the famous Lamogi Hills of Western Acholi before establishing permanent settlements in the northern valleys of Abim District.

Primary oral evidence narrated by Ocheng John Othii Alex of the *Kalanga* clan in Morulem Sub-county traces the ancestral movement of the Ethur directly from the classical Lwo dispersal point at Bahr el Ghazal in contemporary South Sudan (*Field Interview, in Morulem Subcounty, July 21, 2025*). According to this account, the ancestral group migrated south-eastward into Western Acholi, establishing a major historical base at the Lamogi Hills.

From the Lamogi Hills, the migratory stream advanced eastward across Acholiland into present-day Abim District, entering through the Alerek sector and establishing residential footholds at Ochom and Kulo Dwong in Alerek Sub-county (*Field Interview, in Morulem Subcounty, July 21, 2025*). Furthermore, Ocheng John Othii Alex recorded a significant internal lineage branching, a prominent *Kalanga* cohort led by the ancestral leader Obwoya split from the main group during their transit through Acholiland and permanently settled at Amyel Parish in contemporary Lapono Sub-county, Agago District. This narrative provides crucial empirical corroboration of the Ethur's historical transit and permanent lineage footprint across the Lamogi-Agago corridor.

In Northern Ugandan historiography, the movement from Bahr el Ghazal through Pubungu Pakwach to the Lamogi Hills is universally recognized as the foundational migration path of the Central Luo groups (*Crazzolara, 1951; Webster, 1979; Atkinson, 1994*). Regional scholars note that the Lamogi Hills served as a major regional distribution hub from which various Lwo lineages branched off eastward along the Agago and Pager river basins toward the Karamoja borderlands (*Herring, 1974*).

Furthermore, historical research on the Agago-Labwor frontier (*Webster, 1979; Lamphear, 1992*) explicitly documents the presence of *Kalanga* clan segments in both Lapono Agago District and the Labwor range Abim District. Historians note that the Lapono Hills functioned as a twin-gateway to the Labwor range, allowing closely related clans to maintain dual settlements across the administrative boundary, thereby facilitating continuous trade, marital

exchanges, and mutual defense alliances between the eastern Acholi chiefdoms and the Ethur polities.

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the narrative preserved by Ocheng John Othii Alex is of paramount historiographical value because it firmly validates the Western Nilotic linguistic and genealogical foundation of the Ethur. I contend that the transit through the Lamogi Hills and the subsequent settlement at Ochom and Kulo Dwong in Alerek proves that the *Kalanga* clan was among the core Lwo-speaking frontlines who brought the *Leb-Thur* linguistic structure into Abim District.

I strongly argue that the segmentary division led by Obwoya which left a *Kalanga* branch at Amyel in Lapono, Agago District while the rest advanced to Morulem illustrates the strategic frontier-bridging mechanism of Ethur expansion. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) model of lineage segmentation, it is my view that this was not a tragic fracture, but a deliberate geopolitical strategy. By maintaining a foot in both Lapono in Agago and Alerek / Morulem in Abim, the *Kalanga* clan created an uninterrupted trade and intelligence corridor.

Interpreting this spatial footprint through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of historical agency, I maintain that the Bahr el Ghazal–Lamogi stream demonstrates how the Ethur successfully used clan distribution to guarantee security. Occupying Ochom and Kulo Dwong allowed them to control the fertile agricultural gateways of northern Abim, while their kin in Lapono secured the western trade routes, ensuring that the Ethur remained structurally connected to the broader Lwo world while building their sovereign industrial home in the Labwor Hills.

g. The Jie oral tradition on the Ethur Migration.

Providing a crucial cross-community validation of early population movements, the seventh migratory narrative integrates Jie oral traditions with Ethur royal lineage histories. This narrative illuminates the joint movements of Nilotic and Ateker vanguards across the northern

Karamoja corridors, detailing the establishment of the paramount royal clan (*Jo' Karwoth*) at the strategic base of Rwoth Hill in Alerek.

Primary oral evidence provided by Akori John, the senior ritual priest and custodian of defense and security for the *Kapuru* clan, establishes a direct historical link between early Ethur migrations and the ancestral Jie cohorts (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 21, 2025*). According to this comparative account, the ancestral Ethur stream moved from the Sudanic belt into the Dodoth territory modern-day Kaabong District in close company with the ancestral Jie. From the northern Dodoth plains, this allied migratory stream advanced southward into present-day Abim District, establishing a primary, highly fortified settlement around Rwoth Hill in Alerek Sub-county (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 21, 2025*). Oral traditions record that the group that settled at the foot of Rwoth Hill established the Jo' Karwoth clan (literally, "the people of the King / Chief"). From this initial royal center at Rwoth Hill, subsequent generations of the *Jo' Karwoth* expanded across Abim District, establishing permanent royal lineage branches in Kiru Sub-county, Orwamuge Sub-county, and Morulem Sub-county to administer the growing territory.

In regional historiography, the shared migration trajectories of early Lwo-speaking vanguards and Ateker cohorts (such as the Jie and Dodoth) along the northern Karamoja borderlands are well-documented historical facts (*Webster, 1979; Lamphear, 1976; Crazzolara, 1951*). Scholars examining the peopling of Karamoja (*Lamphear, 1992*) confirm that the route from Sudan through Dodoth to the northern entry points of the Labwor Hills served as a primary joint corridor during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Furthermore, historical research on Nilotic royal institutions (*Atkinson, 1994; Webster, 1979*) notes that the root word "*Rwot*" or "*Rwoth*" across Western Nilotic languages specifically signifies a sovereign chief, king, or sacred leader. The physical association of the *Jo' Karwoth*

clan with Rwoth Hill in Alerek is recognized in regional historical literature as an early territorial anchor where royal chief-making protocols (*Ker*) were centralized before administrative powers devolved into sub-regional centers across the Labwor range.

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the Jie comparative tradition preserved by Akori John provides essential empirical proof that early Ethur migrations were characterized by strategic inter-ethnic alliance building. I contend that migrating alongside the Jie through Dodoth to Rwoth Hill was a calculated survival strategy that enabled a demographically smaller Nilotic vanguard to traverse open pastoral plains without suffering military annihilation.

I strongly argue that the establishment of the *Jo' Karwoth* at Rwoth Hill marks the formal institutionalization of sovereign statecraft among the Ethur. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology of institutional evolution, it is my view that Rwoth Hill was selected because its commanding altitude served as both a sacred royal sanctuary and an unassailable defensive citadel. The designation *Jo' Karwoth* proves that the Ethur were not an unstructured band of wanderers, but a politically organized community possessing a clear royal lineage structure capable of territorial governance.

Interpreting the subsequent expansion from Rwoth Hill into Kiru, Orwamuge, and Morulem through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of historical agency, I maintain that the spatial distribution of *Jo' Karwoth* lineages across Abim District was a deliberate administrative strategy. By placing royal clan representatives in each major eco-zone, the Ethur established an integrated network of governance (*Othem*) that successfully unified agriculturalists, master smelters (*Kuku*), and pastoral allies under a single sovereign identity in the Labwor Hills.

h. The Kebhu oral tradition on the Ethur migration

The eighth migratory narrative introduces a deep chronological anchor and a distinct Central Sudanic technological lineage to Ethur historiography. Preserved within the oral archives of the Kebhu Cultural Institution and validated by Ethur elders, this tradition traces an early trans-Nile metallurgical movement from the Sudanic expanse through Moyo, Kitgum, and West Acholi into the Labwor Hills.

According to the documented oral traditions of the Kebhu Cultural Institution (2021), the ancestral Ethur were intimately connected to the ancient Kebhu migration stream originating in the Sudanic belt. Oral records preserve the genealogical lineage of early leaders, stating that under the command of Kebunzu II a descendant of the ancestral figures Aliga and Zamba in the Sudan this group migrated from the northern corridors to settle on Metu Mountain in present-day Moyo District around 1150 AD (*Kebhu Cultural Institution, 2021*).

From Metu Mountain, the Kebhu vanguard moved eastward via Loropi (literally translating to "sloping down toward the river"), executing a historic crossing of the River Nile at modern-day Laropi by utilizing natural floating vegetation masses (*Sudds*). Upon entering West Acholi, the stream advanced eastward across the Pager-Agago basin, establishing a major high-altitude settlement on Mount Langia in present-day Kitgum District. From the Mount Langia staging ground, these early migrants entered the Labwor Hills, where their descendants permanently integrated into Ethur society and became known as the *Ethur* or *Ethuria* (*Kebhu Cultural Institution, 2021*). This ancient Central Sudanic tradition directly corroborates both the Ethiopian/Sudanic origin narratives and the *Kalanga* oral tradition tracing movement from Bahr el Ghazal through the West Acholi hills.

In regional East African historiography, the Central Sudanic population movements across the West Nile-Nile Valley corridor represent the earliest documented iron-smelting migrations in Northern Uganda (*Crazzolaro, 1951; Greenberg, 1963; Webster, 1979*). Historians and

linguistic archaeologists note that Central Sudanic groups (ancestral Lugbara, Madi, and Kebhu/Gbere) occupied the highland zones on both sides of the Albert Nile centuries before the major Western Nilotic (Lwo) and Eastern Nilotic (Ateker) expansions (*Ehret, 1971; Herring, 1974*).

Furthermore, scholarship on ancient East African metallurgy (*Diop, 1987; Lamphear, 1992*) emphasizes that the Kebhu were historically renowned across the Nile Valley as master iron smelters and smiths. The chronological marker of c. 1150 AD aligns closely with archaeological carbon-dating of early furnace slag mounds and fragments found across the Mount Langia range and the Labwor Hills, confirming that pre-Lwo Central Sudanic metallurgists had already identified and exploited high-grade iron ore deposits (*Lelo*) along these mountain corridors well before the 15th century Lwo dispersals (*Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, the Kebhu tradition recorded by the Kebhu Cultural Institution (2021) provides indispensable empirical proof of the multi-layered chronological depth of Ethur ethnogenesis. I strongly contend that the arrival of the Kebhu vanguard around 1150 AD proves that the Labwor Hills were an active metallurgical center long before the Lwo and Ateker migration streams arrived in the 15th and 18th centuries.

I argue that the Kebhu stream represents the foundational industrial layer of Ethur society. Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (1987) multidisciplinary model, it is my view that when the Lwo-speaking *Jo' Karwoth* and *Kalanga* clans later entered the Labwor range via West Acholi, they did not displace or exterminate these Kebhu ironmasters. Instead, they executed an indigenous corporate merger. The incoming Lwo groups then provided the linguistic matrix *Leb-Thur* and royal political governance (*Othem*), while the resident Kebhu metallurgists contributed high-heat furnace technology *Theth* and deep ecological knowledge of local ore deposits (*Lelo*).

Interpreting this historical synthesis through Jan Vansina's (1985) framework of cultural convergence, I maintain that the Kebhu tradition dismantles any remaining notion that the Ethur are a simple offshoot of a single Lwo or Ateker tribe. The identity *Ethuria* is a dynamic historical product forged over nearly nine centuries starting with Central Sudanic ironmasters at Metu and Mount Langia in 1150 AD, and perfected through the absorption of Lwo political statecraft and Ateker defensive discipline in the Labwor Hills of Abim District.

i. The Ethur -Ethiopia relations in the 21st century.

The historical memory of ancestral origins is not a static archival artifact but rather, it is an active, evolving socio-cultural force in the 21st century. The persistent oral traditions linking the Ethur to an early Ethiopian macro-cradle have gained renewed empirical and institutional relevance through contemporary trans-national cultural exchanges, language cross-validations, and regional cultural galas held across the Karamoja Cluster.

Primary field data collected in Abim Town Council highlights a striking 21st-century event that revived interest in the trans-national historical links between the Ethur and contemporary Horn of Africa populations. According to Ayen Jackson, a senior advisor for the *Koguth* clan in Abim Sub-county, tangible evidence of these deep historical connections manifested during the 2024 Karamoja Cultural Gala hosted in Kotido District (*Field Interview, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025*).

During this regional cultural assembly, a delegation of cultural representatives traveling from southwestern Ethiopia attended the event and engaged directly with Ethur elders and delegates. Field observations and oral testimonies record that members of the Ethiopian delegation spoke an indigenous dialect that shared startling structural, lexical, and tonal similarities with *Lëb Thur* as spoken in Abim District. Clan elders noted that despite centuries of geographical separation and distinct colonial administrative histories, the mutual intelligibility in vocabulary,

idioms, and phonetic accent between the Ethiopian delegation and the Ethur delegates provided living, contemporary validation of their shared ancestral memory along the Ethiopian migration corridor.

In modern African linguistic anthropology and historical reconstruction, contemporary language survival across wide geographical distances is recognized as strong proof of historical population dispersals (*Greenberg, 1963; Ehret, 1971; Vansina, 1985*). Comparative Nilo-Saharan dialectology confirms that isolated linguistic pockets belonging to the Eastern Sudanic and Nilotic branches remain preserved along the Omo Valley, Surma, and Gambela borderlands of southwestern Ethiopia (*Greenberg & Kemmer, 1990; Whitmire, 2013*).

Furthermore, regional scholarship on cultural diplomacy and indigenous revivals (*Mazrui, 1986*) emphasizes that modern pan-African cultural festivals such as the annual Karamoja Cultural Gala function as dynamic spaces for reclaiming "lost" oral histories. These gatherings allow minority communities to cross-examine their oral traditions against live linguistic and cultural data presented by visiting delegates from distant national borders, transforming oral claims of ancestral cradles into verifiable field evidence (*Vansina, 1985*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the encounters recorded at the 2024 Kotido Karamoja Cultural Gala by elders like Ayen Jackson provide profound contemporary validation for the oral traditions linking the Ethur to an Ethiopian origin. I strongly contend that the linguistic parallels observed between the visiting Ethiopian delegation and the Ethur delegates are not mere coincidence, but represent relict linguistic continuity living proof of a shared macro-origin before the south-westerly Nilotic and Sudanic dispersals.

I argue that this 21st-century encounter offers crucial theoretical support for Jan Vansina's (*1985*) core thesis: that oral traditions preserve genuine historical truth over centuries when anchored in core cultural structures like language. Applying Cheikh Anta Diop's (*1987*)

multidisciplinary model, it is my view that language is the most resilient archive of human history. Even after centuries of separation during which the Ethur absorbed Lwo political statecraft (*Kajimo*), Sudanic furnace technology (*Kebhu/Kuku*), and Ateker martial tactics (*Kalanga*) in the Labwor Hills the fundamental phonetic and lexical core of their ancestral speech remained intact enough to bridge the distance back to the Ethiopian highlands.

Interpreting this modern re-connection through Ali Mazrui's (1986) framework of historical agency, I maintain that the 21st-century Ethur use these trans-national cultural exchanges to assert their sovereign historical identity. By demonstrating that their language and origin stretch beyond the borders of Uganda into Ethiopia, the Ethur elevate their status from a small "minority tribe" in Abim District to an ancient, historically significant African polity with deep trans-national roots across the Horn of Africa.

The exhaustive examination of the primary oral archives, comparative regional traditions, and 21st-century ethnographic encounters demonstrates that the migration and peopling of the Ethur cannot be reduced to a singular, linear historical march. The narrative trajectories documented ranging from the early Central Sudanic metallurgical migrations (*Kebhu*, c. 1150 AD) and the macro-Ethiopian/Sudanic cradles (*Kuku* and *Koguth*) to the Western Nilotic Lwo expansions (*Jo' Karwoth*, *Kajimo*, and *Kalanga*) and the eastern Cushitic-Ateker streams (*Jokuju* and *Jie*) collectively dismantle the conventional "refugee paradigm" in Northern Ugandan historiography.

In my definitive analytical stance as a historian of the region, these converging streams provide empirical proof of a Composite Ethnogenesis. The ancestral Ethur did not enter the Labwor range as a fragmented group fleeing pastoralist aggression. Rather, diverse specialist cohorts deliberately converged upon the high-altitude sanctuaries of Apau, Wii-Awer, Thoror, and the Awer Hills to construct an integrated socio-industrial polity. Within this highland environment, incoming Lwo political and linguistic frameworks *Leb-Thur* and *Jo' Karwoth* merged

seamlessly with resident Central Sudanic furnace technology (*Theth*) and Ateker-Cushitic defensive and ritual science (*Ametho* and *Won Abila*).

Ultimately, the Ethur migratory experience was a process of strategic spatial engineering and technological consolidation. By securing the iron-rich geological formations and defensible rock citadels of present-day Abim District between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, the Ethur successfully transformed themselves from mobile corridor vanguards into the sovereign, unassailable industrial engine of Northeastern Uganda. This complex historical foundation provided the necessary socio-political resilience for the emergence of the *Otheme* territorial governance system and the physical settlement patterns across the Labwor range.

The re-examination of Ethur migration reveals that population movements into present-day Abim District were not chaotic, stress-induced flights, but a series of highly deliberate, multi-directional technological ventures. Field archives demonstrate that the *Kuku* clan master iron smelters acted as the protective technological guardians of the migrating clusters from the Ethiopian-Sudanic cradle, equipping advancing streams with forged iron weaponry like *Tong* and agricultural tools like *Kwe*. Furthermore, by mapping the nine distinct migratory trajectories stretching from the Bahr el Ghazal and Lamogi corridors to the Kenya-Moroto eastern route and the Nile crossing at Laropi the evidence proves that diverse specialist groups purposefully converged upon the Labwor ranges of Apau, Wii-Awer, Rwoth, and Alerek Hills to transform its defensible rock *Othem* and high-grade iron fields (*Lelo*) into the sovereign, unassailable industrial engine of Northeastern Uganda.

4.1.4 Reasons for the Ethur migration from their cradle land.

The historical factors that catalysed the migration of the ancestral Ethur from their macro-cradle lands, the Sudanic belt and Ethiopian highlands through intermediate staging areas into the Labwor range must be periodized across distinct historical epochs. Rather than stemming from a single event, the movement was driven by a complex interplay of external security threats,

intra-Nilotic geopolitical friction, environmental discovery, and 19th-century mercantile expansion.

a. External attacks

Primary oral traditions collected across Abim District emphasize that conflict and warfare (*Lweny*) served as primary external push factors driving ancestral Ethur migrations from early settlement staging areas. According to Ocheng John Othii Alex of the *Kalanga* clan, as major Lwo-speaking cohorts expanded southward and eastward, the ancestral Ethur encountered armed clashes with emerging neighbour populations who later formed the Acholi and Jie polities (*Field Interview, Morulem Sub-county, July 21, 2025*). These recurrent conflicts disrupted residential stability and agricultural activities, prompting the Ethur to execute gradual, strategic withdrawals away from major war zones.

Crucially, field accounts highlight that this early security friction was exacerbated during subsequent centuries by external mercantile violence. According to Paramount Chief Owilli John of the *Kajimo* clan, a direct and devastating push factor involved aggressive raids launched by foreign Arab slave and ivory traders who frequented the Thoror Hills and surrounding trade corridors (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). These armed incursions introduced the constant threat of enslavement and sudden mortality into established Ethur settlements. The existential danger posed by these predatory trade networks acted as an immediate catalyst, forcing the Ethur to abandon exposed lowland settlements along active trade routes and retreat into the secluded, defensible heights of the Labwor range.

In East African historiography, the periodization of Nilotic migrations highlights clear shifts in push factors across different centuries (*Webster, 1979; Crazzolara, 1951*). Regional scholars examining the Upper Nile and Karamoja borderlands note that the 16th and 17th centuries were characterized by intense inter-group friction (*Lweny*) caused by the overlapping expansion

corridors of Western Nilotics (Lwo) and Eastern Nilotics (Ateker/Jie) (*Herring, 1974; Lamphear, 1976*).

Furthermore, historical research on the 18th and 19th-century mercantile frontiers in Northern Uganda (*Lamphear, 1992; Atkinson, 1994*) explicitly documents the disruptive impact of the *Khartoumers* and coastal Arab trader supply lines. Armed merchant bands targeting ivory and captives established temporary bases along prominent high-altitude corridors, including the Thoror and Mount Langia ranges. Historians confirm that the violence and slave raiding associated with these trade networks triggered widespread spatial realignment, forcing vulnerable agro-industrial groups to abandon open valleys in favour of natural mountain fortresses (*Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, analysing the causes of Ethur migration across distinct historical epochs reveals that external attacks (*Lweny*) operated as both a disruptive force and a catalyst for technological innovation. I contend that the conflict with early Acholi and Jie cohorts during the first epoch should not be viewed as total defeat, but as the natural friction of competing migratory vanguards seeking control over fertile river valleys and strategic mountain passes.

I strongly argue that the oral evidence provided by Owilli John regarding Arab slave raids around the Thoror Hills introduces a critical 18th/19th-century epochal layer to Ethur historiography. Applying Jan Vansina's (*1985*) methodology of historical verification, it is my view that the threat of foreign enslavement forced the Ethur to make a permanent socio-spatial choice, they intentionally abandoned exposed lowland corridors and retreated into the high-altitude rock citadels (*Ametho*) of the Labwor range.

Interpreting this strategic withdrawal through Ali Mazrui's (*1986*) framework of historical agency, I maintain that moving into the mountains away from Arab slave routes was not an act

of cowardice, but an expression of sovereign self-preservation. By positioning their settlements and iron furnaces (*Theth*) in the inaccessible heights of Apau, Awer, and Thoror Hills, the Ethur effectively neutralized foreign cavalry and firearms, creating an unassailable industrial sanctuary that shielded their people from the slave trade while maintaining their economic autonomy.

Primary oral interviews conducted with key clan leaders across Abim District reveal that alongside external security threats, intense internal structural pressures catalysed the dispersal from early settlement staging grounds. According to unanimous testimonies from customary elders and clan custodians, a primary internal driver of migration was rapid demographic growth, encompassing both human populations and domestic livestock herds predominantly goats (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*).

Elders reported that as resident clans expanded over generations at their cradle locations, the ecological carrying capacity of the land was severely overstretched. The acute shortage of pasture, arable farmland, and water sources for growing livestock herds triggered localized resource competition, pasture disputes, and internal lineage friction (*Field Data, June 2025*). This internal demographic saturation created a classic socio-ecological push factor, making the peaceful fission of clans and the systemic search for larger, unexploited territories not only desirable, but mandatory for community survival.

In African historical demography and anthropological literature, population expansion and livestock accumulation are well-documented catalysts for structural lineage segmentation (*Vansina, 1985; Southall, 1956*). Historiographical studies focusing on Nilotic and Central Sudanic societies in Northern Uganda (*Webster, 1979; Herring, 1974; Atkinson, 1994*) emphasize that social structures were inherently segmentary; when a settlement reached a demographic threshold, internal competition over grazing rights and farm boundaries routinely led to peaceful clan branching (*fission*).

Furthermore, regional ecological histories of the Karamoja-Acholi frontier (*Lamphear, 1976, 1992*) confirm that small-stock husbandry (specifically goats and sheep) played a critical role in early migration dynamics. Because small stock reproduces rapidly and requires constant browse, localized overgrazing around permanent water points frequently forced junior clan heads or ambitious family units to split from the parent settlement and migrate toward unoccupied highland frontiers, such as the well-watered Labwor range, to establish autonomous agricultural and pastoral domains (*Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the internal demographic pressure highlighted by the clan leaders represents a fundamental structural mechanism of Ethur territorial expansion. I contend that overpopulation and livestock expansion should not be viewed merely as passive ecological crises, but as key drivers of social innovation and spatial engineering.

I strongly argue that the decision to segment and migrate in response to demographic saturation demonstrates the high degree of institutional flexibility within ancestral Ethur society. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) model of lineage drift and segmentation, it is my view that rather than allowing resource scarcity to degenerate into destructive civil warfare (*Lweny*), Ethur clan elders utilized institutionalized lineage fission. Junior elders, adventurous vanguards, and specialized clan segments voluntarily led sub-groups away from the crowded cradle lands.

Interpreting this demographic dispersal through Ali Mazrui's (1986) concept of ecological agency, I maintain that the search for new territories to accommodate human and animal populations directly led to the discovery and permanent settlement of the Labwor Hills. The highland valleys offered abundant browse for livestock, fertile volcanic soils for agriculture, and rich iron deposits (*Lelo*), enabling the migrating branches to transform an internal demographic crisis into an opportunity for constructing a prosperous, multi-clustered agro-industrial society.

c. Pasture and Water

Primary oral evidence gathered from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews across Abim District highlights ecological degradation and resource depletion as primary catalysts for ancestral Ethur migrations (*Field Data, in Morulem Subcounty, June, 2025*). According to Ethur elders during a Focus Group Discussion, the acute exhaustion and degradation of grazing lands at their earlier settlement sites directly threatened their economic livelihood, which was fundamentally reliant on goat husbandry (*FGD, Orwamuge Town Council, August 15, 2025*). The critical depletion of pasture and seasonal water holes created an unviable environment, making the search for sustainable water sources and undegraded grazing corridors an immediate imperative.

Simultaneously, custom clan leaders emphasized that the quest for premium arable land served as an equally powerful pull factor (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, August 15, 2025*). The ancestral Ethur were actively seeking fertile soils capable of supporting their staple food crops, particularly sorghum, peas, and groundnuts. In Ethur historical memory, this agrarian quest culminated in a landmark geographical discovery. Specialized pioneer elders specifically Makamoe, Oyamoi, and Aburiku led exploratory scouting expeditions into the southern sector of present-day Abim District (*Field Data, in Morulem Subcounty, June, 2025*). These scouts identified the exceptionally rich agricultural zones of Morulem specifically the fertile tracts of Yigul and Olelia. The discovery of these well-watered, nutrient-dense valleys provided a tangible, highly compelling economic destination that drew entire clan cohorts out of degraded staging grounds and into permanent agricultural settlements in Morulem.

In the ecological and agrarian history of Northeastern Uganda, the interplay between pastoral water crises and agricultural land scouting is a recognized structural feature of population distribution (*Webster, 1979; Herring, 1974; Lamphear, 1976*). Historians examining the Karamoja-Acholi eco-tone note that periodic desiccation across the low-lying plains frequently

exhausted surface water and browse, forcing agro-pastoral communities to shift toward the well-watered micro-climates created by mountain massifs like the Labwor range (*Wayland, 1931; Lamphear, 1992*).

Furthermore, scholarship on pioneer scouting networks among Nilotic and Sudanic groups (*Vansina, 1985; Atkinson, 1994*) documents the institutional role of specialized scouts (*Otok*). Before an entire clan or village cluster relocated, experienced hunters and trackers were dispatched to evaluate soil fertility, rainfall patterns, water permanence, and security conditions along potential frontiers. Regional historical literature confirms that the Morulem plains benefiting from alluvial run-off from the Labwor Hills offered exceptional soil moisture and fertility for indigenous cereal and legume cultivation, making it a primary agricultural haven during regional ecological downturns (*Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the oral traditions regarding pasture scarcity and the scouting breakthrough by Makamoe, Oyamoi, and Aburiku demonstrate that Ethur migration was driven by sophisticated environmental literacy and deliberate economic planning. I contend that the Ethur were not haphazard wanderers drifting across the landscape, but strategic environmental managers who systematically evaluated eco-zones prior to territorial occupation.

I strongly argue that the identification of Yigul and Olelia in Morulem by Makamoe, Oyamoi, and Aburiku marks a pivotal transition in Ethur socio-economic organization the shift from vulnerable, water-stressed pastoralism to a stable, highly productive dual agro-industrial economy. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology of historical reconstruction, it is my view that these pioneer scouts functioned as early developmental planners. By securing the fertile alluvial soils of Morulem for sorghum, peas, and groundnuts while utilizing the surrounding hill slopes for goat pasture and iron mining (*Lelo*), they established a balanced ecological framework that guaranteed both food security and economic autonomy.

Interpreting this agrarian expansion through Ali Mazrui's (1986) lens of ecological agency, I maintain that the settlement of Morulem proves that pull factors were just as decisive as push factors in shaping Ethur geography. The discovery of Yigul and Olelia transformed Morulem into the agricultural breadbasket of the Ethur polity, complementing the industrial furnace sites at Apau and Alerek, and providing the economic surplus necessary to sustain a growing population and support long-distance regional trade networks.

d. Promises of a new future

Primary oral data collected from clan advisors highlights that beyond environmental stresses and external violence. Ethur migration was actively propelled by ideological vision and strategic decision-making by customary leaders. According to Ayen Jackson, a senior advisor of the *Koguth* clan, the decisive push to abandon former homelands was heavily influenced by visionary Ethur leaders who persuaded their communities to execute tough, long-term migratory decisions based on the promise of a superior future (*Field Interview, Abim Town Council, July 24, 2025*).

Ayen Jackson noted that these leaders operated under the strategic assumption that peaceful, sparsely populated, and expansive territories lay ahead along the highland frontiers. The primary objective of this leadership-driven movement was not merely survival, but the deliberate acquisition of vast, unallocated land that would afford the Ethur crucial opportunities for sovereign territorial expansion. By relocating to these open highland zones, Ethur leaders sought to establish a tranquil socio-political environment completely liberated from the structural constraints, land compression, and recurrent conflicts that had plagued their former settlements (*Field Data, July 2025*).

In African political anthropology and historical scholarship, the agency of pioneer leaders and visionary state-builders is recognized as a vital internal engine of population movements (*Vansina, 1985; Southall, 1956; Webster, 1979*). Historians examining non-centralized polities

in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994; Lamphear, 1976*) emphasize that major migrations required ideological mobilization; clan heads (*Rwothi* or *Jagi*) had to convince autonomous family units to abandon familiar ancestral graves and invest in the risks of pioneer settlement.

Furthermore, historiographical studies on highland sanctuary seeking (*Lamphear, 1992; Herring, 1974*) document that in late pre-colonial East Africa, promising a peaceful future meant locating low-density, highly defensible ecological niches. The Labwor Hills presented an ideal frontier for such visionary state-building, the rugged topography naturally deterred large-scale cavalry or pastoralist invasions, while its expansive, uncultivated valleys provided the vacant land necessary for multi-clan territorial expansion without immediate inter-group friction (*Webster, 1979*).

In my humble opinion as an independent historical researcher, the oral testimony provided by Ayen Jackson reveals a fundamental, often overlooked dimension of Ethur historiography, the role of ideological agency and strategic statecraft. I contend that Ethur migration was not merely a reactive flight driven by fear or hunger, but a proactive, forward-looking project conceived by decisive leaders who possessed a clear geopolitical vision.

I strongly argue that the promise of a peaceful future in vast, sparsely populated lands demonstrates that Ethur leaders practiced preventative territorial planning. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) framework of intentional migration, it is my view that leaders like those of the *Koguth* clan recognized that permanent security could only be achieved by exiting contested lowland corridors altogether. They deliberately chose the Labwor range because its vast, unoccupied spaces allowed incoming Lwo, Central Sudanic, Ateker, and Cushitic cohorts to settle in distinct territorial clusters (*Otheme*) without overcrowding one another.

Interpreting this visionary mobilization through Ali Mazrui's (1986) concept of historical agency, I maintain that the promise of a peaceful future was fulfilled through the establishment

of the Labwor agro-industrial sanctuary. By coupling visionary leadership with the physical occupation of the highland valleys, the Ethur successfully transformed an uncertain migratory journey into a sovereign, peaceful homeland that sustained their agricultural, metallurgical, and political autonomy for centuries.

4.1.6 Factors that influenced Thur people to settle in present-day Abim District

The permanent occupation and territorial consolidation of present-day Abim District by the Ethur community were neither accidental nor momentary. Following their multi-directional migrations from earlier staging grounds, the Ethur executed a highly deliberate, long-term settlement strategy. Primary field data combined with regional historiography reveal that their decision to fix permanent roots across the Labwor range was governed by five intersecting pillars; physical security through high-altitude defense, agro-pastoral sustainability, industrial self-sufficiency in iron metallurgy, decisive territorial defense, and an optimal land-to-population ratio.

a. Military security and natural mountain settlement.

Primary oral data collected during Focus Group Discussions with customary elders in Alerek Sub-county identifies physical security as the foremost imperative that dictated the location of early Ethur settlements (*FGD, Alerek Sub-county, July 16, 2025*). Elders emphasized that during an era characterized by widespread inter-ethnic warfare and predatory cattle raiding, the unique geographical landscape of Abim District provided an unquestionable natural shield.

Specifically, the ancestral pioneers selected the prominent mountain ridges and rocky hills most notably Kanu, Apau, Wii-Awer, Abuk, Rwoth, and the Abim-Morulem ranges as natural citadels (*Field Data, in Abim Town Council, 2025*). These high-altitude formations functioned as strategic surveillance posts and fortified defense points (*Ametho*) against hostile regional groups and long-distance raiders. Elders stressed that during the community's early formative

period, when their demographic numbers were relatively small, consolidating settlements around these natural mountain refuges was the sole mechanism that prevented physical annihilation and enabled the Ethur to maintain a permanent, non-transient presence.

In regional East African historical studies, the strategic utilization of mountain refuges for defensive consolidation is a thoroughly documented phenomenon (*Mazrui, 2005*). Historians examining the Karamoja-Acholi-Lango borderlands emphasize that high-altitude rock formations served as primary survival sanctuaries for agro-industrial polities surrounded by mobile, open-plain pastoralists (*Lamphear, 1992; Webster, 1979*).

Odeke (2018) notes that topography in pre-colonial Northern Uganda acted as a major military equalizer; small population groups that occupied elevation contours could easily repel larger attacking forces using natural boulder barriers and high-vantage archers. Similarly, *Mazrui (2005)* highlights that physical geography frequently dictated the political survival of minority polities, as mountain sanctuaries provided the spatial security necessary for communities to consolidate their socio-political institutions without constant displacement.

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the testimony of the Alerek elders demonstrates that the Ethur possessed an exceptional mastery of defensive spatial engineering. I contend that the selection of hills like Kanu, Apau, Wii-Awer, and Rwoth was not a desperate retreat into hiding, but a proactive military strategy that transformed the topography of Abim District into an integrated fortress system.

I strongly argue that by anchoring their domestic residences along the high slopes while maintaining strategic lookout posts on peaks like Rwoth and Apau, the Ethur successfully neutralized the numerical superiority of open-plain raiders. Applying Ali Mazrui's (2005) framework of geopolitical agency, it is my view that this natural citadel architecture provided

the initial security umbrella required for a demographically smaller vanguard to survive, consolidate its institutions, and build a permanent sovereign polity in the Labwor range.

b. Economic sustainability through agro-pastoralism and wild subsistence reserves

Primary interviews with customary clan leaders confirm that long-term economic sustainability served as the second vital pillar securing permanent Ethur residency in Abim District (*Field Data, 2025*). Clan leaders specified that the valleys and alluvial plains cradled by the Labwor Hills provided extraordinarily fertile soils capable of supporting a resilient, dual-subsistence economy (*Field Interview, in Orwamuge Town Council, June, 2025*).

The arable lands enabled the Ethur to successfully cultivate their indigenous staple cereal, finger millet (*Kal*), and later integrate tubers such as the sweet potato (*Ayeta*). Simultaneously, the surrounding hill slopes and well-watered valley margins provided rich, year-round pasture for animal rearing, particularly goats (*Diel*) and cattle (*Dhiang*). Crucially, elders noted that cultivated agriculture was complemented by abundant wild food resource including indigenous forest fruits, edible roots, and wild game which provided a vital secondary cushion during seasonal crop failures, thereby confirming the long-term ecological viability of the region.

The economic resilience of the Ethur polity is widely recognized in regional agrarian scholarship. Scholars examining pre-colonial production systems in Eastern Africa (*Knight, 1999, p. 84*) explicitly identify the Labwor/Ethur people as master practitioners of a balanced agro-pastoral economy.

Knight (1999) documents that unlike pure pastoralists who were entirely dependent on livestock mobility, or pure cultivators who were highly vulnerable to localized drought, the Ethur constructed a diversified economic matrix. By pairing drought-resistant cereal agriculture for example millet and sorghum with small-stock husbandry and systematic foraging in mountain

forests, the Ethur achieved a level of household food security that was rare across the drought-prone Karamoja eco-tone (*Knight, 1999; Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the ecological diversity of the Labwor Hills provided the Ethur with a distinct economic advantage over their neighbours. I contend that the capacity to blend cereal agriculture, livestock rearing, and wild food harvesting created a triple-layered subsistence cushion that made permanent settlement possible.

I strongly argue that the introduction and successful cultivation of millet (*Kal*) and potatoes, supported by the rich alluvial run-off from the surrounding massifs, transformed Abim into a regional agricultural haven. In alignment with *Knight's (1999)* observations, it is my view that this agro-pastoral balance eliminated the economic necessity for seasonal movement of livestock and herders. While neighbouring pastoral groups were forced to migrate constantly in search of water and grass, the Ethur enjoyed localized ecological abundance that anchored them permanently to their land.

c. Strategic trade assets like high-grade iron ore (*Lelo*) and regional metal work monopoly.

A major point of consensus emerging from both Focus Group Discussions and clan leader interviews was the discovery of exceptional, high-grade iron ore deposits (*Lelo*) across the geological formations of Abim District (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). Customary elders emphasized that this strategic natural asset revolutionized early Ethur society by supplying the raw material required for high-heat furnace metallurgy (*Theth*).

Equipped with this resource, Ethur master smelters (*Kuku* and *Kebhu* clans) established an extensive blacksmithing industry. They produced essential iron agricultural implements such as hoes (*Kwe*) and clearing knives as well as military hardware, including spears (*Tong*) and arrowheads (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). Oral traditions stress that this indigenous industrial capability conferred complete economic self-sufficiency upon the Ethur.

Furthermore, it generated an invaluable commercial surplus that allowed them to control local and long-distance trade networks, supplying finished iron goods to neighbouring Acholi, Lango, Jie, and Karamojong communities, thereby providing a powerful economic incentive to remain permanently in the Labwor Hills.

The historical prominence of the Labwor iron industry is extensively documented in African economic history and archaeology (*Sutton, 1973, p. 142*). Regional metallurgical surveys confirm that the Labwor range was one of the most productive iron-smelting centers in Eastern Africa during the pre-colonial era (*Sutton, 1973; Lamphear, 1976; Webster, 1979*).

Sutton (1973) highlights that the Labwor Hills functioned as the primary "industrial engine" for the entire region, exporting thousands of iron hoes and spear points annually across a multi-ethnic trade radius spanning hundreds of kilometers. Historians note that access to rich magnetite ore deposits, combined with vast hardwood timber reserves required for high-grade charcoal production, gave the Labwor metallurgists a virtual monopoly over the regional tool and weapon trade, elevating their geopolitical status (*Sutton, 1973; Diop, 1987*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, the discovery and industrial exploitation of iron ore (*Lelo*) represent the single most important technological driver of permanent Ethur settlement. I contend that metallurgy transformed the Ethur from a vulnerable migrant group into an indispensable regional economic powerhouse.

I strongly argue that industrial self-sufficiency altered the dynamics of regional diplomacy. As *Sutton (1973)* corroborates, because neighbouring Lwo and Ateker polities depended entirely on Ethur blacksmiths for their agricultural hoes and combat weapons, the Ethur converted their home in Abim into an untouchable trade hub. It is my view that economic resilience derived from manufacturing removed any reliance on outside communities, ensuring that the Ethur had

every economic, technological, and strategic reason to permanently retain control over their iron-bearing hills.

d. Territorial defense, historical victories, and land claim legitimization

Elders and clan custodians stressed that permanent settlement was ultimately sealed through successful territorial defense and the active enforcement of peace (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). Oral traditions record that after establishing their bases in the hills, the Ethur were subjected to repeated territorial incursions by expansionist regional groups, most notably early Lango military cohorts.

Through coordinated defensive strategies executed from their mountain citadels, the Ethur decisively repositioned and defeated these invading groups in a series of landmark engagements. Field accounts emphasize that these military victories were not merely violent clashes but they functioned as decisive historical events that cemented the Ethur's sovereign rights over the land. By successfully defending their borders and establishing a secure, peaceful environment, the Ethur established an unchallengeable moral and historical claim to present-day Abim District, transitioning permanently from a defensive posture to settled territorial ownership.

The mechanism of establishing permanent land rights through defensive conquest and territorial stabilization is a central theme in Ugandan political historiography (*Okia, 2000, p. 42*). Historical studies on pre-colonial land tenure emphasize that in the absence of centralized colonial cartography, territorial legitimacy was defined by a community's capacity to occupy, defend, and maintain political order over a specific geographical space (*Okia, 2000; Atkinson, 1994*).

Okia (2000) notes that pre-colonial land claims across Uganda were legitimized through the principle of defense and first effective clearance. When a community successfully defended an

area against aggressive neighbours and established long-term agricultural and ritual presence, their sovereign right to the land became universally recognized by regional polities (*Okia, 2000; Webster, 1979*).

In my humble opinion as a historical researcher, the defeat of invading groups like the Lango was the ultimate political test that validated Ethur territorial sovereignty. I contend that these defensive victories transformed the Labwor range from a temporary sanctuary into a legally and historically recognized sovereign homeland.

I strongly argue that in line with *Okia's (2000)* framework of pre-colonial land claims, the Ethur did not claim Abim through passive occupation, but earned it through defensive sacrifice and territorial enforcement. It is my view that winning these historical battles created a deep psychological and political attachment to the soil. Having shed blood to defend the valleys of Morulem, Alerek, and Kiru, the Ethur solidified a non-transient identity, establishing an enduring commitment to protect and remain in their ancestral land for generations.

e. Ideal Demographics and unconstrained land expansion

Finally, oral traditions from Focus Group Discussions with clan leaders in Alerek Sub-county highlight favourable demographic conditions as a critical logistical factor that facilitated permanent settlement (*FGD, Alerek Sub-county, July 16, 2025*). Elders noted that when the early Ethur cohorts first arrived in the Labwor region, the available land mass was vast, highly fertile, and largely unpopulated.

Given that the initial Ethur population was relatively small, this vast expanse of vacant territory easily accommodated their domestic homesteads, agricultural fields, and livestock grazing zones without triggering internal resource competition. Clan leaders emphasized that the absence of immediate demographic pressure or land compression allowed individual clans to expand naturally, establish distinct territorial divisions (*Otheme*), and practice rotational

farming without suffering from resource depletion or overcrowding, thereby removing any logistical impetus to relocate.

The relationship between low population density, land availability, and early settlement viability is a well-established concept in African political demography (*Mamdani, 1983, p. 7*). Scholars analysing historical land-to-population ratios in East Africa note that initial settlement viability depended heavily on the availability of a land surplus frontier (*Mamdani, 1983; Kitching, 1980*).

Mamdani (1983) observes that during the early phases of state formation in pre-colonial Uganda, access to vast, unallocated land was essential for non-centralized communities. It enabled small population groups to establish expansive agricultural systems and build flexible social structures without generating internal land disputes or ecological strain, thereby laying a stable foundation for long-term demographic and political growth (*Mamdani, 1983; Southall, 1956*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, the favourable land-to-population ratio in early Abim District provided the necessary spatial framework for the structural expansion of the Ethur polity. I contend that the vastness of the land allowed incoming clans to organize themselves cleanly into functional territorial clusters (*Otheme*) without spatial friction.

I strongly argue that as *Mamdani (1983)* theoretical model suggests, the abundance of unallocated, fertile land eliminated the ecological drivers of migration such as land degradation, pasture exhaustion, and internal clan disputes. The initial spatial freedom allowed the small Ethur frontline to grow progressively into a populous, well-structured society, permanently anchoring their identity, governance, and culture in the heart of present-day Abim District.

Figure 2. The view of Labwor hills from southwestern direction.



Source: Photograph from the field by the Researcher, August 25, 2025.

Figure 3. Apau hills in Kiru where the Ethur had the first dispersal point to different Othem.



Source: Photograph from the field by the Researcher, August 25, 2025.

4.1.7 Landmarks or places that are part of the Thur migration history

The physical landscape surrounding the Labwor range functions as a living archive of Ethur migration, territorial expansion, and frontier diplomacy. Far from being arbitrary lines on a modern map, the historical settlement sites, defensive river corridors, hill passes, and boundary

markers surrounding present-day Abim District reflect centuries of spatial occupation and geopolitical negotiation. Primary field data combined with regional historiography demonstrate that these landmarks physically delineate the historical footprint of the Ethur across four major inter-ethnic frontiers; the Acholi-Luo western corridor, the Lango south-western frontier, the Karimojong (Jie/Bokora) eastern plains, and the Iteso southern borderlands.

a. The Western and South-Western Frontiers, (Acholi and Lango)

Primary oral traditions collected from customary elders and clan leaders establish that the early spatial footprint of the Ethur extended well beyond the current administrative limits of Abim District into contemporary Agago, Otuke, and Alebtong districts. Customary elders identified major historical staging grounds such as Patongo in present-day Agago District and Aliwang near the Aloi-Olilim sector as early Ethur residential and trade zones prior to their gradual consolidation into the Labwor Hills (*Field Data, July–August 2025*).

Furthermore, clan leaders provided precise geographical landmarks defining both ancient contact points and modern boundaries with their Acholi and Lango neighbours (*Field Interview, August 23, 2025*). The historical and contemporary frontier with the Acholi is explicitly marked at Amita, supported by deep historical boundary posts at Camroni and Kworoka' Agole in Adilang Sub-county. Towards the Lango frontier, elders documented that the original territorial boundaries were marked at Olilim and Orum in contemporary Otuke District. Crucially, oral archives preserve memory of fierce territorial clashes and strategic battlegrounds along specific aquatic and rock landmarks, most notably Kulo Odithe and Umkobwor in Otuke District, which historically demarcated the contested contact zone where Ethur agro-industrialists and expansionist Lango cohorts met and established territorial equilibrium.

In regional East African historiography, the spatial distribution of Lwo-speaking and Nilotic groups across the Agago-Otuke-Labwor triangle is widely recognized (*Ogot, 1967, p. 63*;

Webster, 1979). Historians mapping the primary expansion of Central Lwo groups confirm that areas like Patongo and the Agago river basin functioned as open, fluid migration corridors where ancestral Lwo clans, including segments of the Ethur, established overlapping settlements prior to 19th-century territorial demarcations (*Ogot, 1967; Crazzolara, 1951*).

Regarding the Lango-Ethur borderland, historical research on pre-colonial territorial claims in Uganda (*Okia, 2000; Atkinson, 1994*) emphasizes that river channels (*Kulo*) and prominent rock outcrops (*Got*) served as universal, naturally enforceable international boundaries. The identification of sites like Olilim, Orum, and Kulo Odithe as historical frontiers aligns with 19th-century administrative and military surveys, which documented these exact eco-tones as the buffer zones separating the iron-producing Labwor polities from the agro-pastoral Lango groups (*Webster, 1979; Lamphear, 1992*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the precise identification of landmarks like Patongo, Aliwang, Amita, and Kulo Odithe provides indispensable ground-level proof of the expansive spatial history of the Ethur. I contend that the presence of Ethur ancestral footprints in modern-day Agago and Otuke districts proves that the Ethur were active co-architects of the broader Lwo landscape in Northern Uganda, rather than a group confined exclusively to the Labwor Hills.

I strongly argue that battleground landmarks such as Kulo Odithe and Umkobwor represent critical historical monuments of sovereign boundary enforcement. Applying Jan Vansina's (*1985*) methodology of landscape memory, it is my view that naming specific streams and hills where military engagements occurred was the pre-colonial Ethur method of mapping territorial sovereignty. In agreement with *Ogot (1967)* and *Okia (2000)*, these landmarks demonstrate that the western and south-western borders of Abim were not arbitrarily drawn by British colonial administrators, but were forged through decades of direct defense, diplomatic negotiation, and physical occupation by Ethur clan vanguards.

b. The Eastern Frontier, pastoral frontiers and mountain landmarks with the Jie and Bokora.

Oral evidence from field interviews with Ethur elders demarcates a distinct set of geographical landmarks that historically managed interactions along the eastern frontier with Ateker pastoralist groups, specifically the Jie of Kotido District and the Bokora of Napak/Moroto. Elders highlighted that key locations bordering present-day Kotido District including Kocolo, the primary iron ore mining zone, and the Thoror Hills served as vital multi-functional staging sites (*Field Interview, in Abim Town Council, August 2025*).

Specifically, clan leaders identified Camkok as the primary, universally recognized historical landmark marking the precise territorial boundary between Thurland (*Labwor*) and the Jie of Kotido District (*Field Data, in Abim Town Council, August, 2025*). In the southern sector of the eastern frontier, Nyakwae Hill was designated as the definitive geographical boundary separating the Ethur from the Bokora Karamojong. Furthermore, the Thoror Hills were highlighted as an overarching northern and north-eastern frontier landmark, functioning simultaneously as an iron-ore extraction zone, a high-altitude lookout settlement, and a territorial buffer bordering Kotido.

The physical and geographical relationship between the agricultural, iron-smelting Ethur of the Labwor Hills and the open-plain pastoral groups of central Karamoja is a classic subject in East African ethnography (*Gulliver, 1955, p. 4; Lamphear, 1976*). Academic surveys of Karamoja (*Gulliver, 1955*) confirm that natural topographic breaks specifically prominent isolated hills like Camkok, Thoror, and Nyakwae formed the natural eco-tones between cultivation zones and dry-season grazing plains.

Gulliver (1955) observes that pastoralists and highland agriculturalists maintained a strictly defined spatial diplomacy anchored on these landmarks. While the central plains were utilized for seasonal cattle grazing, the elevated hill passes like Camkok and Thoror were explicitly

recognized as the sovereign domain of the Labwor/Ethur smelters and farmers. Historians emphasize that these mountain landmarks were crucial for maintaining regional peace, as they served as formal trade stations where Jie and Bokora pastoralists exchanged livestock and hides for Ethur iron hoes (*Kweri*) and grain (*Gulliver, 1955; Sutton, 1973*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the eastern landmarks Camkok, Nyakwae, Lelo, and Thoror represent the industrial and ecological interface of Northeastern Uganda. I contend that these geographical features were chosen as boundaries because they marked the exact point where the high-altitude, iron-bearing ecology of Labwor met the semi-arid pastoral plains of Karamoja.

I strongly argue that the designation of Lelo and Thoror as boundary sites highlights the strategic connection between resource control and territorial defense. As supported by *Gulliver's (1955)* spatial analysis, it is my view that by securing landmarks like Camkok and Thoror, the Ethur successfully protected their iron mines (*Lelo*) and furnace sites (*Okoro*) from pastoralist encroachment. By establishing these hills as recognized international borders, the Ethur ensured that trade with the Jie and Bokora occurred on Ethur terms, reinforcing their status as an autonomous, economically indispensable industrial polity.

c. The Southern Frontier, Ethno-historical boundary markers with the Iteso.

Field data gathered from primary interviews in the southern sector of Abim District establishes the precise geographical markers defining the historical and contemporary frontier between the Ethur and the Iteso. According to oral testimonies collected in Adea, Morulem Sub-county, the definitive boundary separating Ethur territory from the Iteso is marked at Wii Alir Hills (locally known as Nyar Kidi) in Adea (*Field Interview, Adea, Morulem Sub-county, August 24, 2025*).

Customary elders emphasized that Wii Alir Hills (Nyar Kidi) falls firmly within the southern reaches of present-day Abim District, serving as a permanent geographical testament to the

maximum southward extent of Ethur territorial claims. Field accounts record that this landmark represents a historical compromise and spatial partition resulting from centuries of complex ethno-historical interactions, seasonal grazing agreements, and agricultural expansions between the Ethur agro-pastoralists of Morulem and the advancing Iteso cohorts from the Teso sub-region.

The southern borderlands of Karamoja and Abim, where Nilotic, Ateker, and Cushitic spheres overlap with the Teso agrarian frontier, are documented in Ugandan regional studies (*Golgotha, 2018; Webster, 1979*). Regional historical surveys (*Golgotha, 2018*) highlight that the southern micro-regions of Abim, particularly around Morulem and Adea, formed a key contact zone between Southern Nilotic/Lwo extensions and the northern expansion of the Iteso during the 18th and 19th centuries.

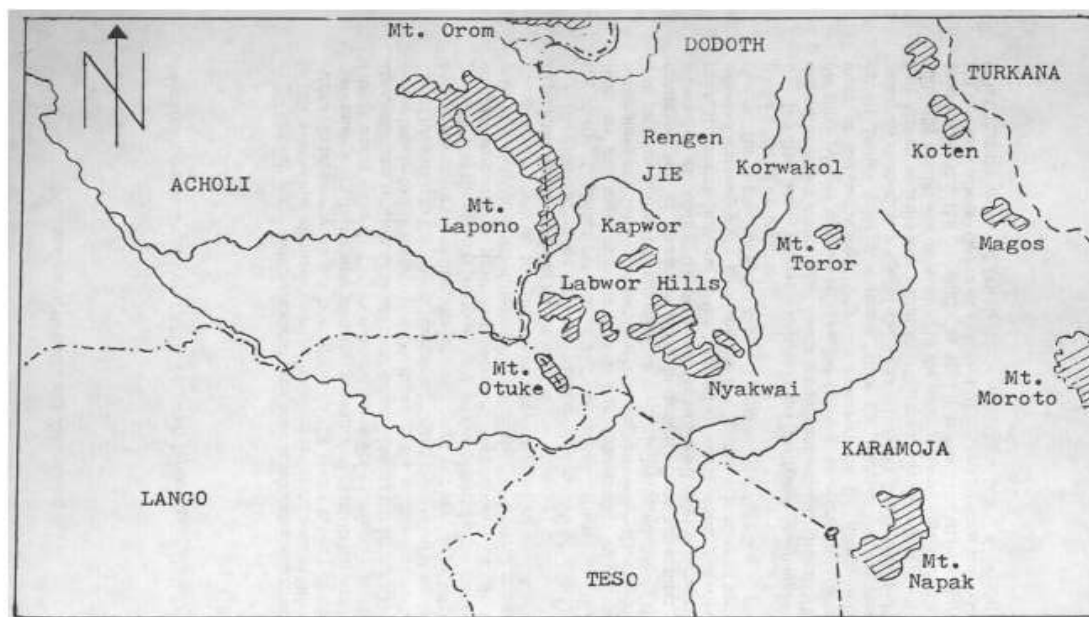
Scholarship on pre-colonial territorial partitioning (*Webster, 1979; Okia, 2000*) confirms that high-relief features like Wii Alir Hills served as vital natural reference points in non-literate societies. Because rock formations and hill crests (*Wii*) were permanent and unalterable, they were routinely selected during inter-community peace accords to prevent territorial encroachment and regulate access to surrounding agricultural plains and water courses (*Golgotha, 2018; Okia, 2000*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the identification of Wii Alir Hills (Nyar Kidi) in Adea as the southern border marker is of profound significance for mapping the complete territorial integrity of the Ethur nation. I contend that this landmark provides empirical proof that the Ethur successfully maintained sovereign control over the rich agricultural plains of southern Morulem.

I strongly argue that the landmark of Wii Alir Hills demonstrates the dynamic diplomatic capabilities of early Ethur leaders. In line with *Golgotha's (2018)* historical observations, it is

my view that establishing a clear, permanent boundary at Nyar Kidi allowed the Ethur to maintain peaceful, mutually beneficial trade and agricultural relations with the Iteso without sacrificing their territorial integrity. By anchoring their southern frontier on a prominent hill feature, the Ethur guaranteed the security of their breadbasket in Morulem, completing the spatial consolidation of present-day Abim District.

Figure 4: Places that are part of the Thur migration history



Source: *Thur digital archives, By the researcher August 24, 2025.*

4.1.8 Conclusion

The origin, migration, and permanent settlement of the Ethur were fundamentally embedded within the broader demographic movements and socio-technological transformations that swept across Northern Uganda and the greater Nile Valley from c. 1150 AD through the eighteenth century. Rather than representing a singular, monolithic exodus under a unified command, the peopling of the Labwor range was a gradual, highly complex, and multi-directional process. Diverse population streams comprising Central Sudanic metallurgical pioneers (*Kebhu* and *Kuku*), Western Nilotic Lwo political vanguards (*Jo' Karwoth*, *Kajimo*, and *Kalanga*), Eastern Nilotic Ateker cohorts (*Jie*), and Eastern Cushitic ritual specialists

(*Jokuju*) migrated in autonomous clan clusters under distinct lineage leaders, navigation scouts, and master smelters.

In my definitive analytical perspective as a historian of the region, the empirical evidence gathered across field sites in Abim District conclusively dismantles the colonial-era refugee paradigm. I contend that the Ethur did not retreat into the Labwor Hills as a defeated, passive remnant of shattered tribes. Instead, their migration and spatial consolidation represent a deliberate project of Composite Ethnogenesis and strategic eco-industrial positioning.

By purposefully occupying the high-altitude rock citadels (*Ametho*) of Apau, Wii-Awer, Rwoth, and Alerek, and securing the iron-bearing geological strata (*Lelo*) of Thoror and Kocolo, these migrating clusters synthesized their distinct heritage into a unified agro-industrial polity. The incoming Lwo groups contributed the overarching linguistic matrix (*Leb-Thur*) and royal council governance (*Othem*); the Central Sudanic groups provided advanced furnace metallurgy (*Theth*); and the Ateker and Cushitic cohorts fortified the community's martial age-set structures and ritual defense sciences (*Won Abila*).

Ultimately, the Ethur successfully converted an uncertain, multi-century migratory trajectory into an unassailable sovereign homeland. By establishing clear, defendable territorial landmarks along their borders with the Acholi, Lango, Jie, Bokora, and Iteso, the Ethur permanently anchored their identity in present-day Abim District. This foundational historical synthesis provided the necessary socio-political stability, economic autonomy, and spatial framework for the development of the *Otheme* territorial governance system and the flourishing of the regional Labwor iron industry.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THUR PEOPLE

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the social, political, and economic organization of the Thur (Ethur/Jo'Abwor) people of Abim District, northeastern Uganda. The findings were derived from qualitative data collected through key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted across multiple sub-counties including Adea (Morulem), Kiru Town Council, Abim Town Council, Nyakwae, and Awach sub-counties between July 2025 and January 2026.

This chapter examines the social, political, and economic organization of the Ethur (Thur/Jo'Abwor) people of Abim District in northeastern Uganda, tracing the historical evolution and institutional resilience of their society across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs. Grounded in a rigorous qualitative methodology, the empirical findings presented herein are derived from extensive primary field archives, including key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth oral interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). These field engagements were systematically conducted across key administrative and historical pivots of Abim District specifically Adea, Morulem Sub-county, Kiru Town Council, Abim Town Council, Nyakwae Sub-county, and Awach Sub-county, Alerek Subcounty between May – November, 2025.

By organizing the empirical data across distinct historical epochs, this chapter provides a critical, multi-layered analysis of how traditional Ethur institutions functioned prior to imperial contact, adapted under colonial administrative restructuring, and continue to operate within modern local governance and regional socio-economic networks.

5.1 Social organisation of the Ethur.

The social organization of the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) forms the institutional backbone of their societal cohesion, political resilience, and collective identity. Unlike centralized polities governed by single monarchical rulers, Ethur society developed a sophisticated, decentralized framework that integrated patrilineal kinship networks, specialized clan lineages, age-set systems (*Ametho*), and customary judicial custodianship into a unified socio-political matrix. This organic structural organization functioned as a complete self-governing system regulating household management, land allocation, inter-clan diplomacy, and territorial defense across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the social fabric that sustained Ethur autonomy in the Labwor Hills, this section examines four key structural pillars; Kinship and family structure, clan hierarchy, lineages, and customary chieftaincy, the age-set system (*Ametho*) and civic duties, and customary judicial systems and dispute.

5.1.1 Kinship and Family Structure

The social matrix of the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) is fundamentally anchored upon a robust patrilineal clan system (*Kaka*) and an extended classificatory kinship model. Far from being a simple domestic arrangement, the Ethur kinship system operates as a comprehensive governance framework a total institution that regulates territorial management, marriage alliances, legal adjudication, and inter-generational civic duties across distinct historical epochs.

Primary oral archives gathered across Abim District demonstrate that the patrilineal clan (*Kaka*) constitutes the foundational building block of Ethur society (*Field Data, Kiru Town council, 2025*). During an in-depth interview in Adea, Morulem Sub-county, elder Abura Jeremoshi articulated the totalizing nature of the clan system:

"For us, the clan is the heart of everything; it is our government, our family, and our identity all in one. Whether you are Jo'Kochero, Koguth, Kapuru, or from any of our other lineages like Kawoo or Kajimo, you belong to a system that dictates how we live together. We maintain our strength through rules; for instance, you must marry outside your clan to weave ties with your neighbours and ensure the community stays united. Our elders are the custodians of this order, where they manage the land, handle the disputes that arise between families, and guide the Age Set System so that every young person knows their duty to the Ethur. This is how we have maintained our autonomy and stability through the years." (Field Interview, Abura Jeremoshi, Kiru Town council, June 2025)

As illustrated by Abura Jeremoshi, the Ethur social order integrates autonomous lineages such as the Jo'Kochero, Koguth, Kapuru, Kawoo, and Kajimo into a disciplined socio-political architecture. A central pillar of this system is strict clan exogamy (*marriage outside the lineage*), a strategic mechanism designed to construct enduring political alliances, weave inter-clan affinity, and maintain regional stability.

Furthermore, field data gathered in Kiru Town Council reveals that the Ethur employ an extended classificatory kinship model, wherein familial terms and social obligations are broadly extended far beyond the immediate nuclear family (*Field Data, Kiru Town Council June, 2025*). In an interview examining household organization and lineage security, Obia Abari Alex elaborated on this structure:

"Labwor society was fortified by an extensive and obligating patrilineal kinship system which utilized a classificatory model where kinship terms were broadly extended beyond immediate biological relations; for example, all father's brothers were termed as 'father' and mother's sisters instead of being called aunts were all 'mother'. This structure

defined a vast network of mutual duties ensuring the social and economic stability of the lineage." (Field Interview, Obia Abari Alex, Kiru Town Council, June 2025)

This classificatory terminology eliminates social orphans within the lineage, guarantees collective child-rearing, and creates an obligating web of social safety nets that underpins the economic and defensive resilience of the Ethur community.

In African political anthropology and Nilotic historiography, the structural dynamics of patrilineal clan systems and classificatory kinship are extensively documented (*Southall, 1956; Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952*). Scholars examining segmentary lineage societies in Northern Uganda (*Webster, 1979; Atkinson, 1994; Lamphear, 1976*) emphasize that non-centralized polities maintained internal order without formal police forces or standing monarchies by relying on obligating kinship networks and elders' councils.

Southall (1956) observes that in segmentary Nilotic systems, exogamous clan rules function as essential "diplomatic instruments." By prohibiting marriage within the patrilineage, communities systematically turn potential external competitors into affine kin, thereby creating broad networks of mutual defense and conflict mitigation (*Southall, 1956; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952*). Furthermore, anthropological analyses of classificatory kinship (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951*) confirm that equating paternal uncles with biological fathers ('*Papa*') and maternal aunts with mothers ('*Meyo*') reinforces collective lineage responsibility over property, bride-wealth (*Limo*), land redistribution, and judicial accountability (*Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the testimony of Abura Jeremoshi and Obia Abari Alex reveals that Ethur kinship operates as a sophisticated, decentralized system of statecraft. I contend that characterising the Ethur as a "stateless" or stateless-loose society is a misnomer; their statehood was simply embodied in the legal, judicial, and moral mechanics of the Kaka (*clan*) and the extended family network.

I strongly argue that exogamy and classificatory kinship functioned as the primary socio-political guarantors of sovereignty and regional stability. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist theory, it is my view that designating all paternal uncles as "father" and maternal aunts as "mother" was an intentional social engineering strategy. This structure distributed parental authority across an entire lineage, ensuring that no household collapsed due to the death of a biological parent in war or famine.

Interpreting this through Ali Mazrui's (1986) concept of indigenous social engineering, I maintain that by integrating autonomous lineages like the *Jo'Kochero*, *Koguth*, *Kapuru*, *Kawoo*, and *Kajimo* through exogamous marriage ties, the Ethur effectively neutralized internal civil strife (*Lweny*). In the absence of a centralized monarchical court, the web of extended kinship, guided by the council of custodians and the age-set system (*Ametho*), provided the institutional order and collective security necessary for the Ethur to defend their territory, manage their land, and maintain their socio-political autonomy across generations.

Figure 5. Ethur settlement pattern in Kiru subcounty, Abim District.



Source: Photograph from the field by the Researcher, 15th, June, 2025

5.1.1a Bride wealth (*Lim Nyom*)

Primary field data collected across Abim District establishes that bridewealth (*Lim Nyom*) functions as the essential legal and socio-economic contract formalizing marriage within Ethur

society Customary elders and clan leaders emphasized that *Lim Nyom* was historically paid primarily in cattle (*Dhiang*), with goats (*Diel*) and sheep (*Rom*) accepted as supplementary livestock transfers (*Field Data, Kiru Town Council, August 2025*).

This livestock exchange served as the legal mechanism legitimizing marital unions and guaranteeing that all children born of the marriage were fully integrated as legal, jural members of the husband's patrilineage (*Kaka*). Crucially, oral accounts reveal that bridewealth was never an isolated transaction between two individuals; instead, the groom's extended kinsmen contributed to outgoing payments, while incoming bridewealth from a daughter's marriage was systematically distributed among a broad network of paternal and affinal relatives. This reciprocal sharing bound multiple clan lineages together, creating a collective social and economic investment in the permanence and success of the marriage.

The structural role of bridewealth as a social contract and risk-pooling mechanism is thoroughly analyzed in regional scholarship covering Nilotic and Ateker societies (*Trócaire, 2015; Atkinson, 1994; Gulliver, 1955*). Studies on the neighbouring Acholi and Lango (*Atkinson, 1994; Trócaire, 2015*) confirm that patrilineal clan structures rely on bridewealth transfers to establish land inheritance rights, secure ancestral lineage continuity, and build inter-clan political harmony.

Furthermore, comparative ethnographies of Karamoja groups such as the Jie (*Gulliver, 1955; Lamphear, 1976*) demonstrate that livestock transfers whether through formal bridewealth or non-kin stock friendships create extensive risk-pooling networks. These livestock exchanges function as social insurance policies, establishing reciprocal obligations that protect households during ecological crises, droughts, and major life-cycle transitions (*Gulliver, 1955; Atkinson, 1994*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, *Lim Nyom* represents a sophisticated instrument of inter-clan diplomacy and economic risk management. I contend that viewing bridewealth as a simple commercial "purchase" of a woman is a complete misinterpretation of Ethur jurisprudence, it was a legal transfer of rights over offspring that secured lineage continuity.

I strongly argue that by requiring extended kinsmen to contribute to and share in *Lim Nyom*, Ethur society transformed marriage into a collective socio-political alliance. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist framework, it is my view that this distributed livestock circulation created a wide web of stakeholders who were highly motivated to mediate marital disputes, thereby preventing divorce and preserving regional peace between potentially rival clans.

5.1.1b Wife Inheritance (*Lako Dhako*)

The research established that widow inheritance (*Lako Dhako*) functioned historically as a formal, obligating social institution grounded in communal welfare rather than individual choice (*Field Interview, Morulem Sub-county, July 21, 2025*). A key informant interview conducted in Morulem Sub-county revealed the core legal and socio-economic mechanics of this practice:

"When a husband dies, the widow is not left destitute or forced out of her home. A male relative, usually a brother of the deceased, assumes the responsibility of caretaker for the widow and her children. This caretaker ensures the economic security of the family, manages the gardens, and maintains the household. Most importantly, any children born after the inheritance still legally belong to the deceased husband's lineage. The biological father steps aside in favour of social paternity, keeping the deceased man's name, property, and memory alive." (*Field Interview, Morulem Sub-county, July 21, 2025*)

As demonstrated by the field data, *Lako Dhako* prioritized social paternity over biological paternity. The inheritor acted primarily as a legal trustee and guardian, ensuring that the deceased man's estate remained intact, his widow retained her land use rights, and his children maintained their full jural identity and inheritance claims within their ancestral patrilineage.

In African political anthropology and customary law studies, widow guardianship (*levirate marriage*) is recognized as a vital social security mechanism in patrilineal societies (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952*). Anthropological surveys across Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994; Trócaire, 2015*) document that in pre-colonial and early colonial eras, *Lako Dhako* protected vulnerable dependents from economic disenfranchisement, property grabbing, and social displacement following the death of a household head.

Evans-Pritchard (1951) highlights that in Nuer and Lwo legal frameworks, the legal bond established by the original bridewealth (*Lim Nyom*) persists beyond physical death. Because the bridewealth paid by the deceased man's lineage remains intact, all offspring raised within that marital domestic unit retain the deceased man's name and inheritance rights, illustrating the absolute primacy of legal social paternity over biological fatherhood (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, *Lako Dhako* must be evaluated within its historical context as an indigenous social security system. I contend that the primary objective of this institution was the protection of vulnerable widows and orphans, ensuring they were never abandoned or stripped of their agricultural land rights.

I strongly argue that the concept of social paternity embedded in *Lako Dhako* demonstrates the elevated legal sophistication of Ethur customary law. By prioritizing the jural rights of the deceased father, Ethur jurisprudence protected the children's future land claims and inheritance,

preventing the fragmentation of ancestral family estates. While modern socio-legal shifts and human rights frameworks have rightly transformed individual choices surrounding widowhood today, historically *Lako Dhako* served as an indispensable pillar of lineage stability and social welfare.

5.1.1 c Gender division of labour

Regarding the division of household and community labor, field investigations across Abim, Alerek, Kanu, Orwamuge, Kiru, and Nyakwae sub-counties documented a rigid yet complementary gendered system. Customary elders interviewed across these sectors characterized women as the indispensable architects of daily life and subsistence agriculture. Women held primary responsibility for planting, weeding, harvesting, crop processing, meal preparation, fuelwood collection, water fetching, childcare, and overall domestic maintenance. (*Field Interview, Kiru Sub-county, July 21, 2025*).

Conversely, men were assigned primary responsibility for external community defense, warfare (*Lweny*), and high-vantage surveillance. During peacetime, men performed heavy physical labor, including field clearing (*Pur*), land ploughing, livestock herding, high-heat furnace metallurgy (*Theth*), and building home structures. Crucially, field data revealed that individual households frequently pooled their labor resources into cooperative neighbourhood work groups (*Wang Pur*) or communal work parties to manage peak agricultural demands, such as land clearing and harvesting, creating a vital layer of social cohesion beyond immediate kin units.

The complementary gendered division of labor and cooperative labor pooling are well-documented characteristics of East African agro-pastoral economies (*Knight, 1999; Trócaire, 2015; Atkinson, 1994*). Scholars examining pre-colonial production systems in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994*) confirm that communal land tenure and cooperative village-clan labor arrangements (*Wang Pur*) were historic norms among the Acholi, Lango, and Labwor/Ethur.

Knight (1999, p. 84) notes that the agro-pastoral balance of the Labwor required strict labor specialization to maximize productivity. While men protected livestock herds and managed heavy land preparation and iron forging, women's agricultural mastery ensured continuous crop yields of finger millet (*Kalo*), sorghum, and legumes, guaranteeing household food security (*Knight, 1999; Trócaire, 2015*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, the gendered division of labor among the Ethur was not a system of subjugation, but an interdependent economic partnership tailored for survival in a frontier environment. I contend that the daily subsistence of the household depended just as heavily on women's agricultural labor as it did on men's defensive military readiness.

I strongly argue that the practice of pooling labor through communal neighbourhood work parties (*Wang Pur*) served as a vital social bridge. In alignment with *Atkinson's (1994)* agrarian analyses, it is my view that cooperative labor groups expanded social solidarity beyond tight patrilineal boundaries, enabling neighbouring clans to build trust, share agricultural technology, and maintain communal resilience during intense farming seasons.

5.1.2 Age Set System (Othem)

The Age-Set System (*Ametho*) represents the single most defining institution of the Ethur people's socio-political, legal, and military organization. Far from a mere social grouping, this institutional framework organizes all male members of the community into named, generational cohorts that transcend individual kinship ties. By shifting political authority away from pure hereditary monarchies or individual wealth, the Ethur age-set structure guarantees that power, civic responsibility, and strategic knowledge are distributed and transferred through a continuous, structured progression across all *Othem* territorial clusters (*Emenkeko, Monyanga, Atunga, Oporoth, and Kiru*).

Primary oral archives gathered across Abim District confirm that the Age-Set System forms the core engine of Ethur governance and military defense (*Field Interview, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025*). During an in-depth field interview in Abim Town Council, a senior elder outlined the chronological sequence of historical and contemporary age-set cohorts:

"The Age-Set System grouped the Ethur from the eldest to the youngest, sometimes referred to as generations. Among them were cohorts that are no longer in existence because death took them away: Elukoth, Ethemwok, Eruda, Engathunyo, Eperenge, Ekwein, Emukura, Edewa, Enyayimony, Emadanga, Bonyo, and Erukojwi. Those former age-sets have passed on, but these are the ones still alive today: Eribanya who are currently leading the people now followed by Elingathom, and then Ebongia."
(*Field Interview, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025*)

As documented in the field archive, the Ethur age-set system operates on an absolute principle of hierarchical power distribution where sovereign authority is directly proportional to a cohort's age and experience. A subsequent interview conducted in Kiru Town Council articulated the functional division of responsibilities across active age-sets:

"The ruling power is always vested in the oldest living age-set, which forms the de facto governing body of the entire community. Currently, the senior set, Eribanya, possesses absolute political and judicial sovereignty, allowing them to legislate, judge, and maintain supreme social order. Following them are the junior sets like Elingathom, whose primary functions involve administrative support, execution of judicial decrees, and communal labor supervision. The youngest sets, represented by Ebongia, constitute the active warrior grade, responsible for territorial defense, military operations, and heavy physical labor." (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*)

This dynamic functional structure ensures that every Ethur male progresses collectively with his peers through three fundamental life stages: Ebongia incharge of active defense, warrior grade, heavy labor, Elingathom for executive administration, judicial execution, police duty, and Eribanya who are the supreme judicial council, legislative oversight, territorial governance.

In African political anthropology and East African age-set scholarship, generational corporate institutions are recognized as sophisticated mechanisms for non-centralized statecraft (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Gulliver, 1955; Lamphear, 1976; Webster, 1979*). Scholars analysing the Nilotic-Ateker interface in Northern and Eastern Uganda (*Lamphear, 1976, 1992; Atkinson, 1994*) emphasize that age-set systems allowed heterogeneous, multi-origin communities to build political unity without creating authoritarian kingships.

Eisenstadt (1956) notes that age-set systems construct "cross-cutting ties" that deliberately supersede narrow clan loyalty. By binding young men from different lineages into a single, named national cohort through collective initiation, the society creates a unified military force and civic identity (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Gulliver, 1955*). Furthermore, historical studies on Karamoja and the Labwor Hills (*Lamphear, 1976; Webster, 1979*) confirm that transferring supreme governance to senior generation sets (*such as the historical Elukoth or contemporary Eribanya*) guaranteed political stability. It established a meritocratic gerontocracy where elder status and accumulated wisdom, rather than royal lineage, dictated judicial decisions and peace treaties.

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the Ethur Age-Set System (*Ametho*) represents an extraordinary achievement in decentralized democratic governance and civic engineering. I contend that the system successfully solved the universal political challenge of balancing youthful military energy with elder wisdom, creating a stable political order that survived for centuries without a standing army or centralized monarch.

I strongly argue that the structured progression from *Ebongia* to *Elingathom* and ultimately to *Eribanya* functioned as a formal institutional career path for civic leadership. Applying S.N. Eisenstadt's (1956) theory of age-set integration, it is my view that grouping youth into named cohorts like *Engathunyo*, *Emukura*, or *Ebongia* deliberately dismantled clan provincialism. A young man owed primary military allegiance not just to his immediate *Kaka* (clan), but to his age-peers across all five *Othem* clusters (*Emenkeko*, *Monyanga*, *Arunga*, *Oporoth*, *Kiru*).

Interpreting this institutional continuity across epochs, I maintain that the survival of active cohorts like *Eribanya*, *Elingathom*, and *Ebongia* down to the present day demonstrates the deep cultural resilience of the Ethur. While colonial indirect rule attempted to dismantle indigenous age-grades in favour of appointed chiefs, the *Ametho* system remained the true moral authority within Ethur society. It preserved indigenous law, maintained social discipline, and guaranteed that every generation of Ethur youth understood their sacred duty to protect the sovereignty, land, and heritage of their homeland.

5.1.2a Succession Mechanism

Primary field data gathered across Abim District highlights a distinct, self-regulating succession model governing the transfer of political power within the Ethur Age-set System. Customary elders emphasized that unlike dynastic or monarchical systems where leadership transitions depend on individual inheritance or royal lineage, power succession among the Ethur is strictly anchored on the lifecycle of the age-set cohorts (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*).

Once a named age-set cohort is formally constituted and initiated, its members belong to that cohort for life. The age-set only ceases to exist when its last surviving member passes away, marking the official conclusion of its governance cycle. When the most senior age-set cohort dies out entirely, the immediately succeeding age-set automatically ascends to the position of supreme eldership. This rising cohort inherits full, absolute political, legislative, and judicial

authority over the *Othem* settlements (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). Oral testimonies stress that this institutional succession mechanism effectively eliminated dynastic rivalries, succession wars, and political factionalism, ensuring that supreme governance was perpetually vested in the hands of the community's most experienced living generation.

In African political anthropology and structural-functionalist literature, the mechanics of automatic generational turnover are recognized as essential features of non-monarchical statecraft (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Gulliver, 1955; Lamphear, 1976*). Comparative studies on Nilotic and Ateker age-system transitions (*Lamphear, 1976, 1992; Spencer, 1965*) demonstrate that gerontocratic societies used automatic cohort succession to maintain constitutional continuity without relying on centralized executive enforcement.

Eisenstadt (1956) observes that structural age-set succession neutralizes individual ambition by making political promotion a collective, inevitable lifecycle event rather than a personal contest for wealth or power. In regional East African historiography, *Lamphear (1976)* notes that when an entire generation set passes away, the transition of power such as the handover of ritual and judicial authority, functions as a sacred constitutional mandate. This institutionalized succession model guaranteed stability across multi-clan confederations by providing an unassailable, universally accepted formula for leadership continuity (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the age-set succession mechanism represents an extraordinarily sophisticated form of institutional constitutionalism. I contend that by decoupling political succession from individual biological heirs or family dynasties, the Ethur designed a political system that was immune to the destructive succession disputes (*Lweny*) that frequently fractured neighbouring monarchical states.

I strongly argue that the automatic ascension of the next senior cohort upon the death of the preceding set functioned as a built-in meritocratic and democratic safeguard. Applying S.N. Eisenstadt's (1956) framework of generational integration, it is my view that this mechanism ensured that those exercising supreme judicial and political sovereignty (*currently Eribanya*) had spent their entire lives progressing through the warrior (*Ebongia*) and administrative (*Elingathom*) grades. By the time a cohort inherited full authority, its members possessed decades of shared administrative experience, deep knowledge of customary law, and proven devotion to the public good, guaranteeing stable, predictable, and wise governance across all *Othem* territories.

5.1.3 Marriage and Divorce

i. Marriage Practices

In Ethur society, marriage is viewed not merely as a private union between two individuals, but as an essential civic duty, a legal mechanism for lineage continuation, and a strategic instrument for inter-clan diplomacy. The institution of marriage regulates demographic growth, establishes jural authority over offspring, and constructs wide-reaching affinity networks that underpin regional peace and economic cooperation across the Labwor range.

Primary field archives gathered across Abim District reveal that marriage was traditionally considered a mandatory societal obligation for all mature young men and women. Oral testimonies collected in Kiru Town Council indicate that historically, Ethur maidens entered marriage during early adolescence traditionally evaluated through physical morphological markers, such as breast development, while young men married between 18 and 22 years after proving their readiness through the warrior age-grade *Ebongia* (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). Polygamy was widely practiced and culturally valued, enabling senior men of standing to take multiple wives and establish expansive homesteads (*Dyekal*).

Field data documented four distinct, institutionalized methods of partner selection and marital initiation; Courtship (*Cuna*) where young man independently identified a maiden of his choice, consulted his close peers and family, and initiated formal courtship visits. There was also Teo-Ring Marking (*Keetho Atego*). The Ethur arranged betrothal mechanism where a young girl was identified by a boy's parents at an early age and marked with a specific toe ring (*Atego*) as a binding promise of future marital negotiations. bridal agricultural service (*Tio Jonga*) was another way as a system of agricultural service where the prospective groom and his family assisted the girl's parents with heavy farm labor (*Pur*), providing an extended period for the families to evaluate character and compatibility prior to formal union, and lastly, there was marriage by abduction / elopement (*Tingo Nyako*). This was a forceful acquisition mechanism where a young man, supported by his age-peers and close kinsmen, staged the physical capture of the maiden to his homestead. This method incurred severe customary penal surcharges, with the bride's aggrieved parents demanding premium bridewealth fine payments traditionally up to eight head of cattle (*Dhiang*).

Following successful bridewealth negotiations, marriages were legally sealed through sacred clan-specific binding rituals designed to protect marital fidelity and spiritually anchor the woman to her new patrilineage. Prominent among these was *Akigath* (or *Wiro Dhako*). For example, among the Kuku ironmasters' clan, *Akigath* required the bride to sit upon a sacred animal skin (*Dien/Lao*) while clan elders performed traditional invocations, anointed her with sacred oils, and offered ancestral prayers (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*).

The lived experience of these customary negotiations was vividly articulated by elder Ongom Hadison during an in-depth field interview in Kiru Town Council:

"In 1984, when I conducted my marriage negotiations in Orwamuge, tradition strictly demanded that discussions take place inside the bride's mother's hut. My family sat humbly on prepared animal skins on the floor, while the bride's uncles and elders sat on

carved wooden stools. Negotiations began at the dawn hour of 4:00 AM and were concluded by 9:00 AM. The moment agreements were reached, the women blew the Aporo (flutes for women) long horn instruments that produce powerful celebration sounds and the uncles blew the Oletu (flutes) to announce to the whole village that the union was sealed. But today, our children face a different reality; contemporary practices have shifted from heavy cattle payments to cash settlements because cattle raids by Karamojong warriors drastically wiped out our livestock herds." (Field Interview, Ongom Hadison, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025)

In East African ethnography and Nilotic legal historiography, the diverse modes of marital contraction and the performance of binding affinity rituals are extensively documented (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956; Atkinson, 1994; Gulliver, 1955*). Studies on Lwo and Ateker marriage mechanics (*Atkinson, 1994; Lamphear, 1976*) confirm that practices like bridal labor service (*Tio Jonga*) and elopement/capture (*Tingo Nyako*) served as structural valves in agro-pastoral societies, allowing young men without immediate access to inherited herd wealth to contract valid legal marriages through physical labor or structured fine negotiations.

Furthermore, anthropological research on African customary law (*Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Southall, 1956*) emphasizes that marital binding rituals like *Akigath* or *Wiro Thako* functioned as legal and spiritual rites of passage. These ceremonies transferred jural authority over the woman's reproductive capacities from her natal clan to her husband's patrilineage, while simultaneously invoking ancestral spirits (*Tipo*) to enforce marital chastity and protect the household from spiritual pollution (*Webster, 1979*). Regional economic histories of Karamoja and the Labwor Hills (*Gulliver, 1955; Knight, 1999*) also corroborate elder Ongom Hadison's account regarding the late-20th-century transition from livestock to cash economies, documenting how persistent cattle rustling across the Karamoja borderlands forced agro-industrial communities to monetize customary bridewealth (*Lim Nyom*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the diverse marriage practices of the Ethur demonstrate an extraordinarily versatile legal architecture designed to accommodate varying economic, social, and inter-clan circumstances. I contend that options ranging from *Cuna* to *Tio Jonga* and *Tingo Nyako* ensured that marital unions and by extension lineage reproduction were never blocked by temporary economic poverty or individual cattle shortages.

I strongly argue that rituals such as *Akigath* and the early morning negotiation protocols described by Ongom Hadison underline the sacred, constitutional nature of Ethur marriage. Sitting on animal skins inside the mother's hut at 4:00 AM was a symbolic posture of humility and respect (*Woro*) extended by the groom's clan to the bride's givers of life. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist framework, it is my view that the sounding of the *Aporo* horns and *Oletu* flutes functioned as a public, legal proclamation of a newly ratified treaty between two sovereign clans.

Interpreting the historical shift from cattle to cash noted in the primary archive, I maintain that the transition reflects the remarkable adaptability of Ethur customary law in the face of late-20th-century security and economic shocks. When Karamojong cattle raids decimated local herds, the council of elders (*Eribanya*) dynamically adjusted the material medium of *Lim Nyom* to cash equivalents without sacrificing the underlying legal, spiritual, and social validity of the marriage covenant.

ii. Customary divorce (*Pokere*), judicial mediation, and bridewealth restitution.

Primary field investigations conducted across Abim District demonstrate that customary divorce (*Pokere*) was extremely rare, highly stigmatized, and actively discouraged by clan custodians. Because marriage (*Nyom*) established a permanent socio-political covenant

between two extended lineages rather than a simple contract between two individuals, dissolving a marital union required extraordinary judicial justification.

Field interviews with elders in Kiru Town Council and Adea establish that formal dissolution was legally sanctioned only under severe, irreparable circumstances (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, June 16, 2025*). Recognized legal grounds included, incurable barrenness or impotence, which was unresolved reproductive failure that threatened lineage continuity, grave anti-social misconduct like confirmed practices of witchcraft (*Tic ki Yen*), poisoning, or chronic, habitual refusal to engage in agricultural labor, and severe household cruelty including insubordination. The persistent of physical abuse of Mother-in-law or extreme disrespect exhibited by the husband's kinsmen toward the wife, or chronic female adultery (*Elomi /Alianga*) would result to divorce.

Judicial decision-making authority during divorce proceedings was strictly vested in the council of male lineage heads (*Jagi/Edong*) and senior clan custodians (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*). Women were legally represented by their paternal uncles and brothers, with male clan heads holding the final authority to grant or deny dissolution. Crucially, the field data establishes that when a divorce was formally granted, the original bridewealth (*Lim Nyom*) had to be fully returned to the husband's lineage. This mandatory restitution applied regardless of which party initiated the dissolution, if the woman's family initiated the split, they were legally obligated to repay the exact count of cattle and goats to the groom's clan and if the husband rejected the wife on legitimate grounds, he retained the absolute jural right to demand full refund of his livestock assets.

In African customary law and Nilotic legal scholarship, the extreme rarity of divorce and the strict requirement of bridewealth restitution are widely documented (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Atkinson, 1994*). Studies on Lwo and Ateker legal

frameworks (*Atkinson, 1994; Gulliver, 1955*) confirm that high bridewealth requirements acted as a structural stabilizer that inherently suppressed divorce rates.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) highlights that because incoming bridewealth (*Lim Nyom*) was quickly distributed among the bride's paternal and affinal relatives to fund their own sons' marriages, returning the livestock required calling in debts from multiple households. Consequently, the bride's extended family had a powerful economic incentive to intervene early in domestic disputes, mediate quarrels, and pressure the couple to reconcile rather than permit a formal dissolution (*Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Southall, 1956*). Furthermore, comparative legal studies (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951*) emphasize that bridewealth restitution in customary courts was directly tied to child custody rights: if children had been born of the union, a proportionate number of cattle were legally retained by the wife's family to validate the children's permanent membership in the husband's patrilineage.

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the legal mechanics governing *Pokere* provide clear proof that Ethur bridewealth operated as a binding legal security deposit rather than a commercial purchase. I contend that making divorce difficult and economically burdensome was a deliberate institutional design aimed at protecting societal cohesion.

I strongly argue that the absolute requirement of bridewealth repayment (*Lim Nyom*) transformed every marriage into a self-policing social contract. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (*1952*) structural-functionalist theory, it is my view that because an entire network of in-laws faced financial disruption if a marriage failed, the extended family functioned as an indigenous marriage counselling board. The elders of both clans were legally bound to exhaust every avenue of arbitration before ever declaring a marriage dissolved.

While recognizing that the exclusive exercise of judicial authority by male lineage heads reflects the rigid patriarchal legal structures of the pre-colonial era, I maintain that from a universal perspective, this legal framework successfully prevented frivolous desertions, protected the jural rights of offspring, and ensured that inter-clan alliances remained stable across generations.

5.1.4. Childbirth, Naming, Burial and Dance

The cultural fabric of the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) is complicatedly woven around sacred life-cycle transitions and communal artistic expressions. From the moment an infant emerges into the light of the homestead to the solemn rites accompanying ancestral transition, and through the vibrant rhythms of community dance assemblies, the Ethur express a deep spiritual worldview that connects the living, the unborn, and the ancestral spirits (*Tipo*).

i. Childbirth and the sacred isolation rites.

Primary field investigations across Abim District demonstrate that childbirth (*Nywol*) is revered as a vital spiritual blessing that secures lineage continuation and honors the ancestral clan. The birth process initiates a strict period of ritual seclusion within the domestic hut (*Ot*). Customary protocol dictates that the mother and her newborn remain isolated inside the home for three days following the birth of a male child, and four days for a female child (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). During this sacred window, entry into the birthing sanctuary is restricted exclusively to elderly matriarchs and close female relatives who serve as birth attendants and ritual guardians.

Crucially, the physical separation of the umbilical cord (*Pel*) involves a binding earth ritual. The umbilical cord is buried immediately near the threshold of the homestead entrance or at the base of a designated sacred tree within the compound (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). This act serves as a physical and spiritual anchoring, binding the child

eternally to the ancestral soil (*Ngom Kwaro*) of the patrilineage and ensuring that the newborn remains spiritually grounded in the heritage of the Ethur nation.

In African political anthropology and Nilotic ritual historiography, the periodization of post-natal seclusion three days for boys, four days for girls and umbilical burial are well-documented practices (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956; Atkinson, 1994*). Scholars examining Lwo and Central Sudanic societies in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994; Crazzolara, 1951*) confirm that the numbers three and four carry deep cosmological symbolism, three represents masculinity, physical defense, and the stand hearth stones of the home, while four symbolizes femininity, agricultural fertility, domestic completion, and the four cardinal points of the compound.

Evans-Pritchard (1951) notes that burying the umbilical cord within the family compound is a universal Nilotic mechanism for establishing legal and spiritual land rights. The act transforms the physical earth into a sacred domestic archive, ensuring that as the child grows into adulthood, their right to cultivate and defend the ancestral estate is permanently validated by the presence of their buried biological origin (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Southall, 1956*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the childbirth rites of the Ethur demonstrate a profound understanding of biocultural ecology and spiritual sanitation. I contend that the three- and four-day seclusion period functioned simultaneously as an indigenous medical quarantine protecting vulnerable newborns and mothers from external pathogens and as a sacred window for spiritual bonding.

I strongly argue that burying the umbilical cord (*Pel*) near the entrance of the homestead is the ultimate assertion of indigenous land tenure. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) framework of spatial memory, it is my view that this ritual physically linked the child's biology to the patrilineal soil. By planting the umbilical cord in the earth, the Ethur ensured that no external

power could easily alienate a person from their ancestral land, as their very origin was permanently integrated into the soil of Abim.

ii. Naming ceremonies and the out-dooring presentation.

Field data gathered in Morulem and Kiru sub-counties reveal that naming ceremonies (*Cako Nying*) are profound socio-spiritual events that formally integrate the infant into the civic and ancestral matrix of the Ethur (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). Names are never chosen at random but they reflect the specific environmental, temporal, or political circumstances of birth such as time of day, weather conditions, or ongoing agricultural seasons or directly honour deceased ancestors (*Kwaro*). Naming a child after a departed ancestor ensures that the ancestor's spirit, character, and moral virtues continue to live through the new generation.

The climax of the naming process is the out-dooring ceremony (*Kelo Nyako/Awobi Yoko*), performed at the conclusion of the ritual seclusion period (*(Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025)*). During this public presentation, the newborn is brought out of the dark hut at dawn to face the rising sun (*Ceng*), symbolizing the gift of life, clarity, and vitality. Members of the extended clan gather for a communal feast, during which senior elders pronounce the infant's name aloud, invoke the ancestral spirits (*Tipo*), and offer formal blessings for protection, wisdom, and long life.

The socio-linguistic and ancestral dimensions of Nilotic naming systems are extensively documented in East African scholarship (*Ogot, 1967; Crazzolara, 1951; Atkinson, 1994*). Historians analysing Lwo nomenclature (*Atkinson, 1994*) observe that circumstantial and ancestral names serve as historical markers within non-literate societies. A child named during a period of severe drought, warfare, or abundant harvest becomes a living historical calendar, allowing future generations to trace historical events through age-mate names.

Furthermore, studies on ancestral reincarnation concepts in Northern Uganda (*Webster, 1979; Southall, 1956*) confirm that bestowing an ancestral name (*Nying Kwaro*) is a spiritual act of lineage preservation. It establishes an invisible guardian bond between the infant and the ancestral spirit, ensuring that the deceased elder's social personality and moral authority remain active within the clan council (*Othem*).

In my humble opinion as a historical researcher, the Ethur naming ceremony is an essential mechanism of historical record-keeping and psychological identity. I contend that by grounding names in environmental realities and ancestral lineages, the Ethur transformed every individual into a living historical document.

I strongly argue that presenting the infant to the rising sun during the out-dooring" ceremony represents a profound cosmic connection. In alignment with *Atkinson's (1994)* observations, it is my view that this ritual publicly declared the child's jural rights to the entire community. When the elders pronounced the name before the assembled clan, the child ceased to be merely an individual biological entity and became a legally recognized citizen of the Ethur nation, endowed with full rights to protection, lineage property, and clan heritage.

iii. Death, burial rites, and cleansing protocols.

Field archives across Abim, Kiru, and Nyakwae sub-counties indicate that among the Ethur, death (*Thoo*²) was historically never perceived as a random biological event. Instead, it was viewed as a calculated disruption caused by ancestral displeasure, witchcraft (*Yath/Jwok*), or external malice ((*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). The passing of a community member was immediately announced by intense, rhythmic wailing and piercing screams by the household women, alerting the entire village and surrounding homesteads. Sanctity of transition relied on the physical presence of the body within the family homestead

² Death

(*Dyekal*) and if a relative died far away, their remains or symbolic ritual substitutes had to be returned to the compound for formal burial.

The research documented a strict categorization of mortuary cleaning practices based on the nature of passing, among these are, Normal or natural deaths, here elderly individuals or those passing from recognized illness received full, honoured homestead burials within the compound. Unusual or bad deaths. Individuals dying from suicide, wild animal attacks, leprosy, or epilepsy were denied standard homestead burials. Historically, their bodies were wrapped in ox-hides (*Pien*) and cast away into deep forests or thrown over high cliff faces to prevent their spiritual pollution from contaminating the living. Fallen Warriors killed on distant battlefields were kept away from the domestic compound, their bodies were buried in the wilderness and covered with sacred leaves.

The burial process was an organized communal endeavour managed through strict age-grade labor ((*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). Senior elders and the deceased's age-mates (*Ametho*) applied an indigenous herbal preservative (*Mitho*) to the body before wrapping it in traditional animal skins (*Pien*). Male youth dug the grave, and also ignited ceremonial fires (*Mach*) to ward off evil spirits, and women managed logistical needs. Following the burial, a sequence of mandatory mortuary cleansing protocols was executed. *Matho Yath* (herbal cleansing) was performed three or four days after burial, where family members ingested ritual herbal concoctions to cleanse the domestic space. *Joobo buru* (ash sacrificial rites) involving goat sacrifices, symbolic head-shaving of the bereaved family, and the smearing of hearth ashes to mark the end of formal mourning, and lastly *Codo thol* (breaking the Rope) was executed approximately one year after death. This final celebration severed the physical bond between the living and the deceased, allowing the widow to be inherited (*Lako Dhako*) and permanently elevating the deceased into the realm of revered ancestral spirits (*Tipo Kwaro*).

In African comparative religion and mortuary anthropology, the structural differentiation between "good" and "bad" deaths is a central theme (*Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Middleton, 1960*). Anthropological surveys of Lwo and Ateker communities (*Atkinson, 1994; Gulliver, 1955*) confirm that deaths resulting from infectious diseases like leprosy, or socially catastrophic events like suicide, were treated as spiritual emergencies requiring immediate spatial expulsion.

Middleton (1960) notes that mortuary cleansing ceremonies like *Codo Thol* ("Breaking the Rope") serve vital psychological and legal functions. By formally concluding the mourning period after one year, the society systematically redistributes the deceased person's property, reallocates land usage rights, resolves outstanding debts, and permits the widow to re-enter marital arrangements, thereby restoring socio-economic equilibrium to the lineage (*Middleton, 1960; Southall, 1956*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, the mortuary practices of the Ethur reveal an advanced, dual-purpose framework combining public health management with complex spiritual philosophy. I contend that expelling bodies associated with leprosy or mysterious contagions to mountain cliffs was an effective indigenous epidemiological control measure designed to protect the broader community from disease transmission.

I strongly argue that the three-stage cleansing process *Matho Yath*, *Joobo Buru*, and *Codo Thol* demonstrates the emotional and legal sophistication of Ethur customary law. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist theory, it is my view that *Codo Thol* prevented prolonged social paralysis. By setting a definitive one-year timeline for grief, the Ethur ensured that household estates were not left indefinitely frozen, enabling widows, orphans, and clan leaders to rebuild their economic and domestic lives with full community support.

iv. Traditional Dance (*Myel Bul* and *Ocutu*) as an Oral Ledger and Civic Assembly.

Primary field archives establish that traditional dances among the Ethur were never mere entertainment, they operated as vital civic assemblies, sacred ritual platforms, and historical archives ((*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025*). While specialized dances like *Ocutu* were performed for specific spiritual outcomes such as rainmaking, exorcism, or pest control the *Myel Bul* (Drum Dance) stood as the supreme, all-encompassing communal gathering.

During an in-depth field interview in Kiru Town Council, key informant Odunge Stephen provided a rich, detailed synthesis of the performance, structure, and historical function of *Myel Bul*:

"The Myel Bul is the definitive cultural heartbeat of the Ethur or Labwor people, serving as a sophisticated rhythmic archive that bridges their historical resilience with contemporary social life. This specific Myel Bul was performed during significant milestones such as the new harvest, the birth of twins and celebration (Ruddi), or following the reconciliation done to harmonize two parties after war. The dance is organized through a strict gender-based collaboration where men take command of the drum (Bul) and athletic maneuvers, while women form a protective, vocal circle that reinforces the community's collective boundary. Both performing teams engage in singing songs depending on the motive of the dance, mostly courtship, victory, new and good harvest, or twin celebrations. The performance is driven by a distinct instrumental ensemble, including the melodic flute (Pelu) and rhythmic jingles tied by men around their ankles forged at the Ot Theth (Blacksmith Point), which coordinate with the grounded, percussive footwork of the dancers.

Historically, the songs of the *Myel Bul* functioned as an oral ledger, recounting the leadership of past traditional leaders of Ethur like Rwoth Arion and Adyaka Watheca, the hardships of the 'Famine of 1980' caused by 'Amin Dada's regime,' and the 'spiritual gifts within groups/clans' from the Kapuru clan dealing with pests to the Kajimo clan who bring rain during prolonged drought. Today, the dance remains a vital tool for mentorship within the Emadanga and other age groups, providing the youth with a structured identity that fulfills the ancestral proverb: 'Aweno ba wekko wie' meaning 'like son, like father; what your parents do is evidenced in you.' This ensures that the character and traditions of the parents are vibrantly mirrored in the next generation." (Field Interview, Odunge Stephen, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025)

As Odunge Stephen's testimony illustrates, *Myel Bul* operates as a multi-layered institution. Mechanically, it relies on locally forged ankle jingles crafted by indigenous blacksmiths at the smelting centers (*Ot Theth*), melodic flutes (*Pelu*), and central master drums (*Bul*). Functionally, its song lyrics record critical historical events including the political reigns of Rwoth Arion and Adyaka Watheca, ecological disasters such as the 1980 famine, and the specialized ritual roles of constituent clans like the Kapuru (*pest control*) and Kajimo (*rainmakers*).

In African oral historiography and ethnomusicology, communal dance assemblies are recognized as primary instruments for historical preservation and social control (*Vansina, 1985; Okot p'Bitek, 1974; Nketia, 1974*). Scholars analysing performance arts in Northern Uganda (*Okot p'Bitek, 1974; Atkinson, 1994*) emphasize that drums (*Bul*) in Lwo-speaking polities were symbols of political authority and territorial sovereignty.

Okot p'Bitek (1974) highlights that dances like *Myel Bul* functioned as open-air customary courts and civic parliaments. Through mocking song lyrics, performers could publicly critique corrupt leaders, rebuke antisocial behavior, praise heroic warriors, and educate youth on customary laws without triggering formal litigation (*Okot p'Bitek, 1974; Nketia, 1974*).

Furthermore, historical studies confirm that iron ankle jingles and specialized instruments produced at local forge sites (*Ot Theth*) represented the fusion of indigenous industrial technology with artistic performance (*Sutton, 1973; Webster, 1979*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, *Myel Bul* represents one of the most sophisticated indigenous educational and archival systems in East Africa. I contend that calling *Myel Bul* a "dance" understates its historical value; it is a living, performative library that has preserved Ethur history for centuries without written text.

I strongly argue that Odunge Stephen's revelation regarding the contents of the *Myel Bul* song ledger recording political leaders like Rwoth Arion, economic catastrophes like the 1980 famine, and specialized clan attributes proves that music served as the primary constitutional memory of the Ethur. Applying Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology of oral tradition, it is my view that the energetic footwork accompanied by iron jingles forged at *Ot Theth* physically imprinted history into the youth. Fulfilling the proverb "*Aweno ba wekko wie*" (*Like father, like son*), *Myel Bul* guaranteed that every generation absorbed their civic duties, political history, and cultural identity through collective artistic participation.

Figure 6. The Myel Bul among Ethur At Karamoja Cultural Events - 7th Edititon 2024 in Abim District



Source: Photograph from the field at Karibu FM grounds by the Researcher, September 2, 2025



Source: Photograph from the field by the Researcher, September, 16, 2025

5.1.5 Indigenous Population Census

Demographic governance among the Ethur was historically rooted in sophisticated, non-literate systems of spatial intelligence and communal resource planning. Long before the introduction of Western statistical cartography, the Ethur devised physical, ritualized methods to assess population density, evaluate military readiness, and regulate household expansion. Across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs, the mechanisms of demographic accounting within the Labwor range underwent profound transformations shifting from indigenous spatial rituals to coercive colonial tax registers, and ultimately to contemporary integrated digital census methodologies.

Primary field archives collected in Nyakwae Sub-county reveal that the Ethur utilized high-altitude topography to conduct direct physical and visual demographic assessments (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council, September, 2025, and Nyakwae Subcounty January, 2026*). The most prominent example of this indigenous demographic accounting was the Aryampolo ritual, periodically executed at Aryampolo Hill in Nyakwae. During critical historical junctures such as preparation for major territorial defense campaigns or post-epidemic recovery the entire population of the surrounding *Othem* clusters was summoned to form a continuous human chain encircling the perimeter of the hill.

An in-depth oral interview conducted in Nyakwae Sub-county on January 19, 2026, documented the sacred rhythmic call-and-response protocol that governed this indigenous census:

"When our people gathered at Aryampolo Hill, the elders stood at the high lookout to monitor the circle. The leaders on the perimeter would shout across the slopes: 'Eryam!!!' (Have we circled? Have we met?), and if the chain was incomplete, the response would echo back from the valley: 'Emum!!!' (Not yet! There is still a gap!). This call was not just a chant; it gave the Council of Elders immediate, visual proof of

our numerical strength. If the circle failed to close if the answer remained 'Emum!' the elders knew instantly that our population density was dangerously low, meaning we lacked enough warriors to defend our borders or enough hands to farm our fields."
(Field Interview, Nyakwae Sub-county, January 19, 2026)

As documented in the oral archive, the Aryampolo ritual provided the Council of Elders (*Eribanya*) with immediate spatial and demographic data. A gap in the human chain functioned as an explicit demographic alarm. Upon receiving this data, the council issued direct societal mandates across the *Othem* settlements, commanding age-set cohorts to prioritize marriage (*Nyom*), accelerating the integration of affine lineages, and enacting policies to boost fertility and consolidate family homesteads (*Field Data, Nyakwae Subcounty January, 2026*).

In African political demography and indigenous knowledge systems literature, the reliance on spatial proxies and physical gathering rituals for population accounting is well-documented (*Noble, 1998; CCFU, 2024; Mamdani, 1996*). Studies by the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (*CCFU, 2024*) and *Noble (1998)* emphasize that pre-colonial African societies engineered highly functional, non-written demographic metrics that directly linked population count to territorial carrying capacity and defense needs.

Comparatively, neighbouring pastoral groups like the Karamojong utilized settlement architecture specifically the circular *manyatta* where the total number of family livestock gates (*Anok / Okul*) served as a reliable proxy for household population size and warrior capability (*Noble, 1998; Gulliver, 1955*). Across the region, these demographic audits were synchronized with generational age-set initiation cycles (*Ametho*) occurring every 8 to 11 years (*Lamphear, 1976; CCFU, 2024*).

During the colonial era, British administrative restructuring completely dismantled these indigenous spatial census tools (*Mamdani, 1996*). Colonial authorities dismissed the

Aryampolo ritual as a "mere pagan dance" and replaced it with the coercive Poll Tax Registry (Mamdani, 1996; UBOS, 2014). As documented by Mamdani (1996) and historical records from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2014), this colonial transition caused severe demographic distortions. To escape predatory tax collectors and forced labor, entire Ethur families routinely evaded registration by taking refuge in the high mountain citadels of Apau, Wii-Awer, and Nyakwae, resulting in decades of persistent statistical undercounting of the Labwor population.

In the contemporary post-colonial era, national statistical frameworks have moved toward reconciling indigenous local structures with modern digital technology (UBOS, 2024; *Minority Rights Group*, 2022). During the 2024 National Population and Housing Census, enumerators deployed GPS-enabled digital tablets to map remote highland households across Abim District (UBOS, 2024). Crucially, to overcome historical skepticism and ensure data integrity among minority indigenous communities, enumerators relied directly on local Village Chairpersons (LC1) and customary clan elders to validate household counts and lineage identities (*Minority Rights Group*, 2022; UBOS, 2024).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the Aryampolo ritual demonstrates that the pre-colonial Ethur possessed an advanced, highly pragmatic understanding of applied spatial demography. I contend that dismissing indigenous gathering practices as mere folk tales overlooks their sophisticated governance function. Aryampolo was an interactive, visual census method perfectly adapted for a non-literate, security-conscious society.

I strongly argue that the transition from indigenous spatial counting to colonial tax registries represents a classic example of administrative alienation. In alignment with Mamdani's (1996) critique of the colonial state, it is my view that when the British converted population accounting from a communal defense exercise (*Aryampolo*) into an instrument of fiscal

extraction (*Poll Tax*), they broke the social contract between the populace and the governing authority. The resulting resistance evading tax collectors by fleeing into the hill citadels was a rational act of anti-colonial self-preservation that severely skewed regional demographic records for nearly a century.

Interpreting modern trends through this historical lens, I maintain that the success of contemporary digital census exercises (*such as the 2024 UBOS census*) depends fundamentally on indigenous institutional legitimacy. As highlighted by the *Minority Rights Group (2022)*, high-tech GPS tablets are functionally useless in indigenous highland zones without the active participation of customary elders and LC1 chairmen. By grounding modern statistical tools in traditional lineage validation, contemporary state institutions implicitly acknowledge the enduring power of the Ethur's ancestral governance framework.

5.1.6 Indigenous Land and Resource Management

Land among the Ethur (*Labwor*) was historically understood not as an alienable, commercial commodity, but as a sacred, inalienable communal asset held under customary tenure. Grounded in the spiritual and social bond between the living, the unborn, and the ancestors (*Jok*), land ownership was vested in the patrilineal clan (*Kaka*). Customary clan heads (*Jagi/Rwodi*) acted as trustees and managers of land allocation, operating under the supreme legislative and judicial guidance of the senior ruling Age-Set (*Eribanya* / historically *Erukojwi*).

The pre-colonial land tenure system among the Ethur was governed by three unyielding constitutional principles; Acquisition of land by birthright was very common among the Ethur and residential rights were derived exclusively through legitimate, birthright membership in a recognized clan (*Kaka*), never through commercial purchase or title deeds, Patrilineal inheritance where land and usage rights were passed directly down the patrilineal line from father to sons, guaranteeing the structural continuity of the ancestral estate, and absolute prohibition of external land alienation, where Ethur customary law strictly prohibited the sale,

transfer, or alienation of clan land to external individuals or non-Ethur entities, ensuring the complete territorial integrity of the *Othem* clusters.

i. Women's Land Rights

Primary field archives gathered across Abim District reveal that within the traditional patrilineal framework, Ethur women held specialized, secondary rights over land rather than direct, formal ownership. An in-depth field interview in Kiru Town Council confirmed that women traditionally could not inherit ancestral land directly from their biological fathers nor purchase land independently (*Field Interview, Kiru Town Council July 24, 2025*). A woman's access to agricultural plots (*Ngom Pur*) was mediated entirely through male figures initially through her father in her natal homestead, subsequently through her husband upon marriage (*Nyom*), and later through her adult sons.

However, field accounts explicitly highlight a crucial, protective customary mechanism regarding widowhood (*Field Data, Kiru Town Council, July, 2025*). Key informant Owili Jeremiah elaborated on this indigenous safety net:

"While a woman does not own clan land in the way modern law defines title ownership, our customary law protects a widow. When her husband dies, many of our clans recognize her absolute right to remain on the family homestead and continue managing and farming the family land to feed and raise her children. She holds a protected status as a temporary trustee and custodian of her deceased husband's estate, ensuring that no outside relative can chase her away or seize the fields while her children are growing up." (*Field Interview, Owili Jeremiah, Kiru Town Council, July 24, 2025*)

As Owili Jeremiah's account demonstrates, customary law engineered the concept of protected custodial trusteeship. While a widow was not an "owner" who could sell or alienate the

property, she possessed an enforceable customary right of occupation and agricultural use, safeguarding her household from eviction and securing the estate for the next generation.

In African customary land jurisprudence and feminist legal anthropology, the distinction between primary ownership and secondary usufructuary access is a well-established theme (*Mamdani, 1996; Adoko & Levine, 2004; Trócaire, 2015; Atkinson, 1994*). Studies on customary land rights in Northern Uganda (*Adoko & Levine, 2004; Trócaire, 2015*) confirm that among Lwo and Ateker agro-pastoralists, land allocation was structured to protect household food security through gendered specialization.

Adoko & Levine (2004) observe that while primary land rights were held collectively by the patrilineage to prevent territorial fragmentation, women held guaranteed, inviolable user rights (*usufruct*) over cultivated gardens. Furthermore, research by *Trócaire (2015)* highlights that widow custodial rights served as an indigenous social security framework. Customary law prevented the disinheritance of widows by elevating them to trustees of their children's future patrimony, a mechanism that maintained household stability without compromising the clan's long-term territorial integrity (*Adoko & Levine, 2004; Atkinson, 1994*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, Ethur customary land law represented a pragmatic balance between lineage territorial defense and household social security. I contend that analysing pre-colonial land rights through modern Western concepts of individual "freehold title" creates a false dichotomy; under customary law, no single individual male or female "owned" land in isolation, as the soil belonged collectively to the ancestral clan (*Kaka*).

I strongly argue that the custodial status granted to widows, as articulated by Ocheng John Alex, demonstrates the humane legal flexibility of Ethur jurisprudence. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist framework, it is my view that designating the widow

as a protected trustee prevented the economic destruction of vulnerable households. By insulating the widow from land-grabbing by secondary male relatives, the elders ensured that the children's inheritance was preserved until they reached maturity within the warrior and administrative age-grades (*Ebongia/Elingathom*).

ii. Conflict Resolution

The research established that the Ethur developed formal diplomatic and judicial mechanisms to manage boundary demarcations and de-escalate inter-community territorial friction (*Field data, Kiru Town Council, November 2025*). Inter-clan and inter-ethnic border disputes were systematically resolved through *Athuko* formal, high-level border assemblies where opposing councils of elders met directly at the contested frontier to negotiate boundary lines using natural geographical landmarks (*hills, streams, rock outcrops, and sacred trees*).

Oral research conducted in November 2025 documented a landmark historical example of *Athuko* border diplomacy that occurred in 1952 along the contested Lango-Ethur frontier. During that period, expansionist Lango cohorts unilaterally planted sisal plants as an artificial boundary marker stretching from Ekue in present-day Ouke District to Orapul within contemporary Abim District, deep inside traditional Ethur territory. Rather than resorting to catastrophic military conflict, the crisis was successfully de-escalated through the diplomatic leadership of Chief Pirimon. Chief Oryono Pirimon mobilized the senior council of elders, convened a formal *Athuko* assembly with Lango leaders, and successfully settled the boundary dispute through peaceful dialogue, mutual compromise, and historical landmark verification.

The mechanism of establishing and de-escalating customary land boundaries through elder diplomacy is a vital subject in Ugandan legal historiography (*Okia, 2000; Adoko & Levine, 2004; Parliament of Uganda, 2024*). Historical studies on pre-colonial and colonial boundary negotiations (*Okia, 2000*) confirm that natural features and planted bio-markers (*such as sisal*

or *Ficus trees*) were routinely utilized across Northern Uganda to demarcate communal frontiers.

However, in the contemporary era, the absence of formal, written documentation for customary land has exposed non-centralized communities like the Ethur to severe external pressures, illegal land encroachments, and predatory land grabbing (*Adoko & Levine, 2004; CCFU, 2024*). To resolve these persistent frontier vulnerabilities, the Parliament of Uganda (2024) passed a formal parliamentary resolution urging the establishment of a comprehensive National Customary Land Registry (*Parliament of Uganda, 2024*). This national policy initiative directly aligns with the historical needs of communities in Abim District, seeking to legally record, map, and protect customary land ownership under Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) frameworks while preserving the administrative authority of customary clan elders (*Parliament of Uganda, 2024; CCFU, 2024*).

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the 1952 boundary resolution led by Chief Pirimon stands as a masterclass in indigenous frontier diplomacy. I contend that Chief Pirimon's choice to convene an *Athuko* assembly rather than launch a retaliatory military strike proved that the Ethur prioritized long-term regional stability and peaceful co-existence with their Lango neighbours.

I strongly argue that the historical effectiveness of *Athuko* assemblies highlights the urgent necessity of the 2024 Parliamentary Resolution for a National Customary Land Registry. In alignment with *Adoko & Levine's (2004)* land tenure analyses, it is my view that in the 21st century, unrecorded customary boundaries are no longer sufficient to protect communities against commercial land speculators and boundary distortions. By digitizing and legally certifying customary clan boundaries while maintaining clan elders as the primary land trustees Uganda can blend the ancestral wisdom of Chief Pirimon's *Athuko* with modern legal

protections, ensuring that the Ethur's ancestral homeland in Abim remains secure for generations to come.

5.1.7 Calamity and Epidemic Management

The survival of the Ethur across centuries of ecological volatility, climate shocks, and epidemiological crises was anchored in an integrated framework of indigenous public health, food security reserves, and ritual mediation. Facing periodic droughts, famines, and contagious disease outbreaks within the Labwor range, the Ethur engineered a dual-pronged system that combined empirical medical and agricultural management with spiritual redress (*Jok*). This holistic approach allowed the community to preserve demographic stability and social order without relying on external state aid across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs.

i. Indigenous public health, quarantine, and herbal therapeutics.

Primary field data collected across Abim District reveal that the Ethur instituted strict, self-enforcing public health protocols during health emergencies (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). When contagious diseases struck such as measles (*Anyoo*), severe respiratory chest epidemics (*Okou*), or acute neurological conditions (*Tuo Araka*) the primary containment strategy was strict physical isolation and household. Infected individuals or entire domestic compounds (*Dyekal*) were immediately segregated from the broader village to break the chain of transmission. Access to quarantined huts was restricted to designated elderly caregivers who had previously survived the disease or possessed specialized immunity.

Simultaneously, traditional medical specialists (*Ajwoogi*, singular *Ajwoga*) deployed an extensive ethnobotanical knowledge base as the community's primary therapeutic defense. The *Ajwoogi* formulated plant-based concoctions, herbal extractions, and respiratory steam therapies to manage symptoms. However, because health was understood as a balance between physical wellness and spiritual harmony, medical treatments were accompanied by communal

ritual appeasement. When epidemics were attributed to ancestral anger (*Kwaro*) or malicious sorcery, senior clan custodians and ritual specialists performed cleansing sacrifices, offered prayers at ancestral shrines (*Abila*), and executed compound purification rites to restore spiritual equilibrium.

In African medical anthropology and regional history, the integration of physical quarantine with spiritual etiology during epidemics is a well-documented phenomenon (*Janzen, 1978; Feierman, 1990; Atkinson, 1994*). Studies on indigenous medical systems in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994*) confirm that non-centralized Nilotic communities utilized spatial isolation as a primary epidemiological tool long before the arrival of Western medicine.

Janzen (1978) observes that traditional healers (*Ajwoogi*) operated as both empirical herbalists and socio-spiritual diagnosticians. By addressing both the biological symptoms through herbal pharmacology and the psychological anxiety of the community through public cleansing rituals, indigenous medical practitioners prevented widespread social panic and maintained public discipline during catastrophic health crises (*Janzen, 1978; Feierman, 1990*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the Ethur epidemic response framework demonstrates an extraordinary synthesis of empirical epidemiology and community psychology. I contend that isolating compounds during outbreaks of *Anyoo* (measles) or *Okou* respiratory epidemics proves that the Ethur possessed a sophisticated understanding of disease contagion and vector control.

I strongly argue that combining physical quarantine with *Ajwoogi* herbal medicine and ancestral cleansing rituals (*Abila*) served a vital governance function. Applying John Janzen's (1978) therapy management group model, it is my view that ritual appeasement neutralized collective fear, enforced quarantine compliance through sacred sanctions, and provided the emotional resilience necessary for households to endure prolonged periods of medical isolation.

ii. Famine (*Kec*), drought management, and granary security systems.

The research documented that the Ethur developed a multi-layered economic safety net to survive devastating climatic shocks, most notably the severe, prolonged drought experienced between 1925 and 1930 (*Kec*). The primary institutional defense against famine was the strict maintenance of individual and communal grain reserves stored in elevated, moisture-proof granaries (*Dero*). Customary law forbade the premature liquidation or commercial sale of stored finger millet (*Kalo*) and sorghum, reserving granary stocks exclusively for emergency consumption during dry seasons. (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*)

Furthermore, the diversified agro-pastoral economy of the Ethur provided a vital buffer against total crop failure (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). During periods of extreme drought when crops failed in the fields, livestock herds (*cattle, goats, sheep*) functioned as convertible liquid capital. Ethur trade cohorts travelled along established diplomatic corridors to exchange livestock for grain with less-affected agrarian communities in the Lango and Acholi plains. Crucially, the patrilineal clan system (*Kaka*) enforced an absolute moral mandate of mutual aid and wealth redistribution: prosperous households and clan elders were customary bound to share food supplies and assist starving kinsmen, ensuring that no family perished in isolation.

The reliance on granary storage (*Dero*), pastoral trade buffers, and customary redistribution during East African famines is extensively analyzed in regional historiography (*Webster, 1979; Knight, 1999; FAO, 2025*). Historical studies on the Labwor range (*Knight, 1999, p. 112*) document that the region's unique micro-climate and high-altitude ecology allowed the Ethur to serve as a regional grain basket, even during wider Karamoja droughts.

Webster (1979) notes that the 1925–1930 drought across Northern Uganda tested the limits of indigenous survival mechanisms. Communities with diversified agro-industrial economies

such as the iron-smelting and grain-cultivating Labwor survived by leveraging trade in iron tools (*Kweri*) and livestock for grain (*Webster, 1979; Knight, 1999*). Recent climate and food security assessments by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2025) confirm that indigenous early-warning systems, diversified livestock-crop production, and communal granary management remain the most effective traditional climate-adaptation strategies across the Karamoja sub-region.

Author's Critical Analytical Perspective & Personal Opinion (Layer 3: Writer's Theoretical Interpretation & Independent Synthesis)

In my considered opinion as a historical researcher, the Ethur response to the 1925–1930 famine (*Kec*) highlights the economic genius of their dual agro-pastoral and industrial economy. I contend that granary management (*Dero*) was not merely a domestic storage habit, but a strategic national security policy overseen by clan elders (*Jagi/Rwodi*).

I strongly argue that the clan obligation of mutual aid acted as an indigenous insurance policy. In alignment with *FAO (2025)* climate resilience frameworks, it is my view that by prohibiting the hoard of grain during crises and enforcing clan-wide food sharing, the Ethur prevented internal socio-economic collapse. This collective economic solidarity guaranteed that the community preserved its demographic core and labor force, enabling rapid recovery once the rains returned.

iii. Rainmaking rituals (*Koth*), sacred topography, and climate forecasting.

When prolonged droughts threatened total agricultural devastation, the Ethur resorted to specialized rainmaking covenants (*Koth*) performed at sacred geographical sanctuaries across the Labwor landscape (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). These rituals were conducted at specific clan shrines (*Abila*), the bases of ancient sacred trees, and prominent rock formations.

Field investigations identified clear clan-specific ritual specializations and sacred locations and among these were; The Kuku Clan whose members performed specialized rain-extraction ceremonies at Kothabok, where ritual leaders obtained sacred water from deep rock hollows (*Oguropien*), The Karwoth Clan (*People of Kidi Rwoth*) held hereditary custodianship as national rainmakers, possessing spiritual authority to invoke rainfall on behalf of all *Othem* settlements, and Lela Mon in Nyakwae being a specialized sacred rock formation in Nyakwae Sub-county where women performed exclusive rain-invoking dances and vocal supplications.

The central sacrificial rite across these ceremonies involved the offering of a flawless black goat or sheep (*Field Data in Kiru Town Council, August, 2025*). The colour black carried deep cosmological symbolism, representing the dark, moisture-heavy rain clouds (*Pol Koth*) that the elders sought to summon from the heavens. The blood of the black sacrifice was poured onto the sacred rock or shrine while elders chanted ancestral invocations, asking *Jok* to release the rains and restore life to the fields.

The practice of rainmaking as both a spiritual covenant and an indigenous climate-forecasting science is documented across Nilotic and Ateker ethnographies (*Crazzolaro, 1951; Gulliver, 1955; Lamphear, 1976; FAO, 2025*). Studies on specialized ritual clans in Karamoja (*Lamphear, 1976*) confirm that groups like the *Karwoth* and *Kajimo* held recognized regional monopolies over rainmaking rites.

Gulliver (1955) observes that rainmakers were expert indigenous meteorologists. Prior to performing public sacrifices, rainmakers closely observed subtle environmental indicators including shifts in wind directions, cloud formations, animal behavior, and the flowering cycles of specific indigenous trees (*Gulliver, 1955; FAO, 2025*). The FAO (2025) report on indigenous early-warning systems in Karamoja highlights that traditional climate forecasting, when combined with sacred animal sacrifices, served to synchronize communal planting schedules

with actual meteorological transitions, preventing farmers from wasting seed grain during false rainy starts.

In my considered opinion as an independent historian, Ethur rainmaking rituals represent a sophisticated fusion of sacred ecology, ethno-meteorology, and social leadership. I contend that clan specialists like the *Karwoth* and *Kuku* were not merely performing symbolic magic they were highly skilled environmental observers who managed the community's agricultural calendar.

I strongly argue that sacrificing a black goat at sanctuaries like *Kothabok* or *Lela Mon* served a vital psychological and operational purpose. As corroborated by *FAO (2025)* studies on indigenous climate knowledge, it is my view that these public ceremonies signalled the exact moment when the entire community was to mobilize for field preparation and planting (*Pur*). By unifying the population behind a single, sacred agricultural signal, the rainmakers guaranteed collective action, ensuring that all households planted simultaneously to maximize crop yields.

5.1.8 Conclusion on Social Organization

The social organization of the Ethur represents a remarkably resilient, highly cultured institutional framework that successfully balanced individual identity with communal survival across centuries of regional transformation. By anchoring their society upon the dual institutional pillars of the patrilineal clan (*Kaka*) and the Age-set system (*Ametho/Othem*), the Ethur created a disciplined social architecture wherein every community member possessed a clearly defined civic role from protective, high-surveillance warriors (*Ebongia*) to executive administrators (*Elingathom*) and wise, governing elders (*Eribanya*).

This organic organization provided the necessary internal discipline to manage scarce natural resources, the judicial authority to resolve complex land and boundary disputes peacefully

(*Athuko*), and the spiritual leadership required to navigate devastating climate shocks, severe famines (*Kec*), and historical epidemics. Through strict rules of clan exogamy, classificatory kinship networks, cooperative labor pooling (*Wang Pur*), and profound life-cycle rites, the Ethur transformed potentially competing lineages into a unified, autonomous nation within the Labwor range.

While late-20th-century economic pressures, modern legal realignments, and global climate change have introduced unprecedented challenges to Abim District, the foundational values of Ethur social organization mutual aid, elder-led arbitration, generational mentorship ("*Aweno ba wekko wie*"), and an unyielding spiritual connection to ancestral land remain the enduring bedrock of Ethur identity and sovereignty.

5.2 Political Organisation of the Ethur

The traditional political architecture of the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) was characterized by a sophisticated dual model of governance combining a decentralized, clan-based peacetime administration with a centralized, highly coordinated military and spiritual command structure during periods of external threat. Unlike centralized monarchical states ruled by absolute hereditary kings, the Ethur established a resilient confederation of autonomous territorial settlements (*Othem*). This political order operated through a rotating cycle of generational age-set leadership (*Ametho*), specialized ritual custodianship, and dynamic war leadership (*Jagi Lweny*), ensuring that authority remained accountable, adaptive, and deeply rooted in ancestral law across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs.

5.2.1 Leadership Structure, territorial settlements (*Othem*), and crisis governance.

Primary field investigations conducted across Abim District reveal that the Ethur political structure functioned as a flexible, multi-tiered governance matrix (*Field Data, 2025*). During peacetime, individual clans (*Kaka*) and lineage heads managed localized domestic affairs, land

allocation, and family disputes independently. However, during times of existential crisis such as regional warfare (*Lweny*), territorial invasions, or catastrophic droughts the community shifted toward a unified military command led by recognized war captains (*Jagi Lweny*).

In an in-depth field interview in Abim Town Council, key informant Ayen Jackson detailed the emergence of these strategic military figures and the role of the central spiritual seat:

"The political organization of the Ethur relied on a rotating cycle of generational leadership and specialized roles. We were led by powerful war leaders who emerged during times of crisis. Notable among these was Logo, a profound military figure whose descendant Opio Okor from Atunga continued this tradition of command. Despite the strength of wartime leaders, the Ethur maintained a decentralized peacetime structure where each clan managed its own affairs. Central unity was maintained through the spiritual and political center in Atunga, where elders from different clustered settlements gathered for traditional prayers and rituals." (Field Interview, Ayen Jackson, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025)

As documented in the field archive, while localized autonomy defined daily life, central political and spiritual cohesion was anchored at Atunga (*Eparagot*), which served as the supreme ceremonial seat of the Ethur nation. Furthermore, the research established that the spatial and administrative organization of the Ethur originally revolved around five major territorial settlements (*Othem*), which later expanded to seven distinct regional hubs: Othem Kiru present-day Kiru Town Council, Eparagot or Atunga still holds the spiritual and political capital, Kanyipa (*Kanu*), Oporoth currently in Awach Sub-county, Kakoka in Alerek Sub-county, Emonyanga Morulem Sub-county, and Emenkeko (*Koya*) in Magamaga Subcounty.

These seven clustered settlements functioned as the primary administrative sites for Athuko extraordinary, seasonal constitutional assemblies convened by senior elders (*Eribanya*) during

extreme national emergencies, such as epidemic outbreaks, severe droughts (*Kec*), or impending military invasions by Karamojong, Jie, or external forces (*Field Interview, Ayen Jackson, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025*).

In African political historiography and Nilotic legal scholarship, the dual political structure of decentralized segmentary lineages paired with centralized war leadership is a well-documented phenomenon (*Southall, 1956; Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Atkinson, 1994; Lamphear, 1976*). Scholars analysing non-monarchical polities in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994; Webster, 1979*) observe that groups inhabiting frontier or highland zones developed "situational centralism."

Southall (1956) and *Evans-Pritchard (1940)* highlight that in times of peace, authority remained dispersed among lineage elders to prevent tyranny and preserve local autonomy. However, when external aggression threatened the polity, specialized military commanders such as *Logo*, *Aryon* or *Opio Okor* in Labwor were vested with executive martial authority to command unified age-set war cohorts (*Ebongia*) (*Southall, 1956; Lamphear, 1976*).

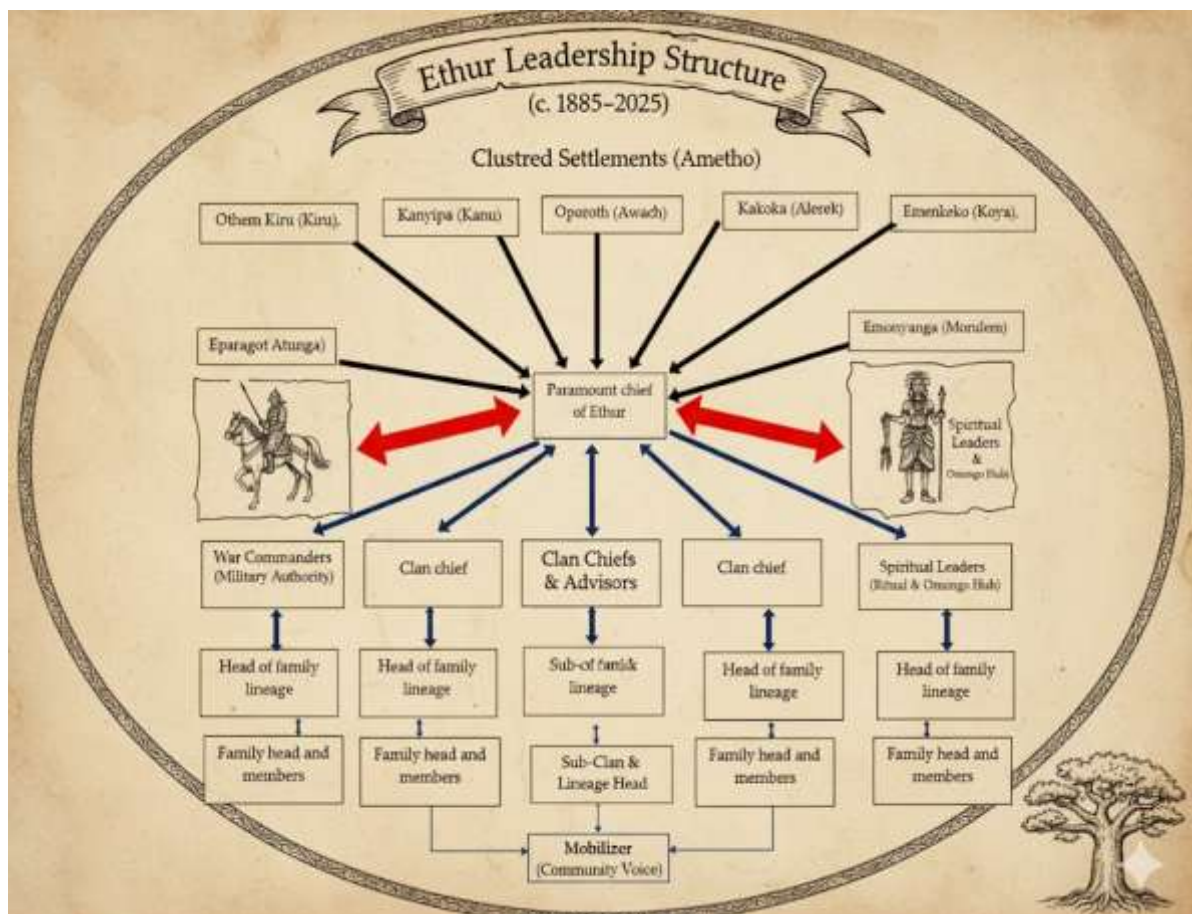
Furthermore, historical research on the Labwor Hills (*Webster, 1979; Knight, 1999*) confirms that central ritual sanctuaries like *Atunga* operated as sacred constitutional capitals. By gathering at *Atunga* for *Athuko* assemblies, independent clan heads synthesized regional intelligence, coordinated iron tool production for defense, and aligned spiritual sacrifices, guaranteeing that the seven *Othem* clusters operated as a single, indivisible sovereign confederation (*Webster, 1979; Knight, 1999*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the political organization of the Ethur represents an exceptionally sophisticated model of adaptive federalism and institutional democracy. I contend that colonial-era classifications that labelled the Ethur as

"stateless" or "headless" completely failed to grasp the dynamic flexibility of their governance framework.

I strongly argue that the political synthesis between decentralized clan autonomy and the emergency centralism exercised at Atunga was a deliberate, highly rational political design. Applying A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functionalist framework and Ali Mazrui's (1986) theories of indigenous statecraft, it is my view that the Ethur successfully avoided both the tyranny of autocratic kingship and the chaos of total disunity. By elevating war leaders like *Logo* only during crises and subordinating them to the council of elders (*Eribanya*) and the spiritual sanctuary at Atunga during peacetime, the Ethur preserved individual liberty, maintained local clan democracy, and guaranteed rapid, decisive military mobilization whenever their homeland was threatened.

Figure 7: A Chart Showing the Thur Political Leadership Structure



Source: *Generated-image of the Ethur political leadership structure, September, 16, 2025.*

Table 1: The Thur leadership hierarchy

Level	Position	Function
Apex	Paramount Chief (elected by Othem Abiro)	Ultimate political authority, symbol of unity
Clan	Clan Chiefs	Manage specific clan territories
Advisory	Council of Chief Advisors	Wisdom on law, history, communal relations
Ritual	Ritual Leaders (rainmakers, foretellers)	Spiritual well-being, crisis management
Military	War Commander (e.g., Omongo wopiman)	Strategic military leadership
Local	Sub-clan/Lineage Heads	Land distribution, internal disputes
Household	Family Head	Discipline, education, welfare

Figure 8: Invitation Letter for the Rwoth Okello Ngolryeko Mathias Aryon IV of Thur land



Source: Thur digital archives by the researcher, July, 21, 2025.

Figure 9: Rwoth Okello Ngolryeko Mathias Aryon IV of Thur land - The Current Leader of the Thur (Installed on 15th March 2025)



Source: Thur digital archives by the researcher, July, 21, 2025.

5.2.2 Traditional leadership and succession.

The transfer of authority and the maintenance of institutional continuity among the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) were governed by an intricate, multi-layered constitutional system. Rather than relying on a single, centralized monarchy or vulnerable hereditary primogeniture, the Ethur designed three distinct yet harmoniously overlapping paths of succession such as generational political succession, paramount and clan chieftaincy, and hereditary spiritual custodianship. This institutional checks-and-balances framework guaranteed that even if an individual leader fell in battle or passed away during an epidemic, the structural integrity and sovereign governance of the community remained intact and unbroken across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs.

Primary oral archives gathered across Abim District demonstrate that traditional leadership succession among the Ethur operated as a stable, highly institutionalized framework designed to eliminate dynastic conflict and guarantee peaceful power transfers (*Field Interview, Ayen Jackson, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025*). During an in-depth field interview in Abim Town Council, key informant Ayen Jackson detailed the core constitutional mechanics of generational succession and the apex council of the Ethur nation:

"Traditional leadership among the Ethur was a stable and highly organized system that ensures a peaceful transfer of power from one generation to the next. This succession is primarily managed through the Age-Set System (Othem), which acts as a constitutional ladder for authority. Leadership is not inherited by a single individual's son, but rather held collectively by an entire age group. Power only passes to the next set for example, from senior elders like Erukojwi to their followers Ebongia once all the members of the currently leading age-set have passed away. This ensures that the leaders are always the most experienced members of society and prevents the sudden power struggles often seen in other political systems."

At the top of this social pyramid is the Edong, where each of the seven Othem settlements presents one representative elder to constitute the council known as Othem Abiro. This supreme body is charged with the vital role of choosing the Paramount Chief of the Ethur, who represents the soul and unity of the entire Ethur tribe. The clan chiefs offer him support, governing their specific family groups with assistance from lineage heads who manage smaller family branches. Succession for these roles is a mix of age-set seniority and lineage oversight by a council of Chief Advisors chosen for their deep knowledge of Ethur law and history.

The spiritual side of leadership also has a clear succession path, particularly for Ritual Leaders and rainmakers who are essential for survival during droughts or epidemics. Succession in these positions involves a combination of apprenticeship and spiritual calling, where a younger relative or chosen member of a specific clan such as Jo'Kochero or Kuku is trained in the secret rituals and history of the people. By having these distinct but overlapping paths for political, military, and spiritual leadership, the Ethur ensure that if one leader is lost, the structure of the community remains strong and unbroken." (Field Interview, Ayen Jackson, Abim Town Council, July 20, 2025)

As documented in the primary archive, the apex governing authority of the Ethur polity is the Edong (the Supreme Federal Assembly), formed by the Othem Abiro the seven delegate elders representing the seven clustered settlements of; *Othem Kiru, Eparagot/Atunga, Kanyipa/Kanu, Oporoth/Awach, Kakoka/Alerek, Emonyanga/Morulem, and Emenkeko/Koya*. The *Othem Abiro* holds the constitutional mandate to select, validate, and advise the Paramount Chief of the Ethur (*Rwoth Madit*), who acts as the living embodiment of tribal unity.

Simultaneously, specialized spiritual and ritual functions such as rainmaking, pest control, and furnace consecration followed strict hereditary lineages within specific clans, such as Jo'Kochero, Kuku, Kapuru, and Kajimo. Succession to these sacred offices required rigorous,

long-term apprenticeship, spiritual selection, and elder initiation, ensuring that ritual expertise and historical secrets were seamlessly preserved across generations.

In African political anthropology and Nilotic constitutional historiography, the integration of corporate age-grades with specialized council representation is recognized as an advanced form of indigenous federalism (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Southall, 1956; Atkinson, 1994; Lamphear, 1976*). Scholars analysing non-monarchical and semi-centralized polities in Northern Uganda (*Atkinson, 1994; Webster, 1979*) observe that confederations operating in volatile frontier environments required robust mechanisms to prevent both autocratic dictatorship and regional fragmentation.

Southall (1956) and *Eisenstadt (1956)* emphasize that utilizing age-set cohorts as a "constitutional ladder" distributes political authority across an entire generation rather than concentrating it within a single royal family. Furthermore, historical studies on the Labwor Hills (*Webster, 1979; Knight, 1999*) confirm that council structures like the Othem Abiro operated as federal electoral colleges. By requiring each of the seven territorial settlements to send an accredited elder delegate to the *Edong* to elect and advise the Paramount Chief, the Ethur created a representative system that balanced local territorial autonomy with central national unity (*Webster, 1979; Southall, 1956*).

The apprenticeship model governing spiritual succession in clans like *Kuku* and *Jo'Kochero* is also well-documented in regional ethno-history (*Lamphear, 1976; Crazzolara, 1951*). Specialized technical and ritual knowledge such as high-heat metallurgy (*Okoro*) and rainmaking (*Koth*) constituted sacred intellectual property. Restricting succession to trained apprentices overseen by senior clan advisors (*Rwodi/Jagi*) protected these strategic industries from external compromise and ensured that ritual leaders possessed the requisite moral and technical competence before assuming office (*Lamphear, 1976; Knight, 1999*).

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the leadership and succession framework of the Ethur represents a masterclass in indigenous constitutional engineering and separation of powers. I contend that early colonial observers who characterized Ethur political governance as informal or anarchic suffered from an ethnocentric bias that only recognized European-style hereditary monarchies or centralized bureaucratic autocracies.

I strongly argue that the establishment of the Edong and the Othem Abiro delegate council proves that the Ethur instituted a bicameral governance model long before imperial contact. Applying S.N. Eisenstadt's (1956) theory of institutional differentiation, it is my view that separating political leadership (*Othem/Age-Sets*), federal executive representation (*Othem Abiro/Paramount Chief*), and spiritual/industrial specialization (*Jo'Kochero/Kuku apprenticeship*) created a resilient tripartite system of checks and balances.

By ensuring that no single individual or clan could monopolize political, military, and spiritual power simultaneously, the Ethur built a political system immune to total systemic collapse. If a war captain (*Jago Lweny*) died in battle, the active warrior grade (*Ebongia*) immediately produced another commander, if a spiritual leader passed away, a fully trained apprentice from *Jo'Kochero* or *Kuku* stepped forward, and if a Paramount chief died, the *Othem Abiro* convened the *Edong* to select a successor based on wisdom, experience, and elder consensus. This dynamic adaptability preserved Ethur sovereignty, territorial integrity, and cultural identity across centuries of regional upheaval.

5.2.3 Law, Order, and Conflict Resolution

Law and order within the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) society were maintained through an indigenous judicial system centered on restorative justice, social reconciliation, and institutional discipline. Rather than focusing on punitive incarceration or retributive violence, Ethur customary law sought to achieve a cool resolution a state of restored social harmony (*Kuc*) where inter-clan

friction was defused through open public deliberation, ancestral invocations, and the authoritative mediation of senior elders (*Eribanya*) and chief advisors.

5.2.3 a. The Ametho Disciplinary Council

Primary field investigations across Abim District document that the Ametho Disciplinary Council functioned as the primary executive and disciplinary tribunal of the Ethur nation (*Field Data, FGD, Kiru Town council, 24 2025*). Headed by senior elders drawn from active and retired age-sets, the *Ametho* council convened its formal disciplinary assemblies at the historical judicial arena of Tyen Bithu in Kiru Town council.

The council operated on a strict principle of age-set hierarchy, where respect for senior cohorts and their spouses was enforceable under customary law. A primary field case documented during a focus group discussion, illustrates the absolute authority of elder testimony and age-grade discipline.

During a dispute brought before the council at Tyen Bithu, a woman referred to under the research pseudonym *Akelle* who was married into the senior *Erukojwi* age-set reported that a young man (pseudonym *Atedo*) from the junior *Ebongia* warrior grade had verbally abused and disrespected her. In Ethur jurisprudence, insulting the wife of a senior age-set member was adjudicated as a direct act of insubordination against the entire ruling age-cohort.

Upon receiving the complaint, the *Ametho* elders immediately summoned the young man to Tyen Bithu and imposed customary disciplinary sanctions without allowing him to present a defense. Customary protocol dictated that any report or testimony submitted by a member of an elder generation set was held as inherently truthful, requiring immediate, unyielding executive enforcement to preserve societal order and generational respect (*Field FGD, Kiru, November 24, 2025*).

As demonstrated by this case, the *Ametho* council at Tyen Bithu acted with decisive executive power. The procedural assumption that elder reports required immediate enforcement served to uphold the absolute moral and legal authority of the gerontocracy, ensuring that junior cohorts (*Ebongia*) maintained strict discipline and deference toward the governing generation (*Erukojwi / Eribanya*).

In African legal anthropology and Nilotic age-set scholarship, the operation of age-grade disciplinary councils is recognized as a vital mechanism for maintaining internal order in non-monarchical societies (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Gulliver, 1955; Southall, 1956; Spencer, 1965*). Studies on age-set governance in East Africa (*Spencer, 1965; Lamphear, 1976*) confirm that senior generation sets exercised absolute disciplinary jurisdiction over junior grades to prevent insubordination, internal brawling, and unauthorized military ventures.

Eisenstadt (1956) observes that in gerontocratic societies, procedural norms deliberately favoured the testimony of senior age-grades over junior members. This asymmetry was not viewed as injustice, but as a necessary constitutional safeguard to protect the structural integrity of the age-hierarchy (*Eisenstadt, 1956; Gulliver, 1955*). Furthermore, historical studies on Northern Ugandan customary courts (*Atkinson, 1994; Adoko & Levine, 2004*) emphasize that open-air judicial arenas such as *Tyen Bithu* in Labwor served as recognized constitutional forums where customary precedents were publicly demonstrated and reinforced across generations.

In my considered opinion as an independent historical researcher, the *Ametho* Disciplinary Council at Tyen Bithu represents an indispensable instrument of indigenous civic discipline and social control. I contend that analysing the summary judgment against *Atedo* through a narrow modern Western legal lens which demands adversarial cross-examination misses the underlying sociological function of the Ethur age-set hearing.

I strongly argue that the absolute legal weight granted to elder reports was the keystone that prevented the breakdown of societal order in a frontier environment. Applying S.N. Eisenstadt's (1956) theory of generational authority, it is my view that if junior warriors (*Ebongia*) were permitted to publicly litigate or challenge the word of senior elders (*Erukojwi*) or their spouses, the entire gerontocratic hierarchy would crumble into factional chaos. By enforcing immediate, unquestioned penalties for inter-generational disrespect, the *Ametho* council preserved the absolute moral authority of the governing elders, ensuring that when those same elders issued critical directives during wars, droughts, or epidemics, the community obeyed without hesitation.

Figure 10: Tyen Bithu in Kiru for Ametho disciplinary assemblies



Source: Photograph from Field observation by the Researcher

5.2.3 b. Traditional Justice Mechanisms

The study identified multiple mechanisms including:

1. Songs (Wer)

Celebratory songs reinforced social rewards of bravery, generosity, and hard work, framing victory as communal blessing rather than personal triumph. The song “Aryon Calo Owiyo” praised Chief Aryon as a weaver bird with strong beaks for collecting food and protecting children. Mocking songs subjected offenders to public ridicule, using psychological pressure to provoke repentance and social reintegration.

Song title: Aryon Calo Owiyo

LebThur version

English language version

1. Aryon calo owiyo

Aryon wa

Aryon calo owiyo, Aryon wa

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee

Aryon wa

2. Aryon winyo Kulo

Aryon wa

Aryon winyo kulo, Aryon wa

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee

Aryon wa

3. Aryon winyo Kulo

Aryon wa

Aryon jwo-ok Kulo, Aryon wa

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee

Aryon wa

1. Aryon like weaver bird

Our Aryon

Aryon like weaver bird, Our Aryon

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee our

Aryon

2. Aryon waterbird (Mandarin Duck)

Our Aryon

Aryon waterbird (Mandarin Duck),

Our Aryon

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee our

Aryon

3. Aryon like weaver bird

Our Aryon

Spirit of the stream

Heeheeheee Aryon, Heeheeheee our

Aryon

Source: *Oral traditions by the elderly participants*

Mr. Owilli John added that these songs of praise serve as a living educational archive for the younger generation, acting as a rhythmic guide for moral development. During initiation ceremonies, the virtues of legendary ancestors are sung to provide a template for the initiates to follow which effectively pre-treat the youth against future moral failures. By commemorating honourable behavior in song, the Ethur created a powerful incentive for individuals to seek social coolness and prestige through service to the clan. This ensures that the moral health of the community is maintained not just by punishing the bad but by continuously magnifying and standardizing the good, creating a cultural environment where the pursuit of virtue becomes the most celebrated path to social success (Field Interview, 24, November, 2025 in Kiru Town Council).

Song of disgrace

Among the Thur, oral traditions indicate that when an individual violates a taboo (kiir) or exhibits behaviour like greed or cowardice, theft, the traditional Thur community responded with mocking verses that subject the offender to public ridicule, a psychological sting designed to provoke repentance and social reintegration. Conversely, during rituals of Ryemo Jwok initiation, specialized songs led by the Ajwoogi served as a beneficial force to cool the spirit, using melody and repetition to drive out wicked influences and reinforce the collective identity of the Age Set. This musical framework ensures that morality is not just a set of abstract rules but a living, audible tradition that corrects behavior and restores the spiritual health of the community without the need for physical coercion.

In similar findings, elderly participants reported that songs were composed according to the events, and some of these songs were to enforce morality and discipline. For example, the killing of wild animals such as lions and leopards, victory in tribal war, and hunting. The song

called *Aryon calo Owio*, as written above (Chief Aryon is like a weaver bird with strong beaks to collect food for feeding and protecting its children). This song was sung by the Kochero clan to praise the gentle leadership of Aryon, the chief of the Abwor or Thur land. The Kalanga clan also had its song to praise and encourage the clanmates to love and promote the Kalanga doctrines.

2. Proverbs (Caro lok)

Proverbs were used to teach morals to children. For instance.

***(i) A dit ka obedo piny neno gin na'athin ba neno ka oyidho I wii yath* (what an elder can see while seated, a child cannot see it, even when he climbs the tallest tree)**

This proverb means young children should respect and listen to elders who are full of wisdom if the young are to succeed.

***(ii) Mon nyuol ki Awothe* (women midwife each other during the delivery of a baby)**

It means women have to share what they have among themselves. Things like salt, food, and even helping with garden work. This is because women midwives support each other when giving birth, regardless of who the woman is.

***(iii) Adwar neno ogul pii ki wange* (the hunter sees the source of the well with his eyes).**

This means that a person pursuing or chasing after a goal chases it to the dot and does not give up. It gives courage to the young people to do whatever good they want maximally without interferences from anybody.

***(iv) Agwata na tek mac en aye weko bedo yom* (A hardened calabash is softened by fire)**

This means that a person who is stubborn, difficult, or resisting correction is like that old, brittle calabash. They require tough treatment, discipline or pressure before they will change their

ways and become receptive to reason or correction. Ethur elders gives the message to the youth that humility and listening are easier than being corrected by hardship.

(v) *Abul tong gweno ngeyo kany na pene tye iye* (he/she who is experienced in roasting eggs knows where the embryo is)

This proverb means that a specialist in any occupation knows best, implying that elders are wiser than young people in many matters in which they have much experience. Young Ethur should defer to expertise and listen to those who have long experience in a specific task, as they understand the non-obvious details.

(vi) *Yoo aryo oroco Alur* (Two roads defeated the hyena)

A hyena was hurriedly following the smell of meat, reached a junction, and could not decide which one was correct as the smell was coming from both directions. This means that a person pursuing or chasing after a goal, chase for it to the dot and does not give up. It means it is not possible to do two things at the same time. Ethur elders wants young people to choose a single path and focus their energy fully on that path to avoid failing at everything.

(vii) *Olam namit ba cek ki ryo* (A sweet fig tree cannot produce fruits twice)

This means that opportunities are fleeting moments that do not last or knocks only once. It is intended to teach young Thur people to be alert, prepared, and quick to act when a chance for a better life or advancement presents itself, because hesitation means losing the opportunity.

(viii) *Oyo napol ba golo ot.* (Many rats cannot dig a hole to make their house)

This is another version of "everyone's business is no man's business." It means that, for maximum productivity of a number of people, you have to give each one a specific task and hold each one accountable individually. It urges all the young people at all times they lead a

project or take a task; they must delegate clearly because shared responsibility without clear roles always leads to failure.

(ix) *Dyel na' odhing tur ibad dero* (A disobedient goat breaks its legs on the arm of a granary)

Children like playing in dangerous places even if they are stopped, some will still continue and as a result get hurt. This means that a disobedient person gets hurt easily. The proverb is used to caution children against disobedience and stubbornness, warning that ignoring rules and seeking danger guarantees a negative consequence.

(x) *Kalwok ba obedo ka katwo* (The bathing place is not where to dry from)

This means that one should not live by habit but must change their ways with the times. This proverb encourages adaptability. Elders warn the young not cling stubbornly to old methods if new circumstances or technologies offer a better solution.

(xi) *Kibwor na kok ba mako lee*. (A lion which roars does not catch an animal)

This means that one needs to be cautious and less noisy in order to succeed. The elders say success comes from quiet, diligent work and stealth, not from boastfulness. Focus on achieving your goal without announcing your every move to the world.

(xii) *Acac ramo /mwodo boo ki thoyi* (One who despises or belittles eats greens with dew)

It means that one who does not appreciate what he/she has always ends up with a worse one. As a result of despising, one comes back eating the poorest food, all the good ones having been finished. The proverb teaches the value of appreciation and contentment. Never disrespect what you have now, as your future options might be much worse.

(xiii) *Min gweno ba tongo bolo ne'ethine* (The mother hen does not pick food and throw to the chicks at late hours)

This means that when it becomes dark, everyone for him/herself. The proverb is a sharp reminder that while family bonds are strong, in times of extreme crisis or danger, you must be prepared to rely solely on your own skills and strength to survive.

(xiv) *Odoodo nabor ba neko twol* (A long stick does not kill a snake)

Ethur elders say that one can does not solve a problem from a distance. This is emphasizing good consideration as a neighbour, rather than a relative, may be the first to come to one's aid or rescue. The proverb encourages strong, supportive relationships with your immediate neighbours, as they are the most critical source of rescue in an emergency.

(xv) *Opuk ne'ecuo / natek eneno ki i mac* (A strong/male tortoise will be seen in the fire)

When a tortoise is threatened it withdraws into its shell until the danger is over. When thrown into a fire, a greater danger, it will open up in order to get out of the situation. It means that a strong person will be tested when faced with danger. Ones' true character and resilience are only revealed under the highest pressure. When facing great adversity, young Ethur are encouraged by the elders to stand up and show their strength.

(xvi) *Rucurucu otero ayom ki yibe* (Rushing or hurrying sent the monkey with its tail)

The proverb means it is good to prepare early and be ready for a specific task. According to the Thur tradition, both man and monkey were going for an important visit. Man, who was ready took off his tail, while monkey was so much in a hurry, it left forgetting to remove its tail. The proverb stresses the need for patience and thorough preparation. Do not let hurry cause you to make permanent and foolish mistakes.

(xvii) *Tingo odul na opong ki Anginingini* (Carrying a log full of black ants)

This depicts that getting involved in a situation unstudied beforehand normally results in a bad choice or unexpected problems. It teaches young Ethur to be strong caution for due diligence, never commit to a new project, relationship, or business deal without carefully investigating it first to avoid unnecessary pain.

(xiii) *Yiro ba dung nono* (Smoke does not come for no reason)

Meaning is that there is no smoke without fire. Ethur elders encourages young people to portray critical observation. Every outward sign, rumour, or consequence has a real, underlying cause that must be investigated and addressed.

(xvi) *Yom cwiny oneko Katinya* (Generosity killed Katinya)

Ethur oral tradition has it that once up on a time there was a woman called Katinya, whom with her village mates used to go for firewood and comes back late. One day, their husbands decided to follow them while jokingly saying they were going to beat them for delaying. The husband of Katinya took it so personal and on reaching where women were tying their firewood, she happily approached her husband but the husband hit her dead with the stick. Because he was annoyed. This became a proverb used by elders warning the young Ethur not be too generous like Katinya who died because of generosity. It became a caution for prudent generosity. Be kind and charitable, but always temper your kindness with wisdom and ensure you do not allow yourself to be exploited to the point of ruin.

3. Curses (Acena)

The study documented that elders cursed clan members who committed abominations including incest, adultery, killing, stealing, or burning gardens before harvest. Several case studies were documented and narrated by the elders:

Case 1 (Hunter Olum, pseudonym): A hunter who accidentally burned a neighbor's sweet potato heaps and refused to confess was cursed through diviner-led rituals. Two days later, he was bitten by a large black snake and confessed on his deathbed.

Case 2 (Thief Okwalimoe, pseudonym): A civil servant who stole an ox-plough and later a borehole spanner was cursed by elders at Akiriketh. He was bitten by a snake, confessed, and directed people to the hidden spanner before dying.

Case 3 (Father and son Komate): A father cursed his firstborn son to death after the son physically abused him while intoxicated. The father lifted his male organ, pointed it at his son, and declared: "If am not the one who with my energy produced you, the sun will not set when you are still a life." Shortly thereafter, Komate developed a headache, convulsed, and died despite all rescue attempts.

Case 4 (False accusation): Atedo (pseudonym) was falsely accused by a girl and subjected to caning and forced to slaughter his only bull. He performed a ritual oath (spearing a black male goat from the right-hand side, lifting the spear while speaking to gods and ancestors, licking the animal blood). The accusing family subsequently experienced six deaths over ten years. Reconciliation was finally achieved when Atedo reversed the curse by sacrificing a white male goat.

4. Rituals (Kwer)

Ethur religious system, particularly the Ametho tradition as a disciplinary council of the Ethur, also integrates ritual actions directly into the maintenance of law, order, and the essential processes of conflict resolution. These rituals were critical for restoring social harmony and ensuring the communal acceptance of judicial outcomes which often utilized the power of the ancestors and oaths to bind the community to the law. The Ethur maintained a decentralized legal system where truth and legitimacy were upheld through ritual oaths performed at sacred

sites like the *Abila* or sacred trees. These oaths resolved disputes over theft, adultery, murder, witchcraft, or land, with fear of ancestral punishment illness, death, or misfortune ensuring honesty and compliance.

Serious offenses, such as homicide, required Kidyer rites of reconciliation and compensation. These rituals cleansed spiritual pollution, appeased victims' families and ancestors, and restored balance. For example, accidental killings demanded prolonged Kidyer sacrifices, often involving a goat's blood for purification and a shared meal to end hostilities and prevent cycles of violence. Atkinson (1994) corroborated this with the Acholi tradition of Mato Put (reconciliation) after bloodshed.

The Ametho, regarded as the "religion of the elders," provided the spiritual mandate for discipline and order across Ethur settlements. Elders wielded authority through judicial decrees backed by spiritual sanctions. Punishments carried ritual elements to restore harmony, while exclusion from vital communal rituals like fertility or rain ceremonies reinforced obedience. Thus, ritual authority was the most powerful tool for maintaining law, order, and social cohesion. The ISS Africa (2026) documented that the Lokirama Peace Accord (1973) between Matheniko and Turkana demonstrated the effectiveness of elder-led traditional justice in the Karamoja Cluster, where communities were empowered as owners of peace processes and elders as guarantors of peace directly paralleling Thur practices.

The Othem leader, Adwong³ (an elder) holds a position of pivotal importance within the Ethur political and legal structure and served as the commander of the Ametho which was the central socio-religious institution. This role transcends mere political leadership where the Adwong acted as the supreme moral and ritual authority whose influence is critical in maintaining law,

³ An elder. Singular (Edong is the plural of elders)

order, and social equilibrium across the Othem and its constituent clans. The authority of the Adwong is derived not only from the Age Set system, which ensures that leadership is vested in the most senior and experienced members, but also from their command over the sacred Ametho tradition. This dual source of power allows him to issue decrees that carry both political weight and spiritual sanction (Field Interview, 20, July, 2025 in Abim Town Council).

In clan law and conflict resolution, the Adwong serves as chief arbiter and supreme judicial authority, overseeing proceedings, hearing evidence, and delivering judgments in serious disputes. His rulings are final, seen as aligned with ancestral will and the principles of the Ametho, ensuring justice is both traditional and spiritually sanctioned. This role prevents feuds and guarantees binding resolutions.

The Edong reinforce the spiritual dimension of law by presiding over ritual oaths in complex cases, transforming truth into sacred covenants with severe consequences if broken. They also lead reconciliation and purification rites after major crimes, cleansing the community of spiritual pollution and restoring harmony. Through these judicial and ritual functions, the Adwong ensures justice not only punishes but also heals the social and spiritual fabric of the clan.

5.2.3 Spiritual Aspects

The research established that the religious landscape of the Ethur was anchored by *Jwok*, a pervasive and invisible spirit force that animated the natural world, manifesting through lightning, rain, and whirlwinds (Adhuru). This divine essence was not confined to a single deity but was found within the landscape hills, rivers, and ancient trees where spirits were even said to keep invisible cattle whose bell sounds could be heard.

The study documented that *Ajwoogi* (specialists including healers, prophets, and soothsayers) served as vital intermediaries, called to their profession through divine visitations in dreams or sudden illnesses. The spiritual structure was defined by specialized division of labor: healing diviners focused on physical and spiritual health using herbal remedies and performing Ryemo Jwok (dispossession of wicked spirits); Won Adwar specialized in prophecy; oracles provided diagnostic clarity using shells, seeds, or stones.

The study found that ancestral spirits lived among the living and actively shaped fortunes. Ancestors communicated through dreams but were also capable of punishing neglect or disobedience with madness and misfortune. The concept of *Kiir* (grave taboos) including incest or killing a kinsman protected social and spiritual order. Because the Ethur traditionally believed that rewards and punishments occurred on earth rather than in an afterlife, justice had to be immediate. Repugnant acts required intense cleansing rituals (*Akiriketh*) where elders invoked ancestral names and offered sacrifices to restore balance.

The study revealed that Ethur spirituality had evolved into a dual identity. The concept of a supreme deity (*Jwok na Maalo*, God in the sky; name *Obanga*) was largely integrated through interactions with Acholi neighbours and Christian missionaries. While many Ethur had adopted Western names and Christian practices, the reliance on traditional rituals remained resilient during times of extreme hardship. The study noted that recent developments included the installation of Rwoth Mathias Okello Ngolryeko Aryon IV as cultural leader in March 2025. However, this installation faced opposition from some elders citing procedural violations under the Cultural Leaders Act of 2011. The throne had been vacant for 78 years (1937-2015) before Paul Ocheri Aryon III's brief reign, as documented by Makerere University (2025).

5.2.4 Military Organization

The study determined that the military organization of the Thur was structured as a decentralized, community-wide defense force reliant on principles of collective responsibility and situational mobilization rather than a permanent standing army. Key features included:

i. Seasonal mobilization: All able-bodied men and youths from various clustered settlements and Othem were considered potential soldiers. When an attack was imminent, or a raid planned, mobilization occurred at will, triggered by a rapid communal alarm.

ii. Ritual preparation: Warriors were smeared with a local herbal medicine (Olwetho na thic ki Yath), intended to psychologically and magically sap the strength of the enemy, causing them to tire quickly.

iii. Selective force composition: The military leader (for instance., Omongo Wopiman from the Kochero clan) personally chose fighters. Specific groups Kochero, Kuku, and Kapuru were renowned for military ability and often sought after to provide leaders and core fighting personnel. Mr. Owili Emojong revealed that potential fighters would not qualify to proceed to the war front if war rituals rejected them on claims that they might have had sex before or during the night of the raid.

iv. Hunter leadership: Hunters commanded battlefields due to their comprehensive understanding of terrain and jungle skills, making them highly effective in navigating battlefronts and executing flanking manoeuvres.

v. Intelligence gathering: Spies were posted on strategic hills (Atunga and Wiawer) to monitor enemy movements, particularly those coming from the Acholi direction. This intelligence was

critical for timely mobilization and successful defense, as demonstrated by the famous victory led by Thur war leader Logo against Acholi warriors.

5.3 Economic Organization

5.3.1 Primary Economic Activities

The empirical findings of this study reveal that the pre-colonial and early historical economy of the Ethur (Labwor) was neither primitive nor socio-economically isolated. Rather, it operated as an advanced, highly integrated tripartite economic system that systematically combined subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and specialized furnace iron metallurgy into a resilient, self-sustaining framework for communal survival and regional geopolitical leverage. Far from existing in state-level dependency, the Ethur deployed this multi-sectoral matrix to master the eco-zones of the Labwor Hills, establish internal food security, and command inter-ethnic trade across Northern Uganda.

i. Agriculture

The study found that, agriculture constituted the primary foundational pillar of daily Ethur subsistence, adapted specifically to the micro-climates, fertile valleys, and rainfall patterns of the Labwor range. Cereal production was anchored by *Bel* (sorghum) and *Kal* (finger millet), drought-resistant grains that were indispensable for daily nutritional reserves (*Kwon*) and carried profound socio-ritual significance in ancestral libations (*Abila*) and communal festivities (*Athuko*). Cereal farming was systematically inter-cropped with *Apena* (pigeon peas and field beans) to restore soil nitrogen, while essential energy reserves were secured through *Obatho* (yams) and *Ayeta* (sweet potatoes) as famine-cushioning crops. Crucially, the field research documented an empirical indigenous protocol for the initial adoption of *Ayeta* through meticulous botanical observation of elephant faeces (*Field Data, 2025*). Elders observed undigested wild tubers sprouting vigorously in elephant droppings, harvested specimen tubers,

and subjected them to controlled culinary testing specifically roasting and toxicity screening before formally approving their cultivation. (Field interview: Owili Jeremiah, Odunge Stephen, Ayen Jackson, Apio Concy). This demonstrated an extraordinarily pragmatic and adaptive approach to agricultural experimentation

ii. Pastoralism

The study found extensive that pastoralism functioned as the secondary pillar of the Ethur economy, involving the extensive animal husbandry of cattle (*Dhiang*), goats (*Dyel*), and sheep (*Romo*). While agriculture sustained daily nutrition, livestock served as the supreme store of mobile capital, social prestige, and institutional stability. Cattle represented the primary measure of individual and lineage prosperity (*Lim*), indispensable for celebrating customary marriage alliances through bridewealth transfers (*Lim-Nyom*), paying institutional fines levied by the *Othem* council, and executing spiritual expiation sacrifices at clan shrines. Managing these mobile assets dictated a rigorous division of labor within the clan (*Kaka*), where daily herding, grazing navigation in pasture corridors, and livestock defense were entrusted to junior age-sets and youth warrior cohorts. (Field interview: Owili Jeremiah, Odunge Stephen, Ayen Jackson, Apio Concy). Because cattle were constant targets for open-plain pastoralist raiding from neighbouring groups, herding duties served as an active training ground for martial discipline, spatial reconnaissance, and rapid mobilization, directly feeding into the defensive architecture of the mountain citadels (*Ametho*).

iii. Iron Smithing (Theth)

The research identified (*Theth*) as the most defining and strategically impactful sector of the Ethur economy, powered by a highly developed, specialized furnace iron smelting industry (*Okoro*). Unlike neighbouring purely pastoral or agrarian societies, the Ethur commanded an advanced industrial infrastructure that transformed them into the primary manufacturing hub

of Northeastern Uganda. The study identified a systematic industrial supply chain beginning with the skilled extraction of high-grade iron ore (*Lelo*) from rich deposits located in the Thoror Hills within the Panyangara corridor, as well as surrounding localized furnace sites across Abim District. Utilizing specialized draft-furnaces, clay, granite anvils, and hardwood charcoal, Ethur master smiths (*Ediru*) fabricated a wide array of high-grade metallic tools including the forged iron hoe (*Kweri*), axes (*Atong*), sickles, and clearing knives alongside martial weaponry such as heavy forged spears (*Tong*), arrows, and defensive blades. Field testimony collected in November 2025, confirms that these forged iron products were fundamental for internal self-sufficiency and formed the supreme currency in long-distance external trade (*Cath*). Because neighbouring groups, including the Jie, Karamojong, Acholi, and Lango, lacked advanced furnace smelting technology, they depended entirely on Ethur smiths for their agricultural hoes and warfare weaponry, conferring immense diplomatic power, economic immunity, and territorial sovereignty upon the Ethur amidst surrounding, militarily aggressive pastoralist polities. An oral interview in November 2025, indicated that these products were fundamental for internal self-sufficiency and served as key commodities for external trade, providing significant economic influence in regional dealings.

Figure 11. Smelting house (Hot theth) of the Ethur from Morulem



Source: photograph from field observation by the Researcher

iv. Hunting

among the Thur community, hunting operated as a crucial supplementary economic activity designed to secure protein reserves and raw materials for leatherwork, targeting game such as antelopes (*Amur*), cane rats (*Anyer*), porcupines (*Coo*), and warthogs (*Puno lum*). (Field interview: Owili Jeremiah, Odunge Stephen, Ayen Jackson). Hunting was conducted as an organized, communal effort that frequently deployed specialized net-surround techniques (*Bwo*) for mass capture. Notably, female members of the community actively participated in these organized hunting expeditions, illustrating a flexible, non-rigid division of labor driven by communal survival imperatives. Furthermore, institutional specialization was embedded within clan structures: the Kuku and Koguth clans performed specialized hereditary roles as official game harvesters and primary meat providers, managing hunting territories and supplying wild meat for communal assemblies and ritual functions.

v. Trade (*Cath*)

The research found that the Ethur were represented as the external commercial engine of the Ethur economy, characterized by strategic regional trade networks (*Cath*) connecting Abim with neighbouring polities. Key exports included highly valued forged iron implements (*Kweri, Tong*), processed animal hides, and surplus agricultural grains. The Ethur maintained active commercial corridors with the Jie, Acholi, Lango, Turkana, and Sudanic frontier groups, exchanging manufactured goods for cattle and other missing commodities. However, trade was not an uncontrolled market function it was strictly regulated by the *Othem* council and dictated by geopolitical realities. (Oral interview: Ayen Jackson, Oyugi Amos, Othii John Alex Ocheng). Commercial access was weaponized as a diplomatic tool vital economic commodities were intentionally withheld or embargoed from hostile or aggressive groups most notably the Bokora thereby utilizing economic blockades to enforce regional equilibrium and penalize frontier aggression.

vi. Handicrafts

The study reveals that handicraft provided essential domestic infrastructure, storage solutions, and protective wear through specialized material manipulation. Female artisans dominated the weaving industry, plaiting local natural fibers into durable baskets and storage containers (*Dero*) tailored for preserving harvested grain staples (*Bel, Kal*). (Oral interview: Ayen Jackson, Oyugi Amos, Othii John Alex Ocheng, Apio Concy, Akullo Lucy). Leatherwork flourished alongside livestock husbandry and hunting, converting animal hides and skins into daily clothing, sandals, and protective martial gear. Additionally, Ethur craftsmen produced woven floor mats, ceramic cooking pots, gourds and calabashes (*Wal*), carved wooden eating and serving utensils (*Athuba*), and specialized hunting gear, ensuring that households maintained high levels of domestic self-sufficiency without reliance on external imports.

5.3.2 Disaster Management Framework

The empirical findings of this study establish that the Ethur (Labwor) conceptualized disaster not as a random, purely ecological occurrence, but through an integrated socio-cosmological worldview in which the physical environment directly mirrored the moral and spiritual health of the community. Within this epistemological framework, natural catastrophes such as prolonged droughts, pest infestations, and lethal epidemics were interpreted as manifestations of heat (*Liet*) or spiritual friction resulting from the transgression of sacred taboos (*Kiir*), social discord, or the neglect of ancestral shrines *Abila*. (Oral interview: Elizabeth Ochinge, Naason Andrew Lorika, Awili Sofia, Owiny Lokoda). Consequently, the Ethur developed a sophisticated, institutionalized disaster management framework that combined empirical eco-resource management, strict public health protocols, communal redistribution networks, and ritual mitigation mechanisms overseen by the elders (*Jagi*) and specialized clan authorities.

i. Food Insurance System

To insulate the community against recurrent rainfall volatility and agricultural failure, the Ethur institutionalized a dual-layered food security policy combining strategic grain reserves with spatial ecological diversification: Beyond individual household grain stores, specific communal granaries were designated as emergency reserves *Dero-Mano*. These reserves were placed under the strict custodian oversight of Lineage Heads (*Jagi*), who held the exclusive customary authority to open them when dry seasons extended into severe famines. Unilateral extraction from these granaries during normal seasons was strictly prohibited by customary law, and to mitigate the risk of localized crop failure, the Ethur implemented an intentional land-fallowing *Koo muru* and spatial diversification policy across contrasting micro-ecological zones. (Oral interview: Okello Jimmy Charles, Akori John, Awino Anjelina, Awili Matide). Cultivation was deliberately split between the high-altitude, moisture-retaining slopes of the

Oliabong Hills and the fertile alluvial lowlands of the Abuk Plains. If excessive heat destroyed crops in the lowlands, the hillside farms yielded adequate harvests; conversely, if heavy rains flooded the plains, the elevated terrain remained productive, thereby eliminating the risk of total agricultural collapse.

ii. Epidemic Response

The study reveals that when biological disasters and highly contagious diseases threatened community survival, the Ethur deployed an advanced combination of strict physical isolation, dietary restrictions, and targeted botanical medicine. (Oral interview: Akullu Lucy, Owili John, Akori John, Awili Janet in Kiru Town council). In response to severe outbreaks such as measles (*Anyoo*) or virulent skin plagues like *Kur Iguda*, the Ethur enforced immediate containment protocols. The designation *Kur Iguda* (literally translated as "Do not touch me") functioned simultaneously as an explicit public health directive and a social distancing order. Contagious victims were promptly isolated in temporary isolation huts built on the periphery of the village settlement, effectively halting viral transmission across households, traditional healers (*Ajwoogi*) also administered specialized botanical infusions to treat symptoms while performing ancestral cleansing rituals to purge the domestic space of contagion and specialized medical knowledge was preserved within specific clan institutions. The *Kapuru Clan* served as the primary custodians of leprosy management, applying strict dietary therapy that mandated absolute avoidance of specific game meats most notably giraffe (*Rii*) which were empirically observed to aggravate skin pathology.

iii. Famine Response (Lerengelag, 1930s)

the study reveals that, during catastrophic climate shocks such as the historically destructive *Lerengelag* Famine of the 1930s the Ethur activated their age-set system (*Othem*) and enforcing an unyielding ethic of communal solidarity. Under famine conditions, the eldest *Othem* (age-

set cohorts) redirected youth labor away from failing farms toward intensive organized hunting and long-distance foraging expeditions. Mobilized cohorts gathered resilient wild fruits such as yams *Omwodu* and *Pwomu*, while harvesting wild honey from deep forest reserves to sustain the population. Ethur also operated under a rigid, non-market economy of redistribution. When a clan's granaries were depleted, the Paramount Chief (*Rwot*) and Council of Elders (*Jagi*) mandated the compulsory transfer of grain from food-surplus households to destitute families. Field data gathered during Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Kiru Town Council (November 2025) confirm that this redistribution was not viewed as discretionary charity, but as a binding existential obligation. Because the death of a single lineage reduced the overall numerical strength of the Ethur, hoarding food during a crisis weakened collective military defense against external pastoralist raiders like the Jie or Bokora. Supported by powerful ancestral sanctions and curses against hoarders, this unbreakable communal solidarity ensured that the Ethur maintained demographic unity and social resilience through severe historical shocks.

iv. Spiritual Early Warning

The Metaphysical oversight and ecological forecasting were entrusted to spiritual foretellers (*Won Adwar*), who acted as the community's early warning mechanism against impending disasters. The *Won Adwar* were believed to possess spiritual foresight, allowing them to detect gathering negative spiritual forces (*Cien*) or malignant energy on mountain peaks prior to the physical onset of droughts, pest outbreaks, or warfare. (Oral interview: Akori John, Owiny Lokopda, Naason Andrew Lorika, Othyang James, Owili Emojong). *Omo Koth* (rain calling or making) was a ritual the Ethur engaged in. This was to neutralize these spiritual threats and restore environmental equilibrium, the *Won Adwar* directed rain-calling and cleansing rituals (*Omo Koth*). Senior age-set cohorts were mobilized to conduct animal sacrifices and libation offerings at sacred hill shrines principally *Kidi Akara* and vital water bodies such as *Wii Aliir*

and *Nyar-Kidi* along the border with Napak District. These rituals served to cool the burning land, appease ancestral guardians, and restore seasonal rainfall.

5.4 Conclusion

The empirical investigation into the economic, institutional, and disaster management structures of the Ethur (Labwor) demonstrates that their social organization constituted a remarkably resilient, adaptive, and self-reinforcing socio-ecological framework. By successfully balancing individual lineage identity with binding communal survival imperatives, the Ethur forged a highly functional society capable of enduring severe environmental, epidemiological, and geopolitical pressures.

The dual institutional pillars of the patrilineal clan system (*Kaka*) and the age-set network (*Othem*) provided clear structural roles across all demographic tiers, transitioning individuals seamlessly from martial youth defenders to policy-making elders (*Jagi*). These customary institutions provided efficient mechanisms for natural resource allocation, industrial metallurgical production (*Theth*), long-distance commercial diplomacy (*Cath*), and peaceful dispute resolution (*Ekithil*). Furthermore, the integration of empirical environmental practices with deep spiritual leadership provided the Ethur with an enduring capacity to navigate severe climate shocks and public health crises. Ultimately, this comprehensive socio-economic architecture allowed the Ethur to preserve their cultural autonomy, maintain territorial integrity in the Labwor Hills, and sustain an impactful historical presence in Northeastern Uganda.

CHAPTER SIX

THE HISTORICAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE THUR PEOPLE AND NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

6.0 Introduction

The historical route of the Thur people is defined by their strategic location within the Labwor Hills which functioned as a cultural and industrial clearing house between the Western Nilotic and Eastern Nilotic worlds. The research data identifies the Ethur traditional neighbours as the Jie (North), Bokora (Southeast), Langi (Southwest), and Acholi (Northwest), with broader interactions extending to the Dodoth, Iteso, and Kumam. This geographic positioning forced the Ethur into a role of regional mediators. Herring (1974) argues, the Ethur were never an isolated group but rather a specialized industrial territory whose survival depended on managing a complex network of external relations. Respondents in this study corroborated this by describing it as a mixture of peace and war where the Ethur utilized their mountain strongholds to oscillate between being aggressive defenders and indispensable trade partners.

6.1 Nature of Inter-community Relationships

The interactions between the Ethur and their neighbours were defined by three primary pillars trade, marriage, and conflict. According to the Obia Abari a respondent (Interview in Akado, Kiru subcounty, 09th, January, 2026), the Ethur leveraged their industrial monopoly in blacksmithing to trade spears and hoes with the Jie, Acholi, and Langi in exchange for animal products and grains. This corroborates the findings of Lamphear (1976), who noted that the Jie were almost entirely dependent on Labwor smiths for their military hardware. These relationships were often seasonal whereby during intervals of peace intermarriage prevailed which created deep kinship ties across ethnic lines. He highlighted that marriage rituals involving the exchange of cattle, spears, and tobacco served as a primary tool for cooling

regional tensions and cementing alliances (Interview in Akado, Kiru subcounty, 09th, January, 2026).

However, these peaceful intervals were frequently interrupted by competition over scarce environmental resources. Conflicts primarily arose over land boundaries, water sources, and pastures, particularly with the pastoralist Karimojong groups. This mirrors Dyson-Hudson's (1966) observation that in the Karamoja cluster, resource scarcity often dictates that today's trade partner becomes tomorrow's raider. As one respondent noted, the Ethur had to be both master diplomats and skilled warriors, protecting their hill *Othem* (settlements) from the very groups they traded with. This duality suggests that Ethur identity was not static but was constantly being renegotiated through its interactions with the other. Culturally, these relationships fostered a high degree of synthesis, particularly with the Lwo-speaking Acholi and Langi. According to Obia Abari, shared agricultural practices involving crops like millet, sorghum, and specifically potatoes where the Ethur have a belief that their Ancestors discovered it from the elephant remains (Oral interview, 9th January 2026 in Akado), as well as linguistic similarities that facilitated communication. This aligns with Okot p'Bitek's (1971) assertion that the Central Lwo groups, including the Ethur, shared a common religious and social logic that prioritized communal harmony.

6.2 Categorical Analysis of Inter-Community Conflicts

The historical interactions between the Ethur and their neighbours were governed by a mixture of peace and war, where the pressure of conflict was frequently mitigated by the conserving effects of trade and ritual diplomacy. These relations are categorically analyzed through the lens of specific territorial and economic disputes where most respondents presented as the actual and immediate cause of the disputes (Interview, Oral interview, 9th January 2025 in Akado, 2026).

6.2.1 Conflicts with the Jie (Northern Neighbours)

The Ethur-Jie relationship was historically a symbiotic rivalry defined by competition for water and pastures versus a mutual need for iron and livestock. According to Othii Ocheng John Alex, the Jie were the traditional allies in certain regional wars and shared strong kinship with the Ethur. A case in point was the Awach water incidents that the Ethur were backed up by the Jie warriors against the Bokora who had ganged against the Ethur (Interview, in Akado, on 18th, December, 2025). Jie were also frequent raiders of Ethur cattle. This supports the findings of Lamphear (1976), who noted that the Jie's military expansion was paradoxically powered by Ethur blacksmiths, who provided the very spears used in regional raids. According to Othii Ocheng John Alex, of late, the Jie have transitioned into antagonists because they insist on grazing and watering their animals freely in Labwor, defying traditional boundaries established by the Ethur elders. This shift from alliance to enmity aligns with Gulliver (1955), who observed that pastoralist groups often ignore territorial boundaries during extreme droughts, leading to inevitable friction with sedentary groups like the Ethur.

According to Akullo, the daughter of Pirimon from Kajimo clan in Orwamuge, she narrated that the enmity between the Ethur and the Jie escalated when the Jie ruthlessly murdered a man who had gone to graze the animals and raided the cattle. This event not only annoyed the brother of the deceased but forced him to take a revenge which later became the permanent breakaway of the Ethur and the Jie ties. The pain of losing the only blood brother forced Oyolo (pet name) to drag the burial of his brother until he executes the revenge, an event which would impact negatively even to his own community. He picked a pappy, spear, and Ebele (traditional herb believed to avert rainfall in an area. The area it grows in experiences long spans of sunshine and famine.) and trekked through the Labwor hills to the Jie community. On reaching where the Jie used to gather and exercise their traditional dances of Edonga, he dug a hole and buried the dog while its head facing the north with this herb. This was a ritual of revenge for killing an innocent

man who was grazing. This was to punish the Jie through scarcity of water and pasture. He continued and moved in to the valleys in Karamoja, buried these traditional herbs and made a swearing that the Jie cattle will all die.

After few months, the effects of this revenge ritual were started being felt in form of hot weather, drought and famine. The Jie cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys and Camel and even people especially the young, and the elders started to starve to death. This forced them to move to different parts of the region. Most of the Jie moved to the Thur land, others went to Acholi land, while others took refuge to Lango. Oyolo the avenger, made a blunder by following back his route he used while going to revenge. This misinterpretation of the ritual practice made these effects to be felt by the Ethur since the avenger came back following his routes. It also forced the Ethur to run to Acholi, Lango and the neighbouring communities to find what to eat. This sparked another wave of torture, hatred and cross conflicts to the Ethur by the unwelcoming communities like the Iteso, Kumam, and the Dodoth, and was another opportunity to the Bokora to punish the Ethur and Jie for the allies against them (Interview, December, 2025).

6.2.2 Conflicts with the Acholi (Northwestern Neighbours)

Historically, the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) functioned as a resilient Luo-speaking community of blacksmiths and farmers whose identity was shaped by their strategic position in the Labwor Hills. While they shared kinship with the Acholi, territorial friction was common a notable flashpoint was the Candit conflict of approximately 1800 on Kobwor Hill sparked by disputes over hunting boundaries and land rights (Interview, December, 2025). During this era, the Ethur utilized a sophisticated defense system where *Otok* (detectives) monitored the lowlands from high hill corners to signal incoming Acholi invaders. In one fierce encounter led by the leader Rwoth Aryon and military commander Logo, the Ethur utilized their mountainous terrain to roll stones down upon the attackers, eventually driving the Acholi forces back to Kwor

Ka'agole in present-day Agago (Interview, December 2025). As noted by Okot p'Bitek (1971) and Webster (1979), these localized combats were rarely intended for total destruction, but rather served as a mechanism for boundary adjustment, often resolved through traditional *Ekithil* (peace talks).

The nature of these regional dynamics shifted from traditional boundary disputes to a desperate fight for survival following the 1979 collapse of the Idi Amin regime. When Karamojong warriors looted modern automatic weapons from the Moroto barracks, the Ethur were thrust into a violent buffer zone between the newly armed pastoralists and the Acholi plains. This power shift devastated the Ethur economy. The Ethur were among the first to lose their cattle and livelihoods to high-tech raiding. During this time, the relationship with the Acholi became strained, as the Ethur were often unfairly suspected of failing to block the corridor of raiders. Consequently, the Ethur had to rapidly transition from being the region's peaceful metalworkers into a defensive frontline to protect their ancestral lands and food supplies from constant high-stakes invasions.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the Ethur's role reached a critical climax as they were squeezed between the terror of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and persistent Karamojong rustlers. By absorbing the initial shocks of eastward and westward violence, they effectively served as a shield for the broader Acholi heartland, absorbing attacks intended for deeper northern Uganda. This shared experience of marginalization and suffering eventually mended the old territorial rifts, fostering a deeper bond of solidarity between the Ethur and the Acholi as both groups were marginalized by the same threats. Today, the Ethur are recognized not as aggressors, but as a resilient group that survived the frontline of a decades-long regional war, transforming their historical role as detectives of the hills into modern leaders of peace and disarmament dialogues in Northern Uganda.

The modern recognition of the Ethur as a resilient shield and diplomatic bridge is corroborated by their unique geopolitical role during the peak of Northern Uganda's instability, where they effectively absorbed the dual shocks of Karamojong cattle rustling and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) incursions. This "shared suffering" fostered a new era of Luo solidarity, as documented in regional peace reports which highlight how the Ethur's geographical position in the Labwor Hills forced them to transition from defensive detectives of the hills into essential mediators between the Nilotic Acholi and the Para-Nilotic Karamojong. The validity of this shift was most recently cemented during the landmark 2024 reconciliation summits in Abim, where cultural leaders such as the Rwoth of the Ethur (His Highness Rwoth Aryon II Ngolryeko) and representatives from the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) acknowledged that the Ethur's historical resilience as a buffer zone was instrumental in protecting the broader Acholi heartland, ultimately transforming the community into the primary architects of the current Karamoja Cluster peace and disarmament dialogues (Interview, 2025; ARLPI, 2024).

6.2.3 Conflicts with the Langi (Western/Southwestern Neighbours)

The historical relationship between the Ethur and the Langi reflects a complex economic life-support system where trade and intermarriage coexisted with violent territorial disputes. This duality is best illustrated by the ongoing struggle for land in the Labwor Hills, which served as a natural barrier to Lango eastward expansion. According to research by Herring (1974), as the Lango population surged, they pushed toward the Ethur's territory, creating a squeezing effect that necessitated military resistance. A definitive example of this was the 1800 battle at Tyen Ongole (Kidi Otuke), which stands as a historic landmark of Ethur defiance against Langi encroachment. Despite these clashes, the two groups remained vital trade partners, exchanging Ethur-forged iron hoes and grain, and maintained deep social ties through intermarriage a paradox where communal survival depended on the very neighbours they fought on the battlefield.

Figure 12. The defensive shield used by the Ethur against the Lango community.



Source: Participant field observation by the Researcher

The intensity of these disputes reached a peak in the 1920s, specifically during the bloody conflict of 1922–1923 centered in the Abwongeth and Orwamuge areas. Under the leadership of Omongo Wapiman, the Ethur successfully repelled Langi encroachment in what is now the Abim District headquarters, though the victory came with personal costs. Owili Jeremiah Athwaniki identifies the capture of Ocopule, his brother and a young boy from the Kochero clan, as a significant outcome of this era. He was integrated into a Langi clan (Okia'amat), married, and raised a family in Lango (Participant Observation, 2025). This specific narrative of Ocopule's descendants recently tracing their roots back to Kiru in Abim District corroborates the broader historical pattern that while military engagements like the 1922 battle were total losses for the Langi in terms of land, the subsequent cultural absorption and lineage tracing reinforce the deep although forced kinship between the two tribes.

These events align with the academic consensus that while Lwo-speaking groups shared a cultural preference for peace, the material reality of land scarcity often overrode ethnic kinship. The Ethur's ability to defend their highlands while maintaining economic ties with the Langi demonstrates a sophisticated survival strategy. This history of conflict and commerce underscores how boundary adjustments were often settled through blood yet the social fabric was frequently mended through the very descendants of those captured or married during the wars. This narrative remains a core part of the Ethur identity which highlights their resilience as a smaller group successfully defending their ancestral home against larger and expanding neighbours (Herring, 1974; Participant Observation, 2025).

6.2.4 Conflicts with the Bokora (Southeastern Neighbours)

The Bokora (Karimojong) were historically the most persistent military antagonists of the Ethur, with relations defined by a constant cycle of raiding and the protection of water sources. According to a narrative from Othii Ocheng John Alex, a Thur woman from Awach (Edule mother to Owiny Othak), who was struggling for water (Kuth) in Awach fought with a pregnant Bokora woman who succumbed death. This forced the Bokora men to parade from their homeland via Nyakwae, Morulem for Awach but while in Morulem and thirsty, they branch to Angolebwal watershed in Morulem Subcounty, met a Thur woman (Awili wife to Oruruma) and killed her as a revenge. Karimojong then started killing the Ethur like that with spear which laid the background of the enmity between Thur and the Karimojong. In this kind of affair, revenge was the order of the day and the Ethur utilized their hills to repel Bokora warriors who sought pastures for their animals. This antagonistic relationship is a classic example of resource competition, as described by Dyson-Hudson (1966), who explained that the Bokora viewed the Labwor Hills as a strategic obstacle to their grazing routes.

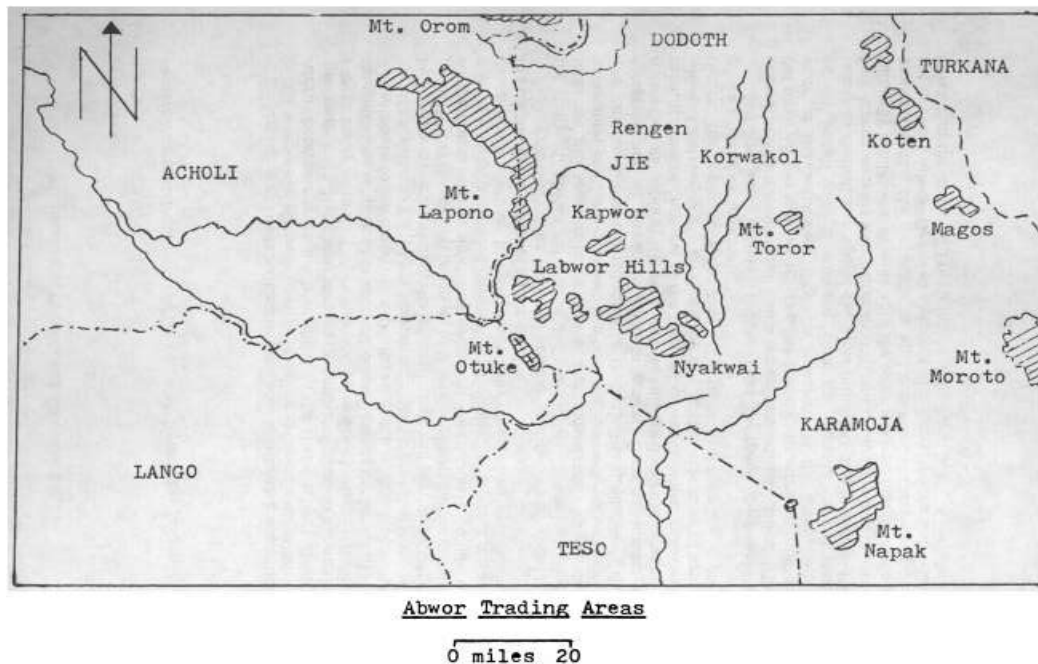
The Ethur elders could then involve themselves in the war rites and rituals mostly managed by the Kuku clan in Koya. They could visit Lela Obuthia in Koya Magamaga subcounty, where they had a natural and sanctified ground, they believed to harbour their gods. This place has up to date twelve holes (caves) in the bare rock where the elders named each hole with the names of the neighbouring tribes. Here, the one for Bokora at the time for war could be opened, their spear of weapon brought and dropped in the hole, and left open. This was then followed by a ritual and some prayers made by elders of that clan. All these were intended to render the powers of the enemies weak and useless (Oral interview, Okello Martine, Ochen James, Ayen Jackson, Omara Paulino, Okuda Justine, Othyang James, 2025). To manage this antagonism, some times the two groups occasionally engaged in cooling rituals which involved bull sacrifice and the symbolic burying of the spear to enforce temporary ceasefires and Akithil (reconciliations) followed.

6.2.5 Conflicts with the Iteso, Kumam, and Dodoth

Relations with the Iteso, Kumam, and Dodoth were often plagued by language barriers, which made the diplomatic reconciliation rituals used with Lwo-speaking neighbours less effective. (Oral interview, Moding Johnson, Omara Paulino, Okuda Justine, Othyang James, 2025). The study reveals that Ethur conflicted with the Kumam and it was named as *Lweny Oribo*. They also conflicted with the Iteso in a land-based battles. Interactions with the Dodoth were more tactical where in 1964, the Ethur allied with the Dodoth against the Bokora, an event signified by the introduction of a camel into Thur land. These interactions, corroborated by Webster

(1979), demonstrate the Ethur's role as a diplomatic pivot capable of forming complex regional coalitions to protect their southern and northern borders from displacement and resource theft.

Figure 13: Evidence of Historical Interactions between the Thur People and Neighbouring Communities



Source: Thur Kingdom archives

6.3 Historical Alliances and Dispute Resolution

The historical trajectory of the Ethur is defined by tactical, shifting alliances aimed at maintaining a risky balance of power within the volatile landscape of Northeastern Uganda. As a smaller community, the Ethur often engaged in strategic partnerships with the Jie to counter the influence of the Bokora most notably during the 1958 Pama water incident and a 1964 campaign involving the Dodoth (Oral interview, Okello Martine, Ochen James, Ayen Jackson, Omara Paulino, Okuda Justine, Othyang James, 2025). These findings align with Gulliver's (1955) research, which describes how minority groups like the Ethur frequently served as a punch ballot or strategic pivot point in the broader conflicts between larger pastoralist sections. Beyond these pastoralist dynamics, the Ethur also solidified their bloc by uniting the seven

Othem system to repel Langi expansion particularly following devastating droughts that heightened competition for resources. This reinforces the notion that while ethnic kinship provided a foundation for cooperation, political friction and survival often dictated the necessity of these military pacts.

To manage the fallout of these frequent clashes, the Ethur developed a sophisticated internal mechanism for dispute resolution centered on the *Ekithil* (peace talks) system. Similar to the *Mato Oput* of the Acholi described by Okot p'Bitek (1971), the *Ekithil* involved elders analysing the root causes of a conflict and invoking spiritual sanctions or curses against those who violated the peace terms. However, Thur elders stated that this restorative justice was not always absolute. If reconciliation failed, the cycle of revenge became the order of the day with defeated communities reorganizing for abrupt counterattacks (Interview, December 2025). This duality of spiritual mediation and retaliatory warfare ensured that while peace was the goal, the capacity for defense remained a core component of Ethur social structure.

In recent decades, the intervention of the colonial government and modern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has fundamentally transformed these traditional mechanisms. Respondents observed that formal court sessions and standardized compensation have largely replaced the winner-takes-all approach that characterized historical warfare (Interview, December 2025). Today, NGOs have introduced soft diplomacy techniques, utilizing communal dances, drama, and sports to build trust and ensure a win-win state between the Ethur and their neighbours. These modern interventions have mitigated the reliance on the cycle of revenge, shifting the focus from spiritual curses toward long-term communal integration and trust-building as the primary means of maintaining regional stability.

6.4 Ethur and the Colonial era

On the eve of colonialism, the Ethur occupied a unique and powerful position as the primary industrialists of Northeastern Uganda and maintained their sovereignty through a strategic monopoly on iron production and a sophisticated observation system known as *Otok*. Situated in the rugged Labwor Hills where they had their unique settlements before the seven major clusters settlements, they utilized the terrain for defense while serving as an indispensable economic hub. Their high-quality iron hoes and spears were essential trade items for the agricultural Acholi and Langi to the west and the pastoralist Karamojong and Jie to the east (Gulliver, 1955). This economic leverage allowed the Ethur to remain a neutral sovereign pocket amidst the tribal migrations and raids of the late 19th century. Although they shared deep linguistic and ancestral ties with the Luo-speaking Acholi, their geographic location meant that when the British eventually formalized administrative boundaries, the Ethur were grouped under the Karamoja administration rather than Acholi. This decision was a colonial calculation intended to secure the iron-rich highlands as a distinct strategic asset and to utilize the settled Ethur community as a stable buffer zone between the pacified west and the nomadic unreachable east (Knighton, 1990; Interview, 2025).

The relationship between the Ethur and the British colonial government was primarily defined by the community's role as a strategic buffer and the eventual imposition of administrative control. Because the Ethur (Jo'Abwor) were settled agriculturalists and expert blacksmiths, the British initially viewed them as a stabilizing force in a region dominated by nomadic pastoralist groups. However, this relationship became strained as the colonial state sought to appease the area often restricting the traditional iron-hoe trade and hunting practices that were central to Ethur autonomy. According to Gulliver (1955), the colonial administration integrated the Labwor Hills into the Karamoja District largely for ease of taxation and security, but this

formalization often ignored the unique Lwo-speaking identity of the Ethur leading to a sense of political marginalization as the administrative centre was established further east in Moroto.

This contradicts with the research findings where an elder mentioned that caving Ethur under the Karamoja administration was as a result of their related cultural practices especially the dances which resembles that of the Karimojong (Interview, December 2025). According to Obia Abari, under the Rwothship of Rwoth Owiny, Ethur political leader, the British would organise yearly cultural galla stationary in Kitgum. The Ethur participants were instructed by Rwoth to go and dance “Elilia dance” instead of “Myel Bull” since he did not want to be politically grouped under the Acholi. This made the colonial masters to regroup the Labwor hills and occupants under Karamoja with its headquarters in Moroto.

Early missionary relations began in 1920–1921 when the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society (BCMS) entered the Labwor Hills from the west (Oral interview, Odunge Stephen, Othii John Alen Ocheng, Owili Jeremiah Athwaniki, Okello Jimmy Charles, Othyang James, 2025). Missionaries like Canon Lawrence Totty and Arthur J. Yerbury found the Ethur far more receptive to Western education and the book than the pastoralist groups, largely due to linguistic similarities with the already-Christianised Acholi (Knighton, 1990). This period is often recalled as the dawn of the book in Abim, as the missionaries established the first bush schools and prayer houses under trees in Lotukei and Kiru. While the missionaries provided a path to literacy and modern medicine, they also acted as precursors to colonial rule often working in cycle with the government to transition the Ethur from a traditional surveillance-based society to one governed by Christian morality and colonial law.

Despite the benefits of education, deep-seated cultural friction eventually soured the relationship between the Ethur and the white settlers. Oral traditions record that the foreigners

residing in the Ongene area between Kiru and Akado displayed antisocial behaviors that were deeply offensive to local sensibilities (Interview, 2025). The elders were particularly outraged by the disrespect shown toward young Ethur girls, noting that missionaries and officers would disrespectfully handle their *Oriko* (waist beads) to check for tails, a profound violation of traditional modesty and personhood. Furthermore, the use of biscuits, clothes, and food to win over Ethur women was viewed by the men as a form of bribery that undermined the traditional family structure and patriarchal authority of the clans.

In response to these perceived insults, the Ethur elders took a stand against the foreign presence through a blend of spiritual and physical resistance. Local accounts describe how the elders consulted their deities and were instructed to use a specific traditional herb uprooted, dried, and smashed to be mixed into the food of the whites to incite internal disagreements and force their departure (Interview, 2025). This cultural pushback, combined with the colonial government's desire to centralize power in Moroto, led to the eventual exit of the mission headquarters from Labwor. Although the missionaries left behind the foundations of Kiru Primary School (formally founded in 1935), their departure marked a victory for Ethur cultural preservation, as the community successfully repelled behaviours, they deemed incompatible with their ancestral values.

6.5 Post-Colonial Transition and Modernity

In the post-colonial era, the social interaction of the Ethur has been defined by a resilient bridging identity that navigates the cultural space between the Nilotic Karamoja sub-region and the Luo-speaking Acholi and Lango neighbours. While officially administered under the Karamoja umbrella, the Ethur have maintained deep social and linguistic ties with the Acholi, often serving as a cultural mediator during times of regional instability (Meyerson, 2022). This interaction was particularly evident during the return from Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

camps following the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency, where the Ethur engaged in complex land negotiations and cross-border trade that solidified their role as a stabilizing economic link (Lomo & Hovil, 2004). Modern social life is increasingly characterized by soft diplomacy, where traditional mechanisms like the *Ekithil* peace ceremonies are blended with modern NGO-led initiatives such as communal sports and inter-district dramas to foster trust and mitigate the historical cycle of revenge with neighbouring groups (Interview, 2025).

Furthermore, the social fabric of the Ethur has undergone a significant transformation through the expansion of Western education and the formalization of the Anglican and Catholic churches. Since the establishment of institutions like Kiru Primary School in 1935, education has become a primary vehicle for social mobility leading to the emergence of an Ethur elite that actively participates in Uganda's national political and civil service spheres (Meyerson, 2022). Despite this modernization, traditional clan structures specifically the Kiru, Kochero and other influential lineages remain central to social cohesion. This governs marriage rites and local dispute resolutions through restorative justice (Interview, 2025). This dualism allows the Ethur to participate in the globalized economy of the 21st century while retaining the ancestral values of the Labwor Hills and effectively shifting from a community once isolated by geography to one that is socially integrated across Northern and Eastern Uganda.

In the immediate post-independence era, the relationship between the Ethur and the central government was marked by a struggle for administrative recognition and the preservation of their unique identity within the Karamoja District (Gulliver, 1955). Following 1962, the Ethur found themselves politically fastened to Moroto, the regional capital, which often prioritized the needs of pastoralist Karamojong groups over the settled agriculturalists of the Labwor Hills. During the turbulent 1970s and 80s, the Ethur were frequently caught in the crossfire of regional insecurity and cattle rustling. The government's inability to provide adequate protection led to

a period of self-reliance where traditional surveillance systems were revitalized to guard against raids (Knighton, 1990). Despite these challenges, the Ethur utilized their early lead in education a legacy of the Kiru and Lotukei churches.

From 1971 to 2005, the relationship between the Ethur and the central government was marked by extreme volatility, political marginalization, and a desperate struggle for survival against the dual threats of state violence and armed cattle rustling. During the regime of Idi Amin (1971–1979), the Ethur faced brutal ethnic targeting as a Lwo-speaking group with deep ties to Acholi land, they were frequently viewed with suspicion by Amin’s security apparatus, which systematically purged those associated with the former Obote government (Quam, 1996). The situation deteriorated further after the 1979 fall of Amin, when the Moroto Barracks was looted, flooding the Karamoja sub-region with automatic weapons. This militarization of the plains left the agricultural Ethur vulnerable to devastating raids by the heavily armed Jie and Karamojong. Throughout the 1980s, the government’s inability to provide security forced the Ethur into a state of defensive isolation where they relied on their rugged hills and revitalized traditional observation to survive a period of famine and unchecked lawlessness.

During the NRM era (1986–2005), the relationship shifted as the Ethur became a strategic yet often overlooked, frontier in the war against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Because the Labwor Hills sat between the conflict-ridden Acholi districts and the restless Karamoja plains, the Ethur were caught in a double bind. They suffered from LRA invasions from the west and cattle raids from the east. According to Knighton (1990), the government’s administrative strategy at the time of keeping Labwor as a county under Kotido District was often criticized by Ethur leaders like Dr. Omwony Ojwok who felt their agricultural needs were ignored in a district dominated by pastoralist interests. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, this frustration fuelled a powerful grassroots movement for self-governance. The Ethur argued that only a

separate district could secure the resources needed to rebuild their schools and health centres. This led to the successful lobbying effort that eventually resulted in the liberation and creation of Abim District in 2006 (Interview, December, 2025).

The most significant turning point in Ethur-government relations occurred in 2006, when the NRM government granted Abim District its own administrative status carving it out of Kotido District. This move was celebrated as a liberation by many Ethur as it finally allowed for direct budgetary allocations and the formal recognition of Abim as a distinct political entity rather than a peripheral sub-county (Meyerson, 2022). Since then, the relationship has evolved into one of active partnership in development, particularly through programs like the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and the Karamoja Integrated Development Programme (KIDP). While the Ethur still voice concerns regarding their representation within the broader Karamoja developmental framework. They often argue that their agricultural needs differ from the region's pastoralist focus. The establishment of Abim District has empowered local leaders to negotiate directly with the central government for roads, electricity, and health facilities, solidifying the Ethur's position as a key stakeholder in Northern Uganda's growth (Interview, 2025).

The current political leadership of Abim District is dominated by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), reflecting a strong alignment with the central government's developmental agenda. In the 11th Parliament (2021–2026), the district is represented by Hon. Jimbrick Norman Ochero for Labwor County and Hon. Janet Grace Akech Okori-Moe as the District Woman Representative, both of whom have been instrumental in lobbying for infrastructure and agricultural support through the Ministry of Karamoja Affairs (Parliament of Uganda, 2021). Locally, the political wing is headed by the LC5 Chairperson, Hon. Ariko John De-West, while the technical and administrative operations are managed by the Chief Administrative

Officer (CAO), Abong Luke Jackson Abwangamoi, who serves as the primary link between local implementation and national policy.

This leadership structure is currently overseeing the rollout of the Parish Development Model (PDM) which aims to transition the Ethur community from subsistence farming to the money economy. The recent 2026 General Elections concluded and Hon. Ayepa Micheal emerged as the Labwor constituency member of Parliament and Hon. Aayoo Joyce Makamoe was directly elected as the Women representative in the 12th Parliament (2026-2031).

6.6 Conclusion

In summary, the historical interactions of the Ethur across their various border locations reveal a community that functioned as the industrial and diplomatic pivot of Northeastern Uganda. Their survival was not guaranteed by military dominance, but by a masterful balance of technical skills, linguistic flexibility, and ritual diplomacy (Baker, 1958). By positioning themselves as a "cooling" force between the agricultural west and the pastoralist east, the Ethur made themselves indispensable to their neighbours, utilizing systems like *Ekithil* (peace talks) to analyze and resolve conflicts (Okot p'Bitek, 1971). The transition from the "hoe-for-grain" alliances of the pre-colonial era to the modern administrative autonomy of Abim District (2006) demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of regional interdependence and resilience. Ultimately, the history of the Ethur serves as a testament to the importance of minority groups in regional stability; their ability to turn potential enemies into permanent economic partners highlights a unique model of indigenous diplomacy that continues to uphold human dignity and peace in a rapidly changing modern state.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This final chapter provides a theoretical mixture of the research findings, analysing the socio-historical trajectory (1885–2025) of the Ethur (Labwor) people in Abim District, Uganda. Rather than offering a purely narrative account, this blend evaluates the empirical data through the conceptual lenses of ecological materialism, structural functionalism, and interdependence theory in political economy. It explains why a minority community like Ethur occupying an ecological frontier chose specialized industrial production over expansive pastoralism or large-scale state formation, and how they deployed technological monopoly alongside diplomatic alternation to preserve their political autonomy and territorial integrity in a volatile region. The chapter concludes with evidence-based conclusions.

7.1 Summary of analysis and discussion

7.1.1 Objective One: The origin of the Thur people

The Ethur emerged as a distinct Western Nilotic (Luo) group by settling in the Labwor Hills around the 15th century, absorbing multi-directional migration streams like Sudanic, Ateker, Lwo, and Horn of Africa into a unified *Leb-Thur*-speaking society.

Vansina (1985) asserts that oral traditions are not static myths, but processual historical records that capture collective social memory through internal and external source criticism. Interpreting the multi-directional migration narratives through Vansina's framework reveals that the diverse clan accounts like *Kebhu*, *Kalanga*, *Kuku*, *Jo' Karwoth* do not represent contradictory histories, but rather a multi-layered process of composite ethnogenesis. Vansina's rules of testimony validation confirm that the Labwor Hills operated as an ancestral sanctuary where migrant bands synthesized distinct traditions into a unified historical narrative.

Mazrui (1986) posits that African societies evolve through the dynamic blending of diverse cultural streams to build new, resilient identities. Applying this to Ethur origins, their ethnogenesis reflects an indigenous triple heritage synthesis, Central Sudanic groups contributed foundational furnace smelting technology (*Theth*); Central Lwo streams embedded the *Leb-Thur* linguistic matrix and *Othem* council governance; and Ateker cohorts introduced age-set defensive structures (*Ametho*).

From my analytical stance as a researcher embedded in the region, the foundational choice of the ancestral Ethur to abandon the open-plain pastoral economy in favour of an agro-industrial place in the Labwor Hills was an act of high-level geopolitical calculation rather than mere geographical displacement. While mainstream regional historiography frequently mischaracterizes minority groups as passive refugees fleeing larger polities, my synthesis demonstrates that the Ethur consciously weaponized topography. They selected a high-altitude natural fortress rich in iron ore (*Lelo*) and hardwood timber to deliberately construct a specialized identity. In my view, *Leb-Thur* is not just a dialect; it is a linguistic monument to historical integration an indigenous synthesis that allowed a demographically smaller group to absorb diverse migrant lineages and maintain cultural sovereignty surrounded by expansive Luo and Ateker populations.

7.1.2 Objective Two: The organization of the Thur people

Ethur society was organized around two primary institutional structures: the *Othem* clustered residential and governance councils and the *Ametho* age-set, military, and labor organization systems.

Okot p'Bitek (1971, 1986) argued that traditional African societies were organically organized around indigenous institutions that defined social morality, communal labor, and collective identity without needing Eurocentric state structures. The *Othem* (fireplace council) and

Ametho (age-set system) exemplify p'Bitek's concept of personhood within community. The *Ametho* mobilized youth cohorts for the physically demanding, dangerous tasks of iron ore mining (*Lelo*), charcoal burning, and furnace smelting (*Theth*). Simultaneously, the *Othem* provided the ethical and judicial foundation, enforcing strict secrecy around metallurgical knowledge to protect the community's industrial monopoly.

Vansina demonstrates how stateless societies develop specialized institutions to manage environmental adaptation and resource allocation. The *Othem* and *Ametho* were functional mechanisms engineered to organize trade production, resolve inter-clan conflicts, and manage disaster reserves (*Dero-Mano*) during ecological shocks.

It is my considered perspective that colonial administrators and early Eurocentric scholars fundamentally misinterpreted the *Othem* and *Ametho* because they searched for centralized, monarchical crowns (*Rwodi*) and failed to recognize decentralized industrial governance. I maintain that the *Othem* operated as an elite corporate board and intellectual property regulator. By enforcing strict hereditary secrecy around furnace engineering (*Theth*) and restricting master-smithing to specific lineages, the elders executed an early form of industrial patent protection. Far from being a loose collection of agrarian settlements, Ethur social organization was an intentionally engineered, highly disciplined guild architecture where labor, military defense, and technological secrets were seamlessly integrated to guarantee collective survival.

7.1.3 Objective Three: The historical interactions between the Thur people and neighbouring communities

The Ethur maintained dual relations, supplying agricultural hoes (*Kweri*) to Luo agrarian groups (Acholi and Lango) while trading weapons (*Tong*) and tools to pastoralist groups (Jie and Karamojong), while selectively embargoing hostile groups like the Bokora.

Achebe (1958, 2000) emphasized that African societies possessed sophisticated political agency, strategic diplomacy, and internal logic to navigate external pressures prior to colonial disruption. The Ethur's strategic trade alliances (*Cath*) and ritual peace covenants (*Ekithil*) reflect this indigenous agency. As a demographically small minority, the Ethur avoided direct military confrontation with vast pastoral armies. Instead, they transformed their metallurgical monopoly into an instrument of diplomatic leverage supplying essential hoes to agrarian neighbours and weapons to pastoralists while implementing economic embargoes against aggressive groups like the Bokora.

Mazrui (1967, 1977) argued that pre-colonial regional stability was maintained through indigenous balances of power and economic interdependence "Pax Africana". By establishing the Labwor Hills as a protected, neutral industrial zone, the Ethur rendered their larger neighbours structurally dependent on their iron products, converting technological mastery into geopolitical immunity.

In evaluating these historical interactions, I contend that the Ethur practiced a masterclass in pre-colonial technological diplomacy that mirrors modern economic statecraft. Rather than relying on standing armies, they constructed a system of unequal interdependence, they made themselves indispensable. By supplying agricultural hoes (*Kweri*) to the West (Acholi/Lango) and warfare spears (*Tong*) to the East (Jie/Karamojong), they ensured that destroying the Ethur meant economic paralysis for agrarian neighbours and military disarming for pastoral ones. In my view, their selective economic embargo against the Bokora stands as empirical proof of decolonial agency demonstrating that a minority group, anchored in indigenous technological innovation, could successfully enforce regional sanctions and project diplomatic power across a volatile frontier.

7.2 Conclusion

7.2.1 Theoretical Conclusion

This study validates Cheikh Anta Diop's (1974, 1987) multidisciplinary methodology by seamlessly integrating *Leb-Thur* linguistic structures, spatial settlement patterns (*Othem*), and physical metallurgical artifacts specifically ancient furnace sites (*Ot Theth*) to reconstruct the Ethur past. The findings establish that the history of the Ethur is physically encoded in the Labwor landscape and preserved within specialized technical vocabulary. This empirical reality directly challenges dominant national historiographies that have historically underrepresented minority ethnicities, demonstrating that indigenous material culture and industrial landscapes constitute an unassailable historical record (Diop, 1987; Moore, 1989).

Furthermore, the research provides robust empirical confirmation for Jan Vansina's (1985) methodology regarding oral traditions. The remarkable cross-clan consistency observed across genealogies (*Kaka*), ritual incantations, proverbial philosophy, and clan migration narratives proves that oral tradition is a fully legitimate, academically sound archive. Through systematic internal and external source criticism cross-checking oral accounts against colonial archival records, inter-clan testimonies, and metallurgical sites this study proves that collective memory preserved complex historical truths with extraordinary precision despite the absence of a formal writing system (Vansina, 1985).

The study also strongly aligns with Ali Mazrui's (1986, 2005) framework of indigenous historical agency and cultural synthesis. By centering the internal *Leb-Thur* worldview, the research fundamentally reframes Ethur history far from being a peripheral footnote or passive buffer population, the Ethur were central geopolitical actors whose industrial innovation and trade diplomacy actively shaped Northern Uganda. This analytical shift restores historical dignity to the Ethur as active technological innovators and regional diplomats which

successfully reclaims their rightful place in the national historical consciousness (*Mazrui, 2005*).

Finally, drawing upon Okot p'Bitek's (*1971, 1984*) critical critique of post-colonial cultural alienation, the study concludes that contemporary Ethur identity represents a masterclass in post-colonial resilience and institutional continuity. Despite colonial impositions that sought to dismantle indigenous authority and subsume minority populations under larger administrative polities, the Ethur preserved the core customary knowledge systems (*Othem, Jagi, Ekithil*) that sustained them. This proves that indigenous epistemologies and customary governance frameworks remain dynamic, vital forces for community continuity and self-determination in modern Africa (*p'Bitek, 1984*).

7.2.2 Historical Conclusion

Historically, the Ethur stand as a uniquely resilient, specialized link in the broader Nilotic and Ateker expansions across East Africa. Their historical movement from Bahr el Ghazal through the Sudanic corridors to the Labwor Hills around the fifteenth century was not a disorganized flight of a scattered or lost group fleeing external pressure. Rather, it was a deliberate, highly strategic geographical choice to secure an eco-industrial sanctuary rich in high-grade iron ore (*Lelo*), hardwood timber, and defensible mountain settlements (*Othem*).

The research concludes that the Ethur served as the undisputed technological pulse of Northeastern Uganda. By establishing a metal work monopoly over furnace iron smelting (*Cath*) and specialized blacksmithing (*Theth*), the Ethur engineered a sophisticated system of unequal regional interdependence. They functioned as the essential industrial engine of the region arming pastoralists to the east like Jie, Karamojong, and Bokora with high-grade spears (*Tong*) and equipping agrarian communities to the west (Acholi, Lango) with vital agricultural hoes (*Kwe*). This technological indispensable status transformed the Labwor Hills into a

protected, neutral commercial zone (*Cath*), insulating a demographically smaller minority from military conquest or cultural assimilation.

Finally, the Ethur demonstrated extraordinary adaptability during the colonial transition and post-independence eras. When cheap European scrap metal and administrative disarmaments disrupted the traditional furnace smelting economy in the early twentieth century, the community did not collapse into socio-economic uselessness. Instead, they strategically pivoted toward Western education, civil service, and commercial agriculture while retaining their core customary identity (*Athuko Ke' Ethur*). The landmark creation of Abim District in 2006 represents the logical historical culmination of a people who have, across a 140-year horizon, masterfully navigated their survival through technological innovation, diplomatic alternation, and regional indispensability.

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APENDICES

Appendix A: Research work plan

Table 2: Research Workplan

Activity	July 2025	Aug 2025	Nov 2025	Oct 2025	Nov 2025	Dec 2025	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar- 2026	April- 2026	May- Sept 2026
Idea, topic identification and synopsis writing											
Consultation and proposal writing											
Proof reading and printing draft copies of proposal											
Data collection											
Data entry and analysis											
Report writing and Submission of final report											
Defending the thesis to the department, viva voce, correction and submission											

Appendix B: Ethur Anthem

Rot Obanga go lao	mon ki cuo oru eyau	maku pur ki kwan na tek
tin ilobo Thur	me gwoko lobo Thur	me dongo lobo Thur
ek gum na megio	kun egango kuc na	ek lonyo omedere
ony ilobo wa	tye ikin wa	ilobo wa
ka gum ki mar na	kuc ki mar ki riborok	ka etio na tek ki ribo
megio ony iloboni	na bedo naka	cing pi lobo ni
lobo Thur bino	lobo Thur bino	Lobo Thur bino ryeny
cung na tek	cung na tek	natwal
		Lobo Thur bino ryeny
		natwal

GULU

P.O. BOX 166 GULU



UNIVERSITY

TEL: +256471432922;

**OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND
HUMANITIES**

19th September 2025

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Okengo Lazarous (Reg No. 24/U/0683/MAH/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Arts in History, Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

THE HISTORY OF THE THUR PEOPLE IN ABIM DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA:1985-2025

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to her in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

pp. A. Ofoyuru

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities



Appendix D: Consent Form

Title of Study: “*The History of Thur people in Abim District Northern Uganda: 1885 - 2025*”.

Purpose of the Study: This research aims to document the historical background, social structure, and cultural identity of the Thur people in Abim District. The study will use oral interviews, archival records, and participant observations to gather data from community members and elders.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in an interview that will last approximately 30 - 60 minutes.

Share your personal or community historical knowledge.

Allow the researcher to record the interview only audio, with your permission.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

There are no expected physical risks from participating in this study. The information you provide will contribute to the preservation and documentation of the Thur people's cultural history. You may also benefit by having your voice and knowledge included in a scholarly historical record.

Your identity will be kept confidential unless you agree to be quoted by name. All recordings and notes will be securely stored, and any publications resulting from this study will use pseudonyms unless you give written consent to be identified.

There will be no financial compensation for participation. However, refreshments or a token of appreciation may be provided where appropriate.

Consent

Statement:

I have read (or have had read to me) the information above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my participation. I voluntarily agree to participate.

☐ I agree to have the interview audio recorded.

☐ I do not agree to have the interview audio recorded.

☐ I give permission for my name to be used in research publications.

☐ I prefer to remain anonymous in any research publications.

Participant's Name:

Participant's Signature or Thumbprint: Date:

Researcher's Name:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Appendix E: Assent Form

Study Title: The History of the Thur People in Abim District, 1885–2025.

Principal Researcher: OKENGO LAZAROUS. Affiliation: GULU UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

My name is Okengo Lazarous, and I am a researcher. I am trying to learn more about the Ethur (Jo' Abwor) people and how they used to make iron tools in the Labwor Hills. I want to understand how your culture, like the Myel bul (drum dance) and the stories of your elders, is being passed down to you.

Purpose: You are being invited as a young member of the Ethur community to help preserve your history and clan traditions.

Procedure: Participation involves a 30–45 minutes recorded conversation in a safe location (like home or school) regarding your knowledge of Ethur culture and historical sites.

Voluntary Participation: Joining is completely optional. You can say "no" or stop at any time without anyone being angry, even if your parents or teachers have already given permission.

Privacy & Benefits: There is no risk of harm. Your identity will remain private, and your contribution helps ensure the Ethur story is accurately recorded for the future.

Contact: You can ask questions now, talk to your parents, or contact the researcher at 0788511840

SIGNATURE OF ASSENT

I have read this form (or someone has read it to me). I understand what I am being asked to do, and I agree to be part of this study.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT

I have explained this study to the participant in a language they understand (English/Lëb Thur). I have answered all their questions and ensured they understand they can stop at any time.

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: Research Questionnaire

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE: ARCHIVAL AND DOCUMENTARY DATA EXTRACTION SHEET

Study Title: The History of the Thur People in Abim District, 1885–2025

Purpose: To systematically locate, categorize, and extract specific historical data from written records to corroborate oral testimonies and establish a chronological framework.

Methodology Reference: Section 3.4.2 (Written Sources)

PART A: SOURCE METADATA (Structured Record Keeping)

Field	Entry
Extraction Date	
Archival Repository/Location (e.g., Uganda National Archives, Abim District HQs Registry)	
File/Box/Shelf Reference No. (Crucial for verification and future retrieval)	
Document Title/Description	
Document Date (Specific) (e.g., 10th February 1925; estimated date if unknown)	
Document Author/Sender (e.g., District Commissioner, Catholic Mission Head, Native Administration)	
Document Type (e.g., Annual Report, Intelligence Report, Correspondence, Diary Entry, Court Record)	

PART B: CONTENT SUMMARY AND THUR PEOPLE REFERENCE

Field	Entry
Total Pages/Length of Document	
Pages Referencing Thur People (Specifically) (List specific pages/folios where the Thur are mentioned)	
Primary Focus of Document (Briefly state the document's main subject, e.g., "Tax collection statistics in Karamoja," "Boundary disputes between Lango and Acholi.")	
Summary of Findings Relevant to Thur (Provide a concise paragraph summarizing what the document says about the Thur, their location, population, or activities during the documented period.)	

PART C: KEY THEMATIC DATA EXTRACTION

(Instructions: Identify and record specific quantitative or descriptive data points related to the study objectives)

Study Objective/Theme	Data Point Extracted	Page No.
1. Origins & Migration (First mention of Thur location/movement; geographical reference)		
2. Political Organisation (Names of specific traditional leaders/chiefs recognised by administration)		
3. Economic Activities (Data on crops, livestock numbers, trade goods, or tax payments)		
4. Inter-Community Relations (Reference to conflict or alliance with Jie, Bokora, Acholi, or Lango)		
5. Colonial Impact/Administration (Details on administrative imposition, boundary creation, or labor recruitment)		
6. Social/Cultural Practices (Mention of customary law, population figures, or religious/missionary contact)		

PART D: CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION NOTES

1. Chronological Marker: What specific dates or time periods does the document firmly establish for the Thur area, aiding in the historical timeline?

.....

2. Bias/Reliability Assessment: What apparent bias does the author hold (e.g., pro-administration, cultural prejudice)? How reliable do you rate this source for Thur history (High/Medium/Low)?

.....

3. Cross-Reference Note: Which oral interview theme or participant account does this document most strongly confirm or contradict?

.....

Appendix G: Research Interview Guide

A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (S-SIG)

Study Title: The History of the Thur People in Abim District, 1885–2025

Target Group: Key Informants (Elders, Clan Leaders, Ritual Custodians)

Methodology Reference: Section 3.4.1 (Oral Interview)

Goal: To obtain detailed, individual historical narratives and perspectives on governance and conflict.

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT

Good day. Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with me today. My name is *Okengo Lazarous*, and I am conducting a historical study on the history of the Thur people in Abim District. Your deep historical knowledge and memory are invaluable to this research. This is not a test; there are no right or wrong answers. Everything you share is important.

The interview is expected to take between 60-90 minutes. You have the right to skip any question or stop the interview at any point. All the information you provide will be kept confidential, and we will protect your identity using a pseudonym unless you expressly tell us otherwise. We plan to audio-record this session to ensure the accuracy of the transcription.

Do you understand the purpose of this study, and do you consent to participate and be recorded?"

(Confirmation of consent and recording start)

OBJECTIVE 1: TO TRACE THE ORIGIN OF THE THUR PEOPLE

Interview Questions:

1. Who are the Thur people?

2. Who is the Thur Hero-Ancestor?
3. Where did the Thur original from?
4. How did the name Thur come about?
5. What stories or oral traditions do elders share about the Thur migration?
6. Do you know any landmarks or places that are part of the Thur migration history?
7. What factors led the migration from their cradle land?
8. What factors influenced Thur people to settle in present-day Abim District?
9. Are there any songs, proverbs, or rituals that speak about the origins of the Thur?

OBJECTIVE 2: TO EXAMINE THE ORGANISATION OF THE THUR PEOPLE

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Political Organization.

1. How is Thur society politically organized?
2. Who were the traditional leaders among the Thur people?
3. How were these leaders chosen?
4. What roles do the clan leaders play in governing the community?
5. Were there any councils or assemblies that made decisions for the community?
6. How were laws and order maintained in the traditional Thur society?
7. How has the political leadership structure of the Thur changed over time.
 - a. During pre-colonial
 - b. Colonial
 - c. Post-independence period

Military organization

1. How was the military organized?

2. Who headed the military?
3. Who decided whether or not for the Thur to go to war?
4. What were the major causes of conflict?
5. How was internal and external conflict resolved among the Thur people?

Economic Organization

1. What were the main economic activities of the Thur people in the past?
2. What role did these economic activities play in the Thur economy? (livestock rearing, farming, Fishing, hunting, trade)

Revenue

1. What were the main source or form of traditional revenue (of taxation, tribute, or communal labor)?
2. How Were these traditional forms of taxation, tribute, or communal labor mobilized and managed?
3. How did the Thur view environmental resources such as land, vegetation, and water?
4. How did the Thur manage environmental resources such as land, vegetation, and water?

Disaster Management

1. How did the Thur people understand disaster?
2. What were the main disasters which occurred among the Thur?
3. How did the Thur people respond to natural calamities like drought, floods, famine, or illnesses?

Land rights and Management

1. How was land owned, used, or distributed among the community?
2. How did the Thur acquire, distribute, own and use land?

3. How land related issues managed among the Thur?
4. What rights did women have over land?
5. What influence did the women have over land?
6. Who determined land use among the Thur?
7. How did colonialism or government policies affect the economic practices of the Thur?

Social organization

1. How were families and clans organized among the Thur people?
2. What role did clan systems play in the daily life of the Thur community?
3. How were decisions made in the Thur community in the past?
4. What were the roles of the following in the traditional society?
 - a. Men
 - b. Women
 - c. Children
5. How were the following organized according in the Thur customs?
6. Marriages and divorce

Burials

1. How was law and order maintained in Thur society?
2. How were conflicts resolved within the Thur community?
3. How were social co-existence maintained between the elders and the young generations?
4. How were cultural values and social norms taught or passed down through generations?
5. What systems existed for helping the poor, the sick, or strangers in the community?
6. What was the Thur concept of the following?
 - a. Traditional religion
 - b. God and the gods

c. Spirits and living dead

1. How did the Thur perceive indigenous medicine and healing?

OBJECTIVE 3:

TO EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

Interview Questions:

a. Who are the traditional neighbours of the Thur people?

b. What kind of relationships existed between the Thur and their neighbours (e.g., trade, marriage, conflict)?

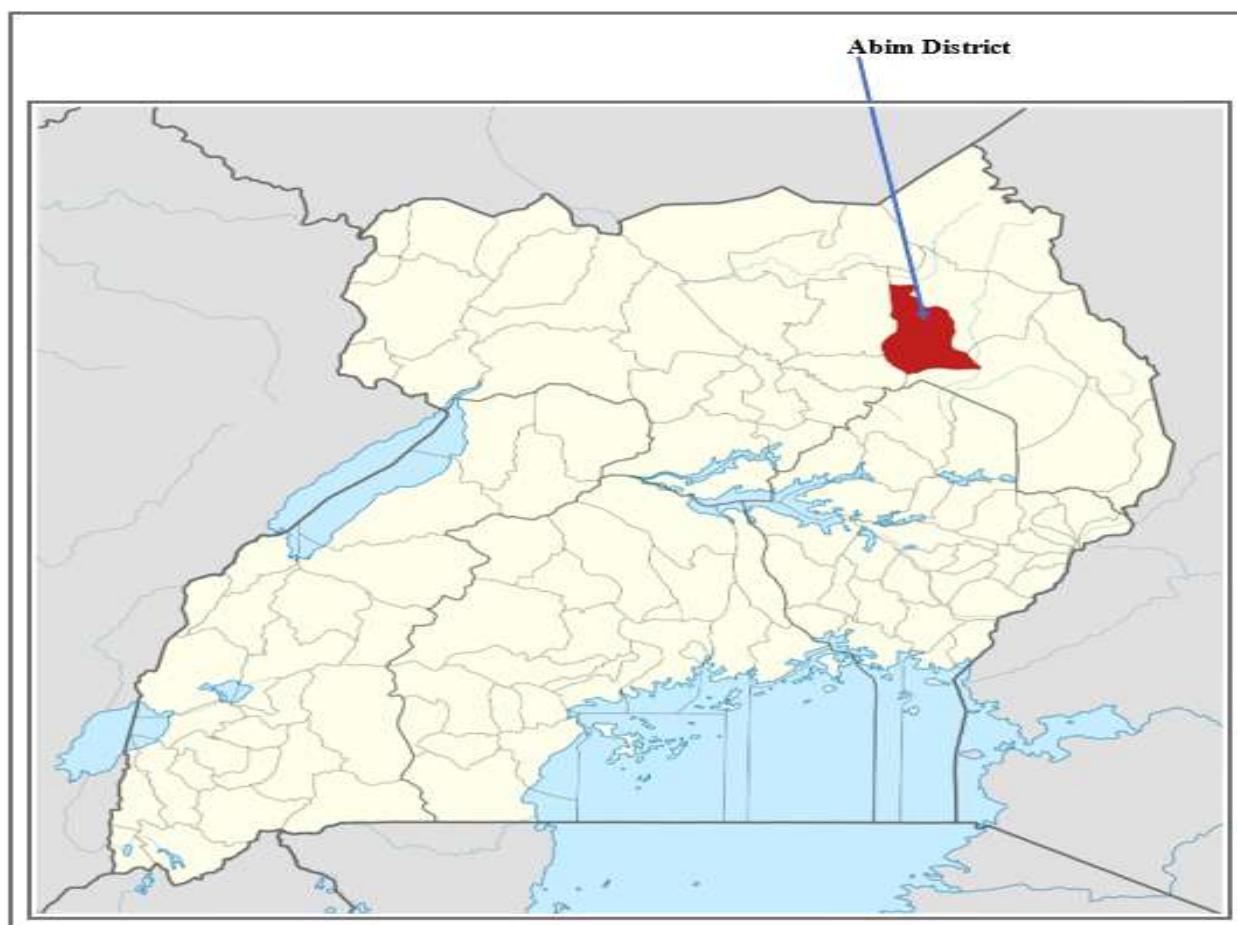
c. Have there been historical conflicts or alliances with neighbouring groups?

d. How did the Thur people handle disputes or issues with neighbouring communities?

e. Are there shared cultural practices or differences with nearby ethnic groups?

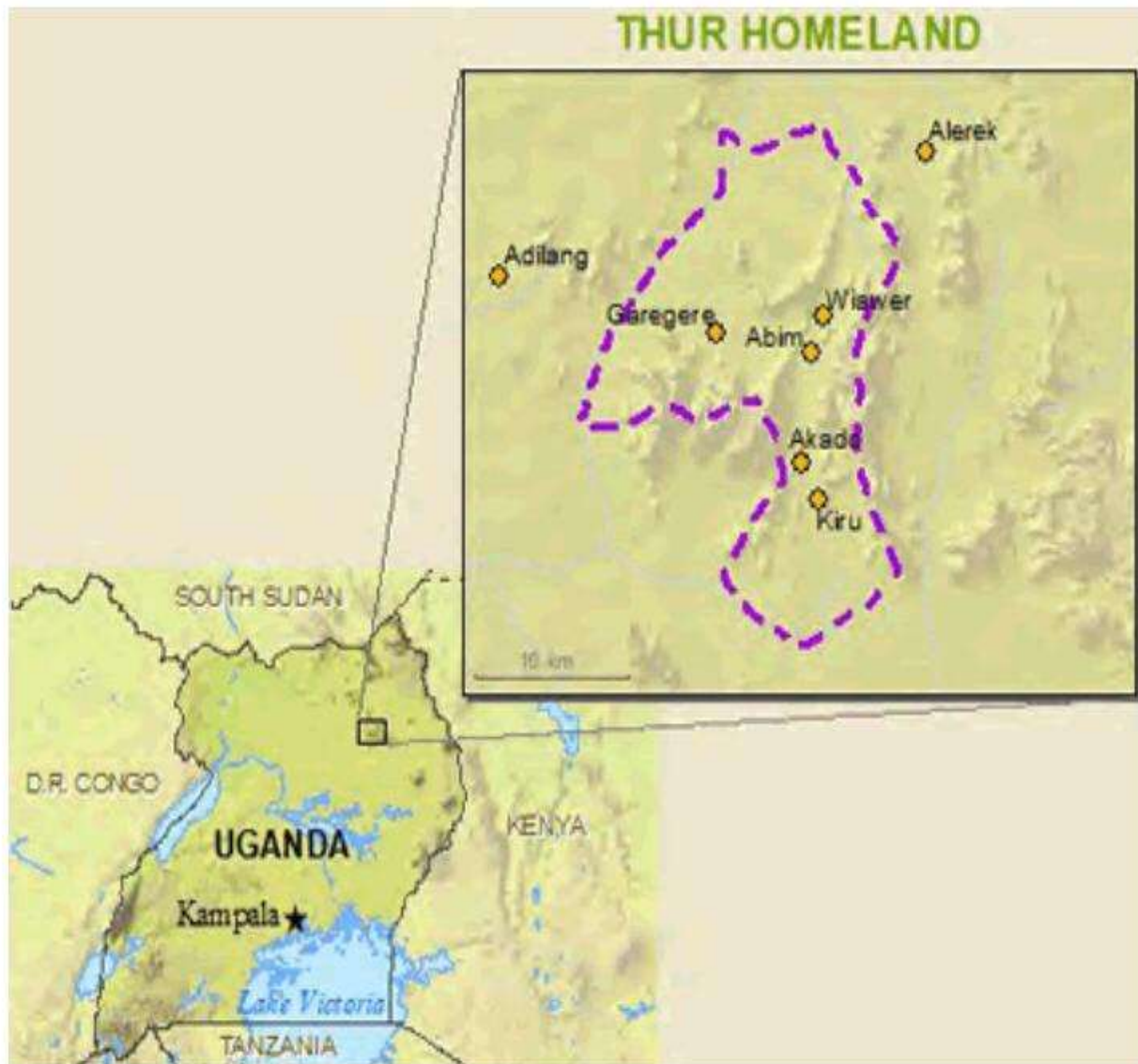
f. How have these inter-community relationships changed over the years?

Appendix H: A Sketch Map of Uganda showing the location of Abim District



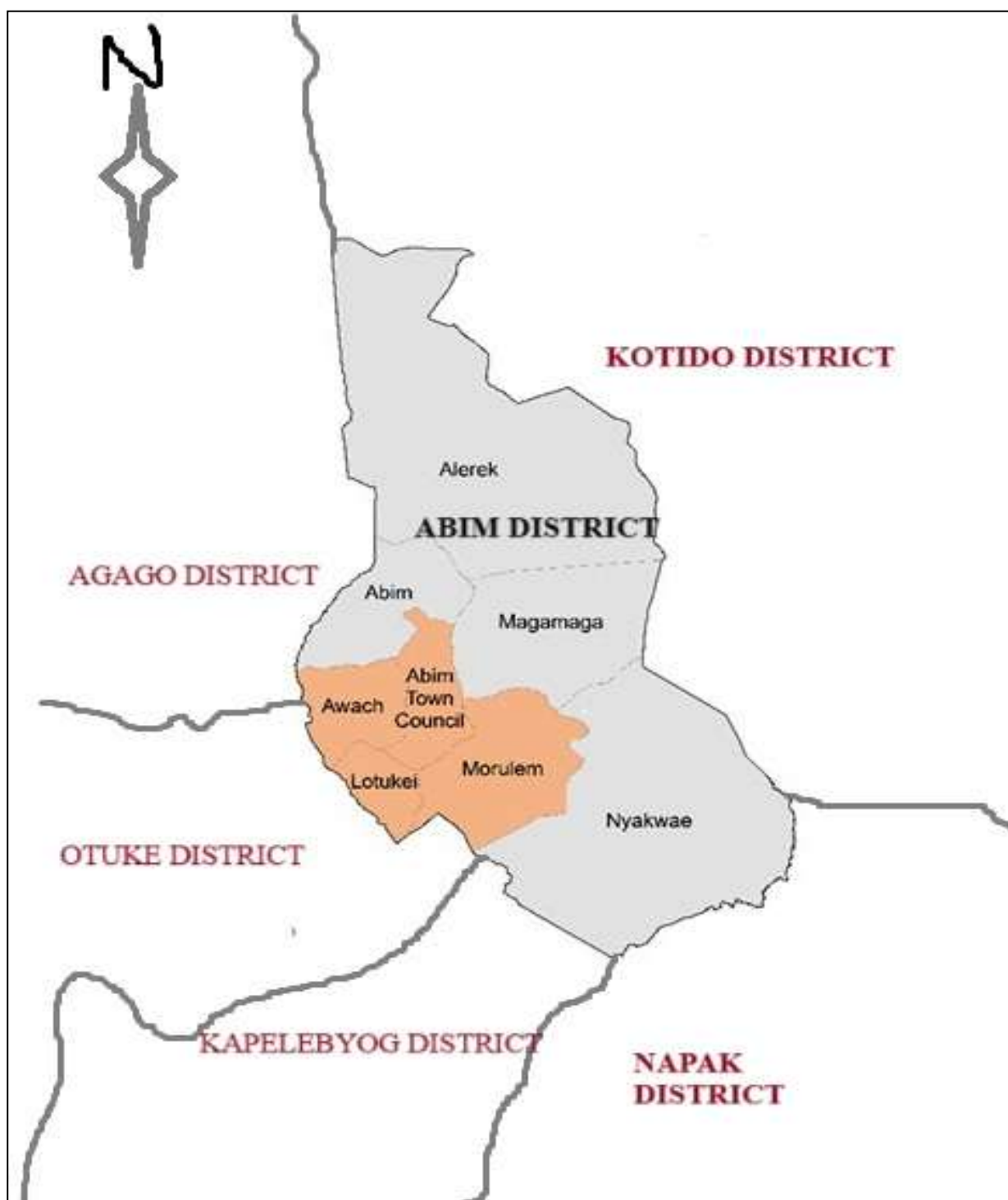
Source: Google maps, extracted on September, 2025

Appendix I: Map Showing Study Area



Source: Abim District Local Government

Appendix J: A Sketch Map of Abim District showing the Sub-counties and Town councils.



Source: Abim District Local Government

Appendix K: List of Participants

S/NO	NAME	AGE	DESIGNATION	VILLAGE	INTERVIEW DATE
1	Mr. Owilli Jeremiah Athwaniki	93	Peasant farmer	Obangangeo Nyikinyiki – Kiru Town council	22 nd December, 2025
2	Mr. Ocheng John Othii Alex	71	Kalanga clan secretary	Obolokome - Morulem subcounty	21 st July 2025
3	Mr. Ayen Jackson	85	Peasant farmer	Yenglemi -Abim subcounty	20 th July 2025
4	Mr. Owilli Moses Emojong	78	Peasant farmer	Obangangeo Tyen-olam Kiru Town council	20 th December 2025
5	Mr. Oyugi Benjamin Amos	99	Chief's advisor	Obangangeo North- Kiru Town council	21 st August 2025
6	Mr. Akori John	79	Ritualist in charge of pests and diseases	Oyaro central Kiru Town council	20 th July 2025
7	Mr. Odunge steven	90	Kuku clan head	Alula cell- Kiru Town council	19 th July 2025
8	Mr. Owili john	70	Kapuru clan head	Nyikinyiki North -Kiru Town council	23 rd August 2025
9	Mr. Okello Jimmy Charles	84	Adviser	Mission cell, Kiru Town council	20 th Sept 2025
10	Akullo Lucy	87	Adviser & women leader	Kapuru	21 st Sept 2025
11	Awilli Janet	74	Adviser	Karwoth	25 th Oct 2025
12	Apio Coney	80	Women leader	Karwoth	25 th Oct 2025
13	Oduch John	82	Land board CP	Koguth	25 th Oct 2025
15	Awilli Sofia	93	Adviser	Kajimo	21 st Sept 2025
16	Elisabeth Ochinge	70	Treasurer	Kapuru	21 st Sept 2025
17	Ogolla Simple	84	Secretary	Kapuru	20 th December 2025
18	Awino Anjelina	75	Women mobilizer	Kadoki clan	20 th December 2025

19	Naason Andrew Lorika	120	Adviser	Kowethangole	20 th December 2025
20	Awilli Matide	88	Women adviser	Aparanyun	22 nd December, 2025
21	Moding Johnson	74	Opinion leader	Kakuku	22 nd December, 2025
22	Othyang James	84	C/P for 3 Zone	Paibwor (Aribanya)	23 rd August 2025
23	Ochen James	68	Secretary finance	Kamola	23 rd August 2025
24	Owilli Charles	74	C/P Koguth & Kalakala	Koguth	
25	Okello Martine	86	Adviser	Kakuku	
26	Omara Paulino Kapel	58	Kacher Secretary	Yigul	21 st July 2025
27	Awilli Jivilia	87	Paibwor Elder & Adviser	Obolokome	22 nd July 2025
28	Omara Matia	75	Kacher C/person	Yigul	21 st July 2025
29	Owiny Lokoda	126	Ebar clan Elder	Obolokome	22 nd July 2025
30	Okuda Justine	81	Rwoth of Kacher clan	Yigul	21 st July 2025

Appendix L: Personal Interview List

1. Personal Interview. (2025, December). *Field Research on the History of the Church in Abim District*. Abim, Uganda.
2. Personal Interview. (2025, December). *Field Research on Clan Lineages and Missionary History in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.
3. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Oral Traditions on Ametho and the Genealogical Roots of the Ethur People in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.
4. Personal interview. (2025, December). *The Sociopolitical Significance of the Othem in Clan Governance in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.
5. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Living Memory: Survival Strategies during the 1980 Famine in Abim*. Abim District, Uganda.
6. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Historical Accounts of Territorial Wars between the Ethur and the Langi in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.
7. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Agrarian Practices and Indigenous Cuisines of the Jo'Abwor in Morulem*. Abim District, Uganda.
8. Personal interview. (2025, December). *The Evolution of Leadership: Profiles of the Traditional Leaders of Jo'Abwor in Awach*. Abim District, Uganda.
9. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Barter Systems and Regional Trade Relations with the Karimojong and Acholi in Alerek*. Abim District, Uganda.
10. Personal interview. (2025, December). *The Art of Theth: Iron Smelting and the Role of Blacksmiths in Ethur Economy in Morulem*. Abim District, Uganda.
11. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Traditional Mechanisms for Conflict Resolution between Enemies in Orwamuge*. Abim District, Uganda.
12. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Lyricism in Clan Identity: Analysis of 'Aryon Calo Owiyo' and Other Praise Songs in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.

13. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Didactic Philosophy: The Use of Proverbs in Ethur Moral Education in Abim*. Abim District, Uganda.
14. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Spiritual Jurisprudence: The Mechanics of Curses and the Process of Cleansing in Kanu*. Abim District, Uganda.
15. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Rites of Passage: Ritual Performances for Birth, Marriage, and Harvest in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.
16. Personal interview. (2025, December). *The Dual Realm: Understanding the Roles of the Ajwoga (Healer) and Adwar Piny (Diviner) in Alerek*. Abim District, Uganda.
17. Personal interview. (2025, December). *Social Policing through Music: The Use of Rebuke Songs against Theft and Deviant Behavior in Kiru*. Abim District, Uganda.

Appendix M: Chronological Synthesis of Ethur History

The historical trajectory of the Ethur people can be synthesized into four distinct transformative phases.

Phase I: The Foundational Migration (c. 1500 – 1650)

During this period, the ancestors of the Ethur or Jo'Abwor branched off from the main Western Nilotic migrations. As guided by the multidisciplinary insights of Cheikh Anta Diop, we see this as a strategic move to occupy the Labwor Hills which was a natural factory-fortress. This era established the Ethur not as a wandering group but as a settled industrial vanguard.

Phase II: The Industrial Monopoly (c. 1650 – 1890)

This era represents the peak of Ethur regional influence. As Jan Vansina argues, oral traditions regarding the *Ajwoogi* and the first blacksmith clans prove that this was a time of technological expansion. The Ethur became the Hardware Store of the North, using their monopoly on iron to create trade-friendships with the Jie and Karamojong.

Phase III: The Colonial Disruption and Adaptation (1890 – 1962)

Following Okot p'Bitek's "clash of cultures," this phase marks the arrival of the British and the influx of European scrap metal. At the verge of the decline of the Ethur traditional smelting, they demonstrated Ali Mazrui's "African Agency" by quickly pivoting toward formal education. Here, the pen replaced the bellows as the primary tool for community survival.

Phase IV: Administrative Autonomy and Rebirth (1962 – Present)

The post-independence era was defined by a struggle for visibility, culminating in the 2006 creation of Abim District. This modern era is characterized by a reclamation of identity, where the Ethur are no longer viewed as a peripheral minority but as a distinct administrative and cultural entity in Uganda.