

**SONGS OF SOLDIERS**  
**DECOLONIZING POLITICAL MEMORY THROUGH POETRY AND SONG**

by  
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## Abstract

In January 1979, a ship ferrying armed Ugandan exiles and members of the Tanzanian army sank on Lake Victoria. Up to three hundred people are believed to have died on that ship, at least one hundred and eleven of them Ugandan. There is no commemoration or social memory of the account. This event is uncanny, incomplete and yet is an insistent memory of the 1978-79 Liberation war, during which the ship sank. From interviews with Ugandan war veterans, and in the tradition of the Luo-speaking Acholi people of Uganda, I present *wer*, song or poetry, an already existing form of resistance and reclamation, as a decolonizing project. Drawing from political memory in postcolonial, African, Black, Indigenous and Diaspora studies, I argue that truth-telling, a fundamental aspect of reconciliation and restoration of justice among the Acholi, can be achieved through poetic expression. This dissertation extends the technical definition of Okot p'Bitek's Song school of poetry to include form and content and the space for social and political commentary in various voices and landscapes. The poet as historian, and the artist as ruler, both Okot p'Bitek's concepts, are illustrated through "Songs of Soldiers". This work is deeply rooted in displacement and the desire to return – continuing factors in where and how I think about and articulate myself.

## Lay Summary

This is a multidisciplinary research project using scholarship from Black, Indigenous, Diaspora and African studies examine how we remember and how we forget events from the past that might haunt us today. In 1979, a ship sank on Lake Victoria, with the loss of Ugandan exiles and members of the Tanzanian army forces en route to fight against Ugandan President Idi Amin who had invaded Tanzania. Not much is known or remembered about that event and it still remains somewhat enigmatic. Veterans from that war shared their memories and have helped to create a clearer understanding of what may have happened. Using *Wer*, a form of poetry and song from the Acholi tradition of northern Uganda, this project memorializes events like this one as a way to reconcile past wrongs and create conditions for peace after a history of war. This research project also establishes *Wer* as a way to think about decolonization and reconciliation.

## Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Juliane Okot Bitek.

My supervisory committee, Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, Dr. Erin Baines and Dr. Ashok Mathur oversaw the project, contributing to concept formation and to manuscript edits; however, unless otherwise stated, all other work described in this dissertation, from concept to completion, is entirely my own.

Ethics approval for fieldwork was granted through the University of British Columbia Behavioural Ethics Board (H14-02239, October 24, 2014) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST SS3707, February 26, 2015).

Extracts from “Song of Soldier” by my father, Okot p’Bitek, are included with permission of his estate, as follows: In Chapter 3, Section 3.4, poems 1-9. Lines aligned to the left-hand side of the page are by Okot p’Bitek, whereas the indented lines are written by me; lines by Okot p’Bitek are also included as a footnote on p. 90. In Chapter 4, Section 4.6, lines from “Song of Soldier” appear as footnotes on pp. 187, 192, 202, 206, 210, 211, 212, 215, 216, 221, 222, 230 and 232.

Chapter 2, Section 2.3 uses extracts from Hansard, June 1894, HC Deb 01 June 1894 vol 25 cc181-270, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1894/jun/01/class-v> to create erasure poems.

In Chapter 2, p. 81 the poem “Day 36” was published in my book *100 Days*. The University of Alberta Press (2016).

From Chapter 2, p. 61-70, a version of “Migration Salt Stories” was published in *Room Magazine*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, pp. 6-14.

From Chapter 3, a version of “What Choice between Nightmares: Intersecting Local, Global and Intimate Stories of Pain in Peacebuilding” is forthcoming in *Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies: Peacebuilding and the Arts*. Palgrave Macmillan.

“My Son is A Story”, attached as Appendix D, was published in *African Writers Online*, no 11, [www.african-writing.com/eleven/bitek.htm](http://www.african-writing.com/eleven/bitek.htm)

From Chapter 4, p. 154, a version of footnote 120 was published as “Ghost Poem” in the *Incompleteness Edition* <https://burninghousepress.com/2019/05/03/juliane-okot-bitek/> from Burning House Press, edited by Petero Kalule.

The PUNCH cartoon, “The Black Baby” on pp. 88, published in Punch Magazine April 4, 1894, is used under License from the Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive, May 11, 2018.

The cartoon, “By the way Obote, can you swim?” on p. 175, is used with permission of the British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent: 19467, Raymond Jackson (Jaks), *Evening Standard*, 19 January 1971.

All photographs were taken by me, except those on pp. 22 and pp. 233 which are from my family archives, used with permission.

The brief chronology of relevant events in Uganda on pp. 13-14 was prepared by me to provide a broad background context to this work and is not intended as a complete or comprehensive historical picture.

The schematic map on p. 58 and the graphic representation of my research journey on p. 126 were created in collaboration with Patrick O'Reilly.

The physical collection, collation and analysis of the interviews was done by me, with support from Patricia Apiyo for translation and transcription.

Additional notes: Acholi or Swahili words have been italicized but salutations, acronyms and geographic names have not. I have used a single upper case letter when referring to interviewees to protect their identity.

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## List of Abbreviations

APC	Armed Personnel Carriers
FEMRITE	Uganda Women Writers Association
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
KAR	King's Army Rifle
KM	Kikosi Maalum
KY	Kabaka Yekka Party
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NRM/A	National Resistance Movement/Army
SSLM	South Sudan Liberation Movement
SUM	Save Uganda Movement
UBC	University of British Columbia
UNLF	Uganda National Liberation Front
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
UPDM	Uganda People's Democratic Movement
WAN	Women's Advocacy Network
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

## Acknowledgements

Early in my doctoral program, I enrolled in a course: Historical Memory and Social Reconstruction taught by Pilar Riaño-Alcalá. I was exposed, for the first time, to the political relationship between memory, identity and the political. The teachings from that class inform everything I write since then. I am deeply grateful to Pilar for the privilege of that class, her brilliant teaching, her friendship and support. I would not know Pilar without Erin Baines who has been unfailingly generous, supportive and a brilliant example of a scholar with a heart – thank you, Erin, *apwoyo lamera*. My supervisory committee carried the faith that I could get this work done when I didn't have very much. Ashok Mathur, Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin have held me in a strong cast of friendship – thank you.

For food and drink, laughter and through many tears, and stories, I am grateful for the love, friendship and relationship with Fatima Jaffer, Veda Prashad, Omer Aijazi, Barbara Binns, Chrissie Arnold, Zucchini and Avocado, Sophia Malcewska, Sophie McCall, Cecily Nicholson, Peter Midgely, Asha Kaushal, Lara Rosenoff-Gauvin, Beth Stewart, Patricia Apiyo, Koju Kasera, Kalina Lawino, Fred Otolit, James Gifford, Joanne Ursino, Andrea Actis (Jesus Christ), Patrick O'Reilly, Seasmay Taylor (good God), Blake Smith, M. NourbeSe Philip, Phoebe Luwum, Sam Olara Okello, Erin Jessee, Phoebe Boswell, Kate Baggott, Anakana Schofield, Chris Dolan, Binyavanga Wainaina, John Paul Lederach, Ketty Anyeko, Tommy Sands – all with their families and the webs that sustain our relationships.

The field work for this dissertation was conducted with assistance from the Refugee Law Project in Kampala and Kitgum, and with support from various grants, including the Bottom Billion Fieldwork Grant from the Liu Institute for Global Issues in Vancouver.

In the field, I was supported by families and individuals who opened their homes to me.

In particular, I am grateful for the generosity of Jennifer Acan, the Obonyo family, Col.

Eriazali Oola, the Lalobo family, Langoya family, Nyero family and the Luwum family. Some

of the veterans who welcomed me in their homes and spaces did not want their names

publicly acknowledged. Their need for privacy does not take away from my deep

appreciation of their open heartedness; I remain deeply grateful to them. And for the deep

commitment and support of Patricia Apiyo for her translation, transcription, company and

care in Uganda.

In Tanzania, Musoma, a *matatu* tout led me by the hand when we arrived in Kigwa, and took

me to a restaurant where I could find a bite to eat. Then he made a couple of calls and took me

to the home of a man who remembered the Ugandans. Musoma represents the generosity of

spirit of Tanzanian people who welcomed me and took care of me. I don't know all their

names but I acknowledge their support. It was a gift to travel to Tanzania and not to have to

worry about anything but the steps of the Ugandans that I was tracing. *Asanteni sana*.

I have the deepest admiration, respect and love for my mother, Caroline Okot Bitek, for her

steady hand, devotion, constancy, her ability to hold us together and still share the best

stories. My siblings and wider family have remained close and seen me through this process.

My deep thanks and love to them for security of belonging, material support and memories

that abound. My late brother, Keny, keeps company: we see him in his children, and now

grandchildren. With deepest respect and heart to those who never returned, and those for

whom we nevertheless hold a space for their voices in our songs.

## Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of  
Toni Morrison and Okot p'Bitek

## Chapter 1: She Writes Dis Place, Dis Place, Dis Place, This Place and Dis place(d)

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Research on Location by the Gendered Body

Dis place, dis place and this place are how M. NourbeSe Philip delineates between location and the female body as relative to the patriarchal, racial and colonial in society (*Black* 251-85). Dis place refers to the genitals in the warnings that girls are given: don't let anyone touch you here in dis place; dis place is also Trinidad, where Philip was born and raised; in Canada where I live and write from, dis place is where Indigenous women go missing and are murdered, where Black people are both hyper-visible<sup>1</sup> and in-visible. Dis place is also here, a moment in time, a particular, a specific, a given, a spot in the river, and yet, undeniably, a part of a longer history.<sup>2</sup> Dis place(d) is diaspora, history and research; dis place(d) is how I have come to understand untethered (in dis place) as a way of being a Black woman, a "freshwater Canadian" (Philip "Black W(h)ole" 125) of the African diaspora and as the daughter of exiles.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter "Of Whom We Have too Many: Black Life and Body Regulation" in her 2017 book *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*, Robin Maynard quotes the first Canadian Prime Minister John A. MacDonald's reference to Black people in 1868 as rapists "[...] of whom we have too many" and dedicates a chapter named for this quote to define Black people as an "unwanted population" (159). Almost a hundred years later in *Transition: Writing Black Canadas*, poet and scholar M. NourbeSe Philip writes an essay sparked by a white man's angry dismissal of her apology for brushing against him with "You fucking people are all over the place" in "Black W(h)oles: A History of Brief Time" (118). My location in Canada is complicated by race and gender but also by the history and present of this country; but as Rinaldo Walcott notes, being Black in Canada "is not one thing. It is multiple relations to the nation state. It is multiple points of arrival. It's a set of different histories" (51). I'm grateful to Walcott's thinking because he does not conflate the Black experience, and more, he echoes Frantz Fanon's insight "I am the slave [...] of my own appearance" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 116). "What coheres," Walcott says, "is Black" (51).

<sup>2</sup> I wish to acknowledge the work of Indigenous scholars and artists who "affirm Indigenous experience, presence and possibility," as Daniel Heath Justice writes in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (208). This is a valuable lens for myself as I study the effects of the colonial experience on my own people.



Research as a dis place(d) person is a long exercise in uncovering and laying bare the long and desperate need I have had to belong and to be rooted. I live and work on the Indigenous lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people in Vancouver, Canada. As is custom, it is proper to acknowledge the lands on which one lives – the other part of the acknowledgement being that where one comes from is narrated and presented as well. I was born to exiled parents, spent my formative years in Kenya where I was born and spent most of my teenage years in Uganda. Returning to Uganda for my parents, was returning home, while for those of us who were born outside, it was but a first turn towards an ancestral home.

I begin with Gulu, to acknowledge the ancestral home of my parents as the place where I am rooted. My first visit to Gulu was as a child, on the occasion of my father's death in July 1982. Later that year, when the last funeral rites were held in Gulu, we returned again to the hot and dusty landscape, where people who looked just like us danced and sang and laughed. Funeral rites, being in part, a celebration of life, was a joyous occasion for us children who were not deeply involved in serious adult conversation about inheritance and property rights. It was at my father's funeral (and subsequent funeral rites) that I first recognized, and was recognized as belonging to, a family that was rooted in a clan, on the land, by blood and in the faces of various people, some of whom had stories about who and how we were here, in that place.

When my brother, Keny, died in 1984, barely two years after our father's death in 1982, my family gathered again together to bury him at our father's home. Since that awful event, we

became scattered and dis placed by the war(s), in death and through migration – our entire family has never been able to gather together again.

My brother appears, speaks and haunts my dissertation, as my father does, to remind us that memory binds us, even as time and space scatters us across the globe. I am grateful for their constant company and contribution to this work. I would be remiss if I did not recognize kin and relations that have sustained me through this process and contributed in ways that continue to reveal themselves.

The space in dis place(ment) allows for people, places and times that I was in place, belonged and had space to think and write and be. I am grateful to all dis place(s).

I acknowledge dis place(ment) as a feature of scattering, as part of the unfinished and unfinishing process of diaspora – a scattering that affects and informs how I live, think and do research.

To acknowledge the gratitude I feel in my ability to live and work on the lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people is also to acknowledge the ongoing colonial violence on these lands that continues to scatter families and uproot people from their land. To write from these lands does more than situate me. To read, think with and form relations with artists and scholars from these lands is a position of utmost privilege. Colonization, war, genocide, residential schools, missing and murdered children, women and girls, globalization and decolonization continue to define the ways we live here on these lands, as well as in the lands of my ancestors. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, artist and scholar Leanne

Betasamosake Simpson shares the teaching of her people on situating the present in a long history that had already been envisioned by Indigenous thinkers in the past and now appears as prophecy. In this thinking, colonialism is part of a long history. “[R]esistance and resurgence are not only our responsibility to colonialism, they are our only responsibility in the face of colonialism. Resurgence is our original instruction” (66).

For me, the lesson is threefold: I think about resistance in this dissertation through form; I think about responsibility and resurgence – to write to, of and about the beneficiaries of this dissertation inside a relationship of respect; to recognize spaces of solidarity and recognition in Indigenous teaching – Acholi and Nishnaabeg teachings and traditions that focus on the possibility of return to a space of harmony,<sup>3</sup> or as Simpson writes, “Indigenous principles of peace, justice and righteousness as embodied in *mino bimaadiziwin*” (67).

I do this work in the gendered body of a woman working with and thinking primarily with men who told me their stories of war, exile and the im/possibilities of return. Dis place that marks me as a woman also marks me as a person to be honoured and respected as I am. Dis place, marked by painful histories here and in my ancestral homelands, is also a place of reclamation and pride. This gendered body was and is enough to do this work; and this

---

<sup>3</sup> “Space of harmony” is a term that Acholi Prime Minister Ambrose Olaa repeatedly used in a lecture he gave to contextualize Acholi philosophy in thinking about transformative memory in post-war northern Uganda. This lecture was given at a gathering of the Transformative Memory Project International Exchange May 21, 2019 in Ker Kwaro Acholi, Gulu. One of my interlocutors uses the phrase “to return to the pre-dispute era.” Reconciliation and forgiveness are similar terms that gesture towards Acholi occupation of reaching beyond the present and towards a peaceful way of being. Analogously, resurgence among the Nishnaabeg people, as Simpson writes, is the “original instruction” (66) a way of being that seeks to return to a place of social and individual well-being. A storyteller from Kitgum echoes Simpson’s words in Sverker Finnstrom’s *Living With Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. “Peace must be built on the restoration of lost relationships,” he is quoted as saying (50). Lost relationships can only be restored if there is a mechanism for it, hence the ready possibility whenever a conflict arises.

work, is rooted in *wer*, song, a space from which discourse on reconciliation and justice in post-war northern Uganda can be held.

I begin with a series of reflections on the concept of homelands as spaces to think and write from as well as spaces of relation-making, recognition and disjuncture. These are homelands as dis places, and as spaces of displacement. These are homelands with histories that inform and define this research.

## 1.2 Antecedent, or a Brief Historical Background

On October 9, 1978, which was the twenty sixth Independence Day of Uganda, President General Idi Amin attacked Tanzania in an attempt to annex the Kagera Salient, a strip of land that follows the Kagera River from the mountains of Rwanda through northern Tanzania and into Lake Victoria. This tense situation was the spark that was needed for Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere to mobilize his forces, along with thousands of Ugandan exiles who had lived in hope of this day, having fled from Uganda in January 1971 when Amin overthrew the government of Milton Obote. At least two futile attempts had been made to overthrow Amin: one as early as in the first week after Amin had taken power, when Tanzania and Somalia had colluded to send joint forces through the Kagera Salient (Avirgan and Honey 34); the second, the botched September 1972 attempt (Museveni 56-71; Mutibwa 97-100; Kiwanuka 138).

By October of 1972 the Ugandan and Tanzanian governments came together to sign a peace agreement brokered by the Somali government in Mogadishu. The October 8, 1972 edition of *The New York Times* in the article “Tanzania, Uganda agree to end strife” quotes the agreement as stating that “[t]he Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania have agreed to end all hostilities between them and restore peace and cement the fraternal ties that have always existed among their people” (*New York Times*).

However, in the six years following the signing of the Mogadishu Agreement tensions between the two countries came to a head. Since the beginning of Amin’s regime, thousands of Ugandans had been killed or had gone into exile, many of them fleeing

through the eastern, northern and southern borders of Uganda to Sudan (now South Sudan), Kenya and Tanzania to settle with their families (those who had that privilege), or as individuals in communities or collectively in camps. In the early months of Idi Amin's regime, there had been violent purges of Luo speaking Acholi and Lango soldiers from the Ugandan army. In 1971 at least 620 people had been killed in a massacre at Mutukula (Otunnu 113). Another massacre took place in July 1972 in Mutukula prison where 520 soldiers, most of them Acholi and Langi by ethnicity, were killed, leaving only twenty three survivors.<sup>4</sup> Most of these survivors fled to Tanzania.

In the fall of 2014, I conducted a series of interviews in Britain and Uganda with Ugandan veterans of the 1978-79 Liberation War and later in 2016 I spent some time tracing the steps and stories that I had heard from them. One of the veterans I interviewed described his experience of Amin's purges against the Acholi as follows:

Primarily, the target was Acholi and in some cases it was really instant over the way Acholi were singled out in bunches. Particularly, they picked them up, you know, the roll calls<sup>5</sup> were called. By the time the roll calls were called they started separating who is who instantly so some were shot from there. Some were driven. Some were slaughtered like chicken but the majority of cases were shot. [...] So [Amin] started off within barracks very intensely and then spread out to the rest of Uganda. And I'm assuming much in some cases, the prominent ones in Buganda, or elsewhere were picked up in the early

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<sup>4</sup> A survivor account underscores the terrible betrayal of numbers and single sentence accounts of such events. Please see Tobbias Jolly Owiny's "Mutukula Massacre Survivor Akena Narrates Ordeal" in *The Daily Monitor* (January 6, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> In Uganda, as in many places, people's names are often markers of ethnicity, so a roll call would be an effective way of singling out the Acholi and Lango soldiers.

70s. In most cases, the rest of Uganda started realizing, or taking seriously what was really happening by maybe 1974/75. That is when it started but we were already deep in it [...]we know in a village you find [that] out of ten homes maybe five lost somebody in that period, you know. Because the soldiers would simply turn up in a truck. These three tonners, they were called three tonners [...]you know, if they came to your home, your compound, started digging up, took the coffin and put the coffin down and without you, the family even getting to see what was inside. That is, if you're lucky. The majority of bodies were never brought back.

The two Mutukula massacres were not the only ones that targeted Acholi and Langi soldiers in the early days of Amin's regime. Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey quote estimations of between 5,000 to 6,000 people, mostly soldiers, mostly Acholi and Langi, killed between May and July 1971 (31). As well as terrorizing the population from which these soldiers hailed, one of the consequences of these massacres was that thousands of exiled Ugandans were recruited and readily joined the efforts of exiles abroad who intended to return and overthrow the Amin government.

Of those who left through the northern border most were successful and were later recruited, but on the evening of April 16, 1971, in Lokung, near the border with South Sudan (then Sudan), Okumu Abdon, a witness, writes<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup> Abdon Okumu, a retired teacher and witness, gave me a written copy of his testimony. It is reproduced in Appendix C, with permission.

Four armed personnel carriers (APC) and two big lorries arrived in Lokung Ngom Lac Primary School [...] Amin's soldiers packed and threw the captives into the two classrooms [...] The movement of taking captives to Corner Ogwech from Ngom Lac Primary School continued until 17<sup>th</sup> of April and the series of gunshots were still persisting [...].

Over four hundred people are believed to have been killed over those two days. Abdon, who shared his testimony, both written and spoken, had been invited to provide testimony of his witnessing in Gulu High Court along with Ocen Macimino and Jekerani Pacoto between October 27 and October 31, 1983, and then again in 1986 to the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Several of the veterans I spoke with remembered this event and spoke to it without prompt from me.

Those who made it through the border into Sudan (now South Sudan) were based at a camp in Owiny ki Bul where Captain Bazilio Olara Okello, the camp commandant, had set up a

[...] training camp to train other Ugandans escaping from Amin's reign of terror with assistance from the government of Sudan. However, following the Addis Ababa peace agreement<sup>7</sup> between Anyanya guerrillas and President Jaffer Nimeiry in 1972, the Ugandan exiles were ordered out of Sudan.

*(Celebrating the Life of Lt. Gen Bazilio Olara Okello 25)*

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<sup>7</sup> The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement was signed on February 27, 1972, ending conflict between the rebel Anyanya and the government of Sudan. Among the items that were agreed on was that the Southern Region would be semi-autonomous region with its capital in Juba, recognition of the cultural and religious differences of the north and south and a significant presence of people from South Sudan in the People's Army (Shinn 242-43). In 1983, the Addis Ababa agreement collapsed when, among other things, President Nimeiry instituted Sharia Law in the Southern Region and tried to re-divide the borders (Shinn 254). The history of South Sudan has had a long relationship with the history of Uganda. After the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972, Jaffer Nimeiry, uninvited Milton Obote who had been living in exile in Khartoum. Subsequently, the Ugandans in Owiny ki Bul had to leave the country.



The Ugandan exiles were bused to Khartoum and then taken by rail to Port Sudan where they were loaded on to a ferry headed for Tanga in Tanzania. One veteran spoke about the long journey (he cannot remember how many days it took), recalls the ship stalling, breaking down while at sea and having to wait for repair work. He (and others) also recall that there was illness on the ship and some men died and were buried at sea. After a brief stay to recuperate in Handeni, veterans recall that they were transported to a deserted training camp<sup>8</sup> near Tabora which grew into Kigwa town.

According to the veterans I spoke with, about three hundred men originally settled in Kigwa with assistance from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. While in Kigwa, a young man took me around to the now abandoned church where the exiles used to pray. I was also taken to Kampala road, showing me how the Ugandan exiles had re-mapped the heart of Tanzania with place names from their home country: Mbarara, Mbale, Tororo, Gulu and Kitgum; whole neighbourhoods, named after Ugandan towns, were pointed out to me by the young guide who wanted me to know that just like in Uganda, the people from different regions lived in their own 'towns'. Eventually, the claim is that there were more than eight hundred Ugandan men living in Kigwa, some with families, having married local Tanzanian women.

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<sup>8</sup> Settled by Ugandans in 1972 with assistance of the UNHRC, Kigwa would grow into a town with a population 396,000 (2018 census). Avirgan and Honey refer to Kigwa as "the Tabora refugee camp" (73).



**Figure 1. Interior of abandoned church Kigwa built by Uganda exiles.**



**Figure 2. The red mud on Kampala Road in Kigwa after rain.**

The Ugandans established new lives, clearing the forest around them and making charcoal for sale in Tabora. Eventually, they started to practice subsistence farming and grew sweet potatoes, tobacco, cassava, vegetables, groundnuts, sorghum and other food crops. A veteran told me:

People farmed and their crops would give good yield. The Tanzanians worked with us [...] We would plant cotton. We would pour water into the tobacco and the tobacco would grow. Then we would get sticks and place the

tobacco one by one. Then we would put sticks in all of them and then the tobacco would grow and we would roast it. We would cook it and sell it in town Tabora. Charcoal was the same story. The charcoal would be brought to town. Even when maize was ready, all would be taken. There crops would grow so well. Gigirango could dig. He could really dig..." (Unattributed at the request of the veteran.)

For about five years, the Ugandans in Tanzania settled into a lull, eking out a subsistence living. In February 1977, Archbishop Janani Luwum along with government Ministers Oboth-Ofumbi and Erinayo Oryema, were assassinated and the Ugandans who had settled into a sedentary life were galvanized into thinking and planning about returning to Uganda. Many veterans remarked that the news of February 16, 1977, the day of the assassination, marked a turning point for them and they began to train for military action. So when Amin attacked Tanzania on October 9, 1978 and claimed the Kagera Salient for Uganda, the exiles were primed and ready to join the Tanzanian army. For the Ugandans, this experience would be known as the Liberation War; for the Tanzanians, this was the Kagera war.

1866	John Speke “discovers” the source of River Nile at Jinja.
1855	General Charles Gordon killed in the fall of Khartoum to the Mahdi fighters in Sudan. At St. Paul’s Cathedral, the crypt of Gordon reads: “He saved an empire with his warlike genius. He ruled vast provinces with justice wisdom and power. And lastly, obedient to his sovereign’s command, he died in the heroic attempt to save men, women and children from imminent and deadly peril”. (It was stunning to stand in front this tomb and see how the soldier, the religious leaders and royalty spend eternity in the same space).
1894	Gerald Portal raised the Union Jack at Mengo, the capital of the kingdom of Buganda, in April 1893 in a provisional act to declare Uganda a protectorate. It would become a formal proclamation in June 1894.
1896	Busoga and Bunyoro are folded into the Uganda Protectorate.
1899	Kabarega of Bunyoro, Kabaka Mwanga captured by the British and sent into exile.
1900	The signing of the Buganda Agreement which would formalize the relationship of the British Government and its “rights and responsibilities” over Uganda.
1911	The Lamogi rebellion took place at Guru Guru hills in Payira. The rebellion arose because the Acholi resisted British demands that they register their guns. The rebellion was finally quelled through the use of chemical gas that killed hundreds of Payira fighters.
1914-18	WW1: 30,000 Africans from Uganda in King’s African Rifles and 178,000 carriers participated in the war (Otunnu xvi).
1939-45	WW2: 77,000 Africans from Uganda participated in the war (Otunnu xvii).
1950s	Agitation for independence. Uganda National Congress which would eventually become the Uganda People’s Congress formed in 1952. Kabaka Mutesa II is deported to Britain. The Kabaka was opposed to the idea of federation in East Africa and the British tried to turn his hand by revoking the Buganda Agreement. He rejected it anyway and was deported. After a series of negotiations, he returned in 1955.
1962	Independence day October 1962. First president of Uganda, also the Kabaka of Buganda is Sir Edward Mutesa. Milton Obote holds the position of first prime minister of Uganda.
1966	The Uganda Constitution crisis leads to the burning of Lubiri and the exile of Kabaka Mutesa II for the second time. He would die in exile in 1969.
1968	Okot p’Bitek sent into exile on account of his book, <i>Song of Lawino</i> . Idi Amin promoted from Brigadier to Major-General (Otunnu xviii).
1969	December 19. Milton Obote survives an assassination attempt on his life.
1970	January 25. Assassination of Brigadier Pierino Okoya and his wife Anna Akello in Gulu. Idi Amin implicated.

**Figure 3. A brief chronology of relevant events in Uganda 1866-1970.**

1971	On the first anniversary of the death of Okoya, Idi Amin overthrows the government of Milton Obote who is at the Commonwealth conference in Singapore. Army purges of Acholi and Lango soldiers.
1971	Remains of Kabaka Mutesa II returned to Uganda from Britain for burial.
1971	April 16-18. First Lokung massacre near Ngom Lac Primary School. About 417 people are believed to have died there.
1972	September. Botched attempts to overthrow the government of Idi Amin results in the deaths of hundreds of Ugandan exiles in Mutukula (Kyemba 57-59).
1977	April 16. Assassination of Archbishop Janani Luwum along with government ministers Oboth-Ofumbi and Erinayo Oryema.
1978	October 9. Idi Amin attacks Tanzania, claiming the Kagera Salient for Uganda and sparking a joint effort between the Tanzanian army and the Ugandan exiles to fight against Amin.
1979	Moshi conference of Ugandan organizations abroad and the formation of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). The participants of the Moshi conference included representatives of Museveni's Front for National salvation (FRONASA), Save Uganda Movement (SUM) led by Ateker Ejalu Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) led by Godfrey Binaisa, Kikosi Maalum (KM) led by Milton Obote. Obote did not attend the conference in person. The government of Idi Amin was overthrown on April 11.
1980	December 10-11. Elections in Uganda. Obote claims victory.
1981	Yoweri Museveni goes to the bush to fight against the election outcome. On February 6 at Tarehe Sita, the first attack led by Museveni at Kabamba. The date would later be declared NRM Liberation Day in Uganda.
1985	July 27. The government of Obote II is overthrown by General Tito Okello and Brigadier Bazilio Olara Okello. The Nairobi Peace Talks are held in an attempt to bring the warring factions to the table. A peace agreement is signed on December 17.
1986	January 25. Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Army overthrow the Okello and Okello government.
1986	Resistance begins to build against the Museveni government in northern Uganda.
1987	The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is formed and begins to fight the Museveni government.
1997	January 12-17. The second Lokung massacre. Up to 412 civilians in Lokung and Palabek sub counties were killed by armed attackers. According to Gersony, they were knifed, clubbed and hacked to death by unknown persons. ("The Anguish of Northern Uganda" 128).
1987 - 97	In the decade between the formation of the LRA and the second Lokung massacre, an untold number of Ugandans died, were kidnapped or maimed in the violence of the war between the government of Uganda and the LRA.  Timelines do not do justice to the losses of life and property and the enduring time before, during and after the second Lokung massacre.

**Figure 4. A brief chronology of relevant events in Uganda 1971-1997**

### 1.3 Homeland as Introduction

These following reflections unpack the term “homeland” – what it means to me, how it determines how I live and think and be in the world. The homeland is not a specific idea or place. The homeland is where I come from, a reservoir of complication, the location of myself, not only the place from which I think and write, but where I imagine that I can be. The homeland is a psychological space or also a physical space. My friend, Barbara Binns, reminds me that one does not need to be in a place to be rooted.<sup>9</sup> Homeland can be both rooted and uprootedness; it is as intangible and real as any space of belonging and exclusion. Homeland is where I write of, and where I go in my head; homeland is context.

In this first homeland, I consider the context in which and from which this project is borne. What senses are evoked and articulated by being here? What does listening entail? What can I know by doing this work in this place? Tina Campt’s haptic theory, alongside Christina Sharpe’s invocation of aspiration<sup>10</sup> as breath and hope, are conditional for this work.

Tina Campt, in the introduction to *Listening to Images*, delineates between the quiet and the quotidian, in order to tease out what we must pay attention to, and how to register for the haptic experience. Campt’s theory of the haptic, like Sharpe’s wake theory, allows us to imagine a possibility beyond the histories that have come to define us. To be aware of the “expressiveness of quiet, the generative dimensions of stasis, and the quotidian

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<sup>9</sup> Personal conversation. June 5, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> From *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (130). I have previously used this quote to inspire a poem “Aspirations” that was published in *The Capilano Review*. In that work, a collaboration between me and Lucia Lorenzi, we reflect on the scholarship and art of Black intellectuals Dionne Brand and Christina Sharpe during their visit to Vancouver, a place where the Black body is at once invisible and hyper-visible.

reclamations of interiority, dignity and refusal” (11) means that how I feel, the affective responses from the environment and everything else outside of ‘the story’ is the story, too, and so I must learn to listen for resonances beyond the aural.

I map the history that leads to the 1979 sinking of the ship on Lake Victoria which is the event through which this dissertation is filtered. I reflect on present portals<sup>11</sup> and thresholds as spaces through which to think about the idea of Uganda as nation, state and space to belong, even as it is narrated through history, defined in a curse, imagined in foreign lands as opportunity and responsibility, and presented in the contemporary form as defining identity and belonging.

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<sup>11</sup> I use Peter Morin and Ayumi Goto’s concept of portals as spaces from which the work of witnessing, ritual and acknowledgement can change how we live in the present, even with difficult histories. In their *Hair* performance (at Thompson Rivers University, 2013) Goto and Morin think about Morin’s body as scissors that cut the hair of residential school children; Goto’s hair cutting ritual as a conjuring of ancestors; and singer Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s lullabies as soothing – all necessary spaces from which the audience can access the meaning of the performance as a return to a place of play and innocence, a place that was forcefully taken away at the Canadian residential school (referenced in Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall’s edited collection *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation* 174-84). Portals, then, are spaces through which we can access a story, experience or memory.

#### **1.4 Homeland: Origins at Seventeen**

I remember becoming aware of the porous relationship between life, death and politics in the news story about a monk who had immolated himself in protest. I was a girl, then.

A monk, I understood at the time, was a person who had committed life to the study and practice of religion. The image in my mind is of a man in orange robes, engulfed in flames.

My father tried to explain that immolation was a political act, not suicide. I later came to understand the distinction in another shocking news story, this one relayed over the BBC.

Bobby Sands, a political prisoner had gone on a hunger strike and died in May 1981

“On purpose?” I’d asked my father, incredulous that anyone could choose to die in pain for something they strongly believed in. I knew about the Christ, since we were church-going children, but that Biblical story, like others, belonged in mythical realm, entertaining and awesome and not to be questioned. “Oh, yes,” my father assured me. A year after this conversation, my father himself would be dead from stroke. And before the 1980s would round out into a new decade, I would have an encounter with my dead father in a moment that would take thirty years to reveal itself.

At age seventeen, I was laid low by an intense fever that had me in bed for days. I was in high school, between school terms and on holiday with my mother in Nairobi. I lay in bed in an in-between state, not quite awake nor asleep. A man walked into my room, through the closed door, stood by the bed and lifted his right arm with jerky movements. I was spellbound, didn’t think to scream or ask who he was. I watched as the machete he was holding came down, still in stiff moves. Another man walked in through the still-closed door. It was my father. He walked in gracefully, fluidly, silently and stood by the man. He did not speak to me but he held the other man by the elbow and guided him away.



Three decades later, I am steeped in work driven by in-between-ness, by haunting<sup>12</sup> and the presence of my father. This old dream reveals itself like an analogy, guiding me, pulling me in and hauling me back. It reminds me of the presence of the deceased and the importance of their voices in crafting who, when and where we are. I'm also reminded that the dead need to be taken care of, to be listened to and their presence acknowledged.

Three decades later, I live in Canada and I identify and am identified as a Black woman. I seek a community, to belong, and am introduced to work of Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, M. NourbeSe Philip, Toni Morrison, Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, all contemporary scholars whose work is steeped in the legacy of slavery and colonialism in the Americas and also in the political and care<sup>13</sup> work involved in maintaining Black presence and voice. For these writers, all Black women, citizenship and belonging is inextricable from their lived experiences with racism and the legacy of slavery on the North American continent. This community of Black women writers guides me in thinking about my own location here in Canada as I wrestle with the effects of slavery, colonialism and post-colonialism in understanding the story of a sunken ship and my role as the teller of this story that drives my doctoral research.

In 2014, I embarked on fieldwork that would take me to Uganda, Britain and Tanzania. Over two years, I sought people who might remember a story of a ship that sank on Lake Victoria in 1979 with more than 100 Ugandan soldiers on board, a memory that is not part

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<sup>12</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip defines a "work of haunting" as one "where the spectres of the undead make themselves present" (*Zong!* 201). I am constantly reminded of the presence of my brother, my father and others I don't know.

<sup>13</sup> For Christina Sharpe, care work is an ethic that requires taking note of the weather and ourselves through "repair, maintenance, attention [...] an ordinary note" (131-34).

of the historical narrative or social memory in Uganda. Each person I interviewed told me something about my family: I went to high school with your sister. I met your father. I know your mother. I visited your home when you were a little girl. I read your father's books. I knew your brother.

First, I understood these to be part of the privilege of coming from a well-known family, of having a famous father. I reflected on the relative ease of access I had to interviews because people recognized my last name. My father was a poet who spent over a decade in exile as a result of his work. I was born in exile and had no appreciation for just how much people admired my father, so when one of the people I interviewed in Gulu in 2015 told me that my brother was in the 1979 Liberation War to overthrow Amin's dictatorship, I thought perhaps he was confusing my brother for someone else. Apicu, he told me, was the code name we gave to the son of the poet.

However, I knew for a fact that Keny, my brother, had not died in 1979, because he became a soldier in the Uganda national army and died in battle in Fort Portal, fighting against National Resistance Army rebels in 1984. We knew that Keny had joined the national army when he came home after the 1979 war and announced his intention. My father had yelled at him and slapped him in front of us all. So, how was it that I was listening to a man in Gulu telling me that he was one of the people assigned to be the bodyguard of Apicu, the son of a poet in a war that had ended in 1979? I dismissed his version of the story. Maybe he had mixed up my brother with someone else.

Later on, in the final interview I had in Kampala before flying back to Canada, the man I was then interviewing told me that he believed that I had come to do this interview because my

brother was one of the victims of the ship that sank. He, too, was sure about that, the man was adamant. If I had not been certain of the time we had with my brother before he died, I might have believed him. After all, he had been one of the highest ranking Ugandan exiles organizing the Liberation War. Your brother was one of them, he said, referring to those who had died when the ship sank. So why else would you be interested in this story?

I had first come across the story of the sunken ship on social media,<sup>14</sup> posted by my friend Sam, who urged that we should never forget the people who died on that ship. I wrote him to ask, what ship? What are you talking about? How come I never heard of that story before? I became engulfed in a story that I would discover in time, had already touched my family. I found myself inside memories of people who knew my family – they connected to me through their memories; through relation and through these portals, I became part of the narrative and part of the story I sought. How do you forget something that you didn't know to remember? At whose expense do we forget the stories that make us who we are?

In Kampala, the man who was telling me about my brother being on that sunken ship is incredulous. How can it be that your brother survived? I don't know how to explain that, I responded. All I knew in that moment is that someone else has recently told me that my brother was in that Liberation War. Of course, he was there. He was there, I'm told.

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<sup>14</sup> Sam's full post is included in Appendix A. He begins with a memory that was so striking to me that I could not stop thinking about how this kind of memory might not be connected to the present:  
 "It will be exactly 35 years this November when I watched as a young man in 1978, a heavy convoy of Leyland buses streaming into the remote refugee camp of Kigwa, situated in a Wanyamwezi village, East of Tabora Town. Their mission? To ferry into the battlefield over 800 Acholi former soldiers who had enjoyed a peaceful farm life for nearly 9 years in Tanzania, and were now undergoing military drill in preparation for war, Amin had invaded the Kagera region."

It would take me several months to find words with which to articulate this experience and reflect on it beyond the privilege of a famous family name and the access afforded me as a western-trained researcher working in the global south. In one moment I would be briefly offended by the misspelling of my last name and in the next moment, the Tanzanian taxi driver who had held up the sign and picked me up at Bukoba airport would remark on my last name. I think it's a Kenyan name, he said. When I told him that mine was a Ugandan name, he sighed. He didn't know that Ugandans had ever written books. When he was in high school, he remembers reading a book called *Song of Lawino*. That was my father's book, I told him. He was stunned. It was 1978 when he had studied that book in high school, he told me. He went on to recite lines from *Song of Lawino* from memory. 1978 is also the year that that Kagera war began, sparked off by Idi Amin's claim in this very region. In the next couple of days, the taxi man, who doubled as a guide, took me to all the places of note in that part of Tanzania: the monument for Emin Pasha overlooking Lake Victoria; the German buildings, and I was reminded to take note of the distinct and strong architecture; the deep crater – the damage from a Ugandan bomb; the silhouette of the remaining wall of a bombed out church; the fields where the fiercest battles had been fought; the Tanzanian monument to the six soldiers who died there and the statue of the soldier that was built, facing north, to remind Tanzanians that Uganda would never face them in a war ever again.

It would take a long time to connect these seemingly disparate moments – the invocation of my father's name and work, in relation to the work that I was doing. It was, as far as I was initially concerned, evidence that people had read his work and the recognition that his work remains important to him. I had not bargained for the deeper connection between

what I was seeing and hearing in the field with my family and with the substance of the story that I was still trying to grasp.

When my father got a teaching position in Nigeria in 1978, we moved there – my parents, four siblings and me. The oldest two, Agnes and Keny, remained behind. They were adults already, living their lives – Agnes had a family and Keny was going to college in Kenya. In April 1979, Amin was overthrown, the Liberation War was won and my parents followed the tensions over who would rule the country through media reports and talked about it. My mother remembers that my father asked us kids if we wanted to write about the war. I wrote a poem. Our father loved it. He showed it off to his friends and when we returned to Kenya, he took me to the offices of *The Nation Newspaper* and asked that the editor publish my poem.



**Figure 5. Our father and me at *The Nation Newspaper* offices in Nairobi.**

Photo from family archives.

At the time, I thought my father was being dramatic and embarrassing, showing my poem off. When we returned to Uganda in 1980, he made certain that I was part of the program during the opening of a cultural centre in Kampala. I would have my first public poetry reading in front of politicians, religious leaders, and ambassadors – a full house, to grand applause. I wouldn't understand my role in commemorating a war that unbeknownst to me, my brother had taken part in, or one that I would be thinking about four decades later. In my poem, I asked that adults consider not fighting for power, to think instead about dividing Uganda into three, the way my parents made us divide stuff equally among us. The end of the poem would elicit guffaws, an inside joke I couldn't appreciate. Anything was better, I thought then, than immolation and hunger strikes.

While in Dar es Salaam, I experience another haunting.<sup>15</sup> My taxi driver points out a gleaming white building. That's Statehouse, he says. I feel the air gulp, not me, the air. I have a sense of my brother over here, in this same spot, but from those days. Keny, according to one of the veterans I had spoken with, had been recruited in Nairobi, to join the liberation struggle against Idi Amin. He was smuggled into Tanzania and trained in Dar es Salaam. In Dar, the sky beyond the gleaming white Statehouse is an impossible shade of blue. In Dar, my brother does not 'speak' to me, but there is no mistaking that something happened here that needs articulation. From M. Nourbese Philip's *Zong!* I learn about a "story that cannot be told, yet wants to be told" (198) and I recognize the unwieldy nature

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<sup>15</sup> I want to call it a haunting. For Gordon Avery, the ghost is a "social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity create social life" (see *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* 8). My experience of the landscape as haunted is a recognition of ghostly agency and Camp's theory of the haptic reminds me to pay attention to different resonances.

of a story that cannot be harnessed. How do I write the blue of the sky against white of the Statehouse?

My role, I believe, is to “confront the tension between the poem that I want to write and the poem that must write itself” (Philip *Zong!* 199). I begin this project, earnest to find out everything there was to be learned about it. I feel the need to know names, dates, places and spaces. I imagine that information is all I needed to craft this story, to connect the relationship between the history of the archive, the softly remembered, and the limitations of our relationship to the state. I think, at this time, that I will complete a book that my father started before he died. He called it “Song of Soldier.” I think that this is a good title, after all, I am talking with former soldiers. Perhaps, I imagine, I will call it “Songs of Soldiers” and I will do something with the four pages that my father wrote while he was still alive. I think that I can imagine my father by my side, cheering me on. I think that it is, perhaps, only a little more complicated than this most perfect of images.

If your brother did not die on that ship, the man in Kampala tells me, then all his mates died on it. Keny, code-name Apicu, had bodyguards so that the son of the poet would not get harmed, the man had said. Keny might not have been harmed in that war, but all his mates lost their lives, I’m reminded. What is the nature of harm beyond an individual’s body and being? How are we called to a story?

I recall the jerky motion of the man who walked toward my bed in my dream/awake state. I remember that he walked in through the closed door of my bedroom. I remember how he stood right next to my bed, his shin probably against the mattress. I remember that he had no discernible facial features and yet I remember that I could feel him looking at me.

In Kitgum, I spoke with Abdon Okumu who told me about the 1972 massacre of four hundred and seventeen men in Lokung. He took me to Ngom Lac Primary School in Lokung, just over forty three kilometres north of Kitgum, to where the men had been held for three days. He pointed to the site of classrooms, now torn down, where the prisoners had been held and told me how they had written their names and prayers on the walls in blood. He pointed at a tall tree with a scarred trunk. The trucks that drove the captured men drove over this tree when it was a sapling. Look, he pointed out to me. The tire marks of the trucks were imprinted and the tree had grown with the memory of that day. Abdon told me that he had to teach in those very same classrooms afterwards. For years, he said. Were the names not washed off? No, he said. What did you teach? I asked, eager for a break from the macabre details. In those days, we taught everything. I taught Maths and Science. I also taught your father's novel, *Lak Tar*. Afterwards, he showed us the mass grave where the men were buried.

I wanted to write a dissertation about what it means to forget such an event. I wanted to consider the weight of these losses – the uninvestigated massacres and rogue brothers whose mates die on sunken ships. What is it to contemplate lessons of literature, mathematics and science in classrooms where condemned men scrawled their names on the walls? What part of that story can we leave out? What is the work of a storyteller, a poet, a researcher?

In my not-asleep dream, the man standing at my bedside lifts his right arm in a jerky motion. He is holding a machete. He starts to bring down the machete with the same jerky movements. I watch him. I am unsure of what to do. I am spellbound. I'm also bound to my



bed by illness. Like the man at my bed, another man walks in through the door. It is my father. I watch as my father holds the man's arm, the one with the machete, the one with the jerky motion. He holds on to the man's elbow.

My father does not speak with me.

My doctorate began with a serious attempt to work with stories from formerly abducted women who been kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and forced to fight the Ugandan national army. These stories were rife with pain and struggle. The women returned to civilian lives and changed the way we think about resilience<sup>16</sup>, victimhood, citizenship and belonging beyond the label of "sex slaves" that the media had confined them to. They taught me that stories from the battlefield were also stories<sup>17</sup> of life and family and survival. I learned from their stories about how limiting, how distracting and how stigmatizing the terms "sex slaves" and "konniees" and "abductees" were. I learned that resilience<sup>18</sup> was not limited to surviving and how the ability to claim agency and to be fully recognized<sup>19</sup> as part of society was to the benefit of all of us. Like these women, the men

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<sup>16</sup> *Buried in the Heart: Women Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda* by Erin Baines traces the political agency of women in wartime, specifically, women who were formerly abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. Stories of complex victimhood, Baines argues, is important in countering the narratives of the powerful that design the world in ways that erase the lives of others (145).

<sup>17</sup> *I am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming my Life from the Lord's Resistance Army* by Evelyn Amony covers the experiences of Evelyn from the time of her abduction as a child to her current role as community organiser and women's advocate. Evelyn reclaims her life in her narrative (and the right to tell her story) in a book that challenges the reader to "unlearn" (xxv) what they think they might know about the lives of women in war.

<sup>18</sup> In *The Hail Mary Project*, a video poem, I reflect on "resilience" in the political landscape and what it means to ascribe heroism to feats of incredulity as I recognize the deeply influential work of the formerly abducted women in northern Uganda.

<sup>19</sup> In *Child to Soldier*, Opiyo Oloya interviewed formerly abducted people from the Lord's Resistance Army who consistently made the claim to be seen as *dano adana*, as every day, regular people instead of being limited to the stigma of having been abducted. Oloya compares the perception of his experience of being a diasporic Acholi to that of the formerly abducted people who he refers to as CI (child-induced) soldiers. They referred to him as *latin Acholi me Canada* – an Acholi son from Canada (16) they, who were forcefully kidnapped, often as children, were ostracized and called *olum*, of the bush (20). The difference between Oloya and the formerly abducted was in how the society around

who spoke to me about their memories of the Liberation War revealed the betrayal of the living and the lies of the archive.

For months following my return to Canada, I can neither write nor bear the transcripts containing the interviews with the men who told me their stories. Two of the men who shared their stories with me have since died. Since I can't write and since the heat of the transcript is still unbearable, I read. I find my father in a 1976 interview<sup>20</sup> where he's talking about a new book "Song of Soldier" that he has started to write. He says that every time he thinks about his friends who lost their lives, it makes him cry. Self-doubt is a deluge over me. If my father could not get beyond the four published pages that were found after he died in 1982, what chance do I have at this heartbreak?

My father walks to the door, through the door into the beyond, still holding on to the man with the machete.

Canada offers distance and safety from the immediacy of the memories of people who knew my father, my brother, and know my family name. For months, years now, this distance is no reprieve from the haunting. What are the responsibilities of the storyteller? How do we fit inside memory? What claims can we make to be outside a memory? What are the limitations to claims of objectivity and distance when you become a subject in the story? What does it mean, this national Ugandan motto, "For God and My country"? What is it to

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them folded him in or rejected them – all were born into Acholi culture. The claim to be called *dano adana*, human persons stems from their rootedness in Acholi customs and traditions, which is also where the CI soldiers trace their resilience (155-60).

<sup>20</sup> See an "An Interview with Okot p'Bitek" by Bernth Lindfors.

die for country? To immolate, to go on a hunger strike, to choose exile, to leave family behind, to cross the border, to pick up arms to fight for something you believe in? What do songs of soldiers sound like where grasses, higher than a tall man, bend to the breeze at the site of a massacre? What are songs of soldiers? What is the nature of political haunting? What is a national story if it does not begin in the home?

I live inside a story that seems to demand more than I have to offer.

I've come to learn that the Irish national anthem is called "The Soldier's Song." I've come to know that tombs of unknown soldiers are places where people pay respects to the names that have been forgotten in the process of building the nation. Blood nations, all of them. Intimate and familial bloodshed are not separate from stories of heroes whose statues grace the greens in every city, every town. My father and the man whose elbow he holds disappear through the door and the fever falls away.

Against death as final. Against death as separate from the living. Against death as powerless. Against death as harmless. For death as the continuum of life. For death as the seed of song. For death as the spaces for beginnings, for the opportunity to retain wonder in these days.

## 1.5 Homeland: How to listen to our own stories

but it is said... / —from the maps / and / contradicted / by the evidence...

question / therefore / the age

(Philip Zong! 14)

### Dust

The only connection with land that I can make is a very tenuous claim – through dust. The dry season is at its height in January 2016 on my way to the funeral of Dr. Benjamin Obonyo, his wife Kevina and two of their adult daughters, Eliza and Marjorie, in Madi Opei, northern Uganda. The funeral is an awful event to attend. Not least because of the horrific car crash that led to their loss. It was more that I had known the family since childhood and it was with Dr. Obonyo that I had started my quest for answers in my research.

I had attended to primary school and high school with Hellen, one of the surviving children of Dr. and Mrs. Obonyo. Two years earlier, in the fall of 2014, I was at their home in London to interview Dr. Obonyo as part of my research fieldwork. He and his wife, Kevina welcomed me to their home and after our business was done, he treated me to a beautiful meal that he had cooked himself, Mrs. Obonyo assured me. The two little girls in the home were the daughters of Hellen, my former classmate. As I came across the threshold of their London home, awkwardly introducing myself, Dr. Obonyo put me at ease by telling me that he first met me as a little girl and that he had carried me on his lap as he told my parents about the happenings in Uganda while they were in exile in Kenya.

Along with thousands of mourners, I am left bereft after the funeral. But life beyond beckons and now I'm in a truck on a red dusty road bound for Kitgum. The wind and the speeding truck kicks up a smog of red dust about us. My ride back to Kitgum from the funeral is in the cab of my cousin's truck along with others in the back needing to get to town, fifty six kilometres away. As we arrive the truck driver stops to let people off at their destinations. Everyone sitting at the back of the truck has covered their faces for protection against the dust. As they remove the cloths from their faces to thank the driver, a dramatic red dust mask covers any skin that is not protected. The dust marks each one as people of that land (dust to dust) and I recognize that – as a diasporic African from northern Uganda – I, like the many, have a weak claim to belonging through land; I have no garden, no plot of land, no place yet that I can make claim to beyond the graves of my family members that are buried in that land. And still, I am taught that all Acholi people are accounted for – we all belong, whether or not we live on the land.

On that ride back from Madi Opei to Kitgum, I recognize the gritty red dust as a marker for those of us whose people created that dust from which we now protect ourselves. The land marks us; it makes a claim on us. The red cloud in its fierce bursts about us derives from contact between wind, traffic and the dirt road. The tall grass on either side of the road, for a meter or so, is also coated by the same red dust. For all its drama, this is a weighted dust; it settles immediately, although, it is said that it carries all manner of germs. The cough and sore throat this year are ferocious. But I have had a ride in the truck cabin and so I have the privilege of being able to observe the machinations of dust and ruminate on how possibly it might help me to make sense of my doctoral work.

I'm in Acholi just to attend this funeral, having flown in from my fieldwork in Tanzania where I had been tracing the steps of the Ugandan exiles who had drowned in Lake Victoria in 1979. The funeral leaves me shaken; I feel unhinged from the work that I'm doing. I wonder about what it is to be looking for a memory, looking at it, thinking through it, while around me people are living and dying and the dust is rising and falling, masking faces, making claims and then settling back onto itself.

In the fall of 2014, following dinner at the Obonyo's London home, Marjorie and Eliza offer me a ride to the train station. I have probably not been in their company since primary school days, and even then we were at the age when we played with other kids our own ages. Eliza who is older than me by a year or so, is driving, Marjorie, a little younger than me, is in the front passenger seat. I'm in the back seat – we're all the same age now, in the same car, heading in the same direction and exchanging stories about the same life stage we find ourselves in. We catch up with each other's news in the time we have together and when they drop me off, there is no way for me to understand that this brief car ride together, the first in almost four decades, will also be the last time that I see them alive, so alive and so happy. Now, on the road between Madi Opei and Kitgum, I'm thinking about what it means to think and work while the rest of me is caught up in grief, in sadness; and sometimes in shock, at life that can clap itself out in one moment and then returns in splendour in another, as if these moments are of no consequence.

I begin at that funeral to situate myself in this dissertation and outside it. Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* teaches us that the wake is more than sitting with the dead; it is more than

[...] the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening and consciousness [...] I mean wake work to be a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives. (17-18)

Wake work as the recognition of dust on the faces of my fellow travelers whose faces are masked in red, wake work is also the recognition of the intimacy between the skin of the earth and the skin of people.

In the cabin of the truck, my face is not covered as dramatically as those outside, but the dust has still made its way in through the filters to sting our eyes and make our throats itch. We're not immune; there are only degrees of exposure that connect us to the land beneath us. We're all dying; some of us just born and others already or just now dead. We're connected by this dust and touched in degrees through proximity to it. Wake work, for Sharpe, "is a theory and praxis of the wake; a theory of Black being in the diaspora" (19). As I write out this quote, my hand slips twice and I write 'being Black in the diaspora' and again: 'being Black in the diaspora'. My unintended transposition of words reminds me that Black being, and being Black are not the same thing. I am a Black person living in the diaspora and I have spent much time thinking with the work of Black scholars who live in the diaspora, but my experience of being Black is informed first by my identity as African, then as a Black person, exiled for almost three decades from home, living and working in the West.

So then, for me, what is it to be Black and African and think about wake work in an African context?

Sharpe, along with M. Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand, are the foremost Black Canadian scholars whose writing has shaped my thinking and better oriented me about the impossible legacy of slavery and colonialism and how that powerful narrative informs the present. From them I learn about refusal, resistance, futurity and care as ways to be in the present and to imagine a future. I think about aspiration, about the intent to keep moving towards a goal, and Sharpe reminds me that aspiration is also about breath; aspiration is “keeping and putting breath in the Black body” (130) and that breathing is not only about being alive, it is also about staying alive in the context of a political landscape that does not care for Black life. Wake work is care work (131-34). This land that we move through, this dust that rises and falls and covers everything and makes us cough, is a laboured aspiration but an insistence nonetheless. Refusal, resistance, futurity and care reveal themselves as themes through this work, illustrating to me that agency and voice are not the purview of the historians alone, and that aspiration as wake work is labour, is aspirational, is resistance, is world making, is return, is being, is staying alive, is singing, too.

We leave Kitgum early in the morning; there is a soft and cold mist about and the world is covered in dew. Nights are cool, days are hot; there is no one thing about this place, not even the pervasive dust of the road, not even the heat of the dry season. We drive to Gulu, and then Kampala and then I fly back to Tanzania to continue my fieldwork. Even in this brief foray to say goodbye to four people who had been kind and generous to me during my fieldwork, I have retraced and walked in the footsteps of the men whose story I’m searching out. When Dr. Obonyo opened the door to me at his London home, I crossed the threshold into a narrative that was framed by *his* memory of me sitting on his lap as he updated my exiled parents about the goings-on in Uganda. The threshold is framed.



This threshold invokes a sill over which one steps to get into or out of a space. The framing is the rest of the door, thus creating a portal<sup>21</sup> into a story. Come in, Dr. Obonyo had invited me. I first met you when you were a little girl and you sat on my lap as I gave your parents news about Uganda. I walked in through the doorframe into a story, already in the telling – one that was already lost to my childhood. I walked into a re-telling of a re-telling. What my video recording captures doesn't cover our pass through the threshold – and since the recording only begins after we were already inside the house, the camera does not capture the history of the story encapsulated in that moment of welcome. We're now inside a story, and as in the story world, there is no physical record of the threshold beyond the telling of the story.

Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's "Let Us Tell This Story Properly" refers to *kiwuduwudu*,<sup>22</sup> "a dismembered torso – without feelings" (n.p.), reminding us that what the body feels is part of the context that matters; and a feeling body that does not register is *kiwuduwudu*. Along with tracking footsteps, conducting interviews, peeking into archives, reading alongside other scholars, academics and artists, I note the affect and the registers, so that I can "tell this story properly" as Makumbi's character advises. To listen, then, is to make oneself available to what is beyond the visual – beyond John Berger's "to look is an act of

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<sup>21</sup> In "Hair," Morin and Goto reflect on a performance of their work at the 2011 Kamloops Artist Residency. In this essay, Goto and Morin present drums as witnesses, as time portals and as heartbeats (see Hill and McCall 176). So much of this fieldwork and writing has revealed what Goto calls "unexpected openings." Homelands are a rhythm, a series of beats, portals to the unexpected and spaces to invite the reader to witness a difficult engagement with history, the land, writing and the body.

<sup>22</sup> A term in Luganda, the language of the Baganda people in Uganda.

choice" (*Ways of Seeing* 8) and Julius Ceasar's "veni, vidi, vici" – from the western culture that privileges sight, for example. I note how other ways of embodiment can provide space to negotiate what we know by sight and what we know through other sensory registers; and how we can use these to animate the present in a different way and beyond the *kiwuduwudu* and objectivity (that demands distance from the subject matter, and even further, demands that we don't feel).

## 1.6 Homeland: Threshold, Memory and Portals

First: the when/ the which / the who / the were

(Philip Zong! 15)

Framed by Dr. Obonyo's memory of my childhood, I walk into their family living room in the fall of 2014 and settle down to listen to him. After setting up the voice recorders and taking care of ethics permission form, I ask him what he remembers of the ship that sank on Lake Victoria in 1979. I did not visit alone. I'm with my friend, Sam Olara, who is also Dr. Obonyo's nephew. Sam and I are from a generation of Ugandans who have lived in the diaspora but have living memory of having been youth in Uganda. We're the ones who were too young to participate in the war but old enough to remember witnessing<sup>23</sup> the effects of the war on those who did.

We are intimately connected to lands in and away from home – as Gloria Anzaldúa would have it, we “ke[ep] the ground of [our] own being” (*Borderlands* 16) by speaking in Acholi whenever we can, eating Acholi food with other Acholi people (and, in London) even holding traditional Acholi dances; the next generation, our children who were born and grew up in exile, generally don't ‘keep’ the same ground. We are a pivot generation, belonging and not belonging, but always connected through food, by the music from the brief slice of time during the 1980s when ‘things were not so bad’ and the fact that we have lived away for more than half our lives. Sam is also the son of Lt. General Bazilio Olara

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<sup>23</sup> Sam's memory of the sinking of the ship is documented in Appendix A.

Okello, one of the architects who organized the Ugandan exiles to overthrow Idi Amin and is familiar with most of the people I need to contact in London.

First, we exchange pleasantries – here I am thinking that perhaps I can get to business to not ‘waste time’. Salutary obligations: I tell the doctor that my mother is well and that my siblings are doing well and that I am doing well too; I tell him that I have two children of my own; Sam pays his respects as well and then we can begin.

I gather from Dr. Obonyo that, sometime in 1970 or 1971, he visited my parents who lived in Nairobi at the time, my father having been sent into exile in 1968 after his poetry was deemed critical of the Obote government. Brigadier Okoya (who I understand to have been my father’s uncle) had been assassinated in 1970 in his home in Gulu, along with his wife, Anna Akello. Prior to his death, Okoya had been investigating the attempted assassination of President Obote at Nakivubo stadium in December 1969, for which Idi Amin had been named as a suspect. Okoya had also been investigating claims of corruption in the Uganda Army. After the attempt on Obote’s life opposition parties were effectively banned by the cabinet.<sup>24</sup> An investigation file was opened on the assassination of Okoya and his wife, and again, Amin was the prime suspect behind the killings. The findings of the investigation were never released. I’m speculating that this was the news that Dr. Obonyo was sharing with my parents in their home in Kenya.

Exactly a year to the day after the death of Okoya and his wife, on January 25, 1971, Idi Amin led the coup d’état that took over the government of Uganda, sending Milton Obote

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<sup>24</sup> See Amii Omara-Otunnu’s *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*.

into exile. Shortly after taking power, the purge of Acholi and Lango speaking soldiers from the army triggered the first real wave of Ugandans who sought refuge in exile.

I later interviewed Capt. K about what he knew about how those fleeing northern Uganda into Sudan had been recruited. He began his telling with an anecdote.

Those people came at night with those of Tito and Ali. They came and called us to see how to recruit people but the people did not want to go. Then they deceived people from home here in Kitgum that they have killed a hundred elephants in Owiny ki Bul<sup>25</sup> [and] that people should go and skin them. Then all the [people] went but when we reached Owiny ki Bul we found that there were no elephants. Then they forwarded us immediately and said that we were going for a guerilla attack [and] the women should go back home. Then the women went back home with the saucepans and the others were taken straight away to do training at Owiny ki Bul.

The reference to the elephants was to signal that several men would be required to leave their homes in the rural areas of northern Uganda to join the exiles in Sudan (now South Sudan) in response to the purging of the Ugandan army. They crossed at various points along the northern border of Uganda, between Nimule, to the western side of the northern

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<sup>25</sup> Originally, Owiny ki Bul was training camp for the SSLM (Southern Sudan Liberation Movement, commonly referred to as Anyanya), a guerrilla group that was fighting the Sudanese government. SSLM was led by Joseph Lagu. Owiny ki Bul would continue to feature as a rendezvous by Ugandans in decades to come. During the initial resistance against President Museveni's National Resistance Army, many soldiers from the UNLA (Uganda National Liberation Army), veterans from the 1979 Liberation War, congregated there, as would the Lord's Resistance Army after them.

border, and north of Lokung along the eastern side. They were to rendezvous at Owiny ki Bul in Sudan (now South Sudan) and receive training over there.

Most left without interception by the Uganda army but a group of about four hundred men who had made it to the meeting point at Owiny ki Bul, were intercepted by the Sudanese rebel group South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), led by Joseph Lagu. Here is more from the written account by Okumu Abdon<sup>26</sup>:

It seems the comrade Ugandans explained their mission to Sudanese rebels hoping that they would be helped to go to Kenya but on the other hand, Anyanya, as they were on good terms with Amin's government, informed Uganda government about the move. In response, Amin's government sent troops to a small village of Latako, Dibolyec Parish, Lokung Sub-county at the Uganda/Sudan border east of Owiny ki Bul in order to intercept the move of the conscripted men who wanted to head for Tanzania. On the other hand the comrades (about four hundred of them) in good terms, were deceived to be led to Kenya going eastward from Owiny ki Bil, but the plan of the Anyanya was to lead them to Latako where Amin's soldiers were waiting for them as they planned with the Uganda government. When they reached Latako, very unfortunately, they were handed over to Amin's soldiers and were held captives.

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See Appendix C.

Abdon's account reiterates the large numbers of people who were leaving Uganda during the purges, and echoes Capt. K's anecdote of responding to the call to go help 'skin a hundred elephants'.

As I continued my conversations with veterans who fled through the northern border with Sudan, several recounted similar stories – being bused to Khartoum and taken by rail to Port Sudan and from there being ferried to Tanga, in Tanzania. The trip, which took a few days, was fraught with problems. At one point the ferry broke down and technical assistance was sent for, as also described by Capt. K. Another time, meningitis broke out and six men died and were buried at sea. On arrival in Tanga, many of them were ill and were hospitalized, kept there for a few days and then, with the support of the Tanzanian government, taken to a disused army training reserve where they were settled by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. At Kigwa, they settled into family living, making and selling charcoal and growing crops for sustenance and for the market.

## 1.7 Memory, Beauty, at Homeness

At-homeness, noun: the quality or state of being at home

(*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

### 1.7.1 The Consecration of Bishop Janani Luwum

In February 1977, the world's media headlined the assassinations<sup>27</sup> of the archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda and Boga Zaire, Janani Luwum,<sup>28</sup> along with Erinayo Oryema,<sup>29</sup> the Minister of Land and Water Resources and Oboth-Ofumbi,<sup>30</sup> the Minister of Internal Affairs. In "*Order of Service for Commemorating Archbishop St. Janani Luwum*," a compilation by Fielda Ojok for the 2015 celebration of the martyrdom of Janani Luwum,<sup>31</sup> she writes:

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<sup>27</sup> How does one narrate this account? I feel like *kiwuduwudu*, disconnected by truth telling that is infused with and steeped in suffering. Apolo Lawoko in *The Dungeons of Nakasero* (134-48) gives an eye witness account to the assassinations as a former prisoner in the torture chambers in Idi Amin's Statehouse, Kampala. Henry Kyemba provides an account of the assassinations, from the perspective of the private secretary to President Amin and secretary to the Ugandan Cabinet (see *State of Blood* 179-192). Together, Lawoko and Kyemba provide a grisly and painful accounting of what happened to the archbishop and the two ministers.

<sup>28</sup> In 1969, on January 25, Luwum was consecrated as Bishop. At the time, my father was already living in exile in Kenya but was invited to join the organizing committee to oversee the cultural aspects of the celebration. In *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, Lawoko presents the events leading to the consecration, noting, in detail, the names and personalities who came together for that event (described later). Oboth-Ofumbi, Luwum and Oryema were part of the national committee that organized the consecration (*The Dungeons of Nakasero* 34), which can now be seen as an eerie foreshadowing of the 2015 events commemorating and canonizing of Luwum and Lt. General Okello's reburial – events that also included the Ugandan president and high ranking religious and political figures (described later).

<sup>29</sup> Along with being the Minister for Lands and Water Resources, Oryema had also been the first African head of Police. In 2017, his son, Geoffery Oryema, who lived in exile in France had visited Uganda for the first time since the assassination of his father forty years previously. In June 2018, Geoffery Oryema died of cancer in Paris, France. A powerful musician, Oryema sang of exile, love and identity. In the lyrics for "Land of Anaka," he sings: "Obiga, lead us home / Show us the way" – bitter and painful words from an exile who witnessed generations of leaders killed, including his own father.

<sup>30</sup> Oboth-Ofumbi was once acting president for nine days, when Idi Amin was out of the country between July 9 and July 18, in 1972. His family, like mine, like the Oryema, Luwum and countless other families, fled the country and lived in exile. A German-produced video *Children of Dictators* presents a portrayal of the sons of Oboth-Ofumbi and Amin meeting in Uganda and participating in reconciliation rituals between the families. My decision to refrain from repeating the gruesome account of the deaths of these (and other people) is in part informed by the possibility for a more open future, one that such details might foreclose.

<sup>31</sup> February 16, 2015 was proclaimed a national holiday in Uganda. Rev. Canon Mwesigye notes in a *New Vision* article that Luwum was the "first sitting Archbishop in the entire Anglican Communion to be martyred in office, since the Archbishops of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer and William Laud were martyred in office in 1556 AD and 1646 AD



A very important impact of his death that is little known by most Ugandans is that it was his martyrdom which marked the turning point for the Amin regime and subsequent liberation of Uganda. The international community was finally awakened to the atrocities of this regime and became united in the realisation that Amin's regime had to go. (8)

Indeed, for the men I spoke with, the news of the killing of the three men, in particular of the much-loved Luwum, was marked in their memory of those days as a major turning point. As tragic and as momentous as this killing was, repeating the words of the veterans would not clarify any more, the immediacy of their decision to take up arms again.

In this and the following two sections, I present three memories: the first one set in 1969 concerning the three men who were assassinated on February 16, 1977; the second one set in 2015, a celebration of the martyrdom of Janani Luwum, who has become a saint of the Anglican Church; and the third memory, also in 2015, relates to the reburial of Lt. General Bazilio Okello who was one of the architects of the 1979 Liberation War. In presenting these, I illustrate the work of Morrison's rememory as a framing for the present beyond a colonial historical narrative that depends on facts that often delude,<sup>32</sup> excise,<sup>33</sup> or

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respectively. Thus his martyrdom on February 16, 1977, so motivated the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral that they established a Chapel to commemorate Modern Martyr's because of Luwum's martyrdom in Uganda. Thus, Canterbury Cathedral/Church of England was the first ecclesiastical authority in the whole of the Anglican Communion to proclaim Archbishop Janani Luwum 20<sup>th</sup> Century African Martyr. Henceforth, Archbishop-martyr Luwum has been referred to as 'Blessed Janani' in the Special Prayers (Collect) of the Church of England. The Modern Martyrs Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral was dedicated in July 1978, during Lambeth '78" (Mwesigye).

<sup>32</sup> I refer, for example, to the spurious argument of retaining the responsibility as one "bound in honour" as argued in the British parliament. See Section 2.3

<sup>33</sup> The focus on painful histories as representative of our political identities, especially those of us who are heirs of the colonial system, makes us beholden to (and sometimes desperate for) the few instances of heroism. By this rationale, we forget or are distracted by the actions of a few, instead of appreciating that there might have been/was a cultural system in place that depended on the actions of many/everyone.

misrepresent us. All three recollections/rememories are also dreamlike, they take us away from the moment and return us to spaces of freedom,<sup>34</sup> to moments when we are free to be our spectacular selves, inside the Acholi tradition of song and dance.

On January 25, 1969, Apolo Lawoko,<sup>35</sup> a journalist, witnessed the 1969 consecration of Janani Luwum. He recalls this in *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, his memoir of surviving Idi Amin's Statehouse torture chambers. Lawoko was also at the event in January 2015 that celebrated the martyrdom of Saint Janani Luwum, which I also attended. As we watched the momentous celebrations together in Wii Gweng, I didn't immediately have full appreciation for the powerful memory making event that I was witnessing, one that may have been a déjà vu of sorts for Lawoko but was also a bracketing almost half a century in the making. Following Lawoko's recollection of the 1969 consecration below, I present my own recollections of the 2015 event.

I begin with Lawoko's extended quote which is meant not only to capture the presence of the three men who were killed on the same day but also to illustrate the work of Toni Morrison's rememory as a method for decolonizing knowledge through a disassemblance of the gaze (*The Source of Self-Regard* 286) and to establish a moment of beauty<sup>36</sup> – a

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<sup>34</sup> Dreams as political tools can also be landscapes of freedom and return – from Fanon's "Concerning Violence": "The settler's work is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the native" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 93). To follow with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's assertion in *Re-membering Africa* that the dream is the location of memory (82) for which artists (among others) are responsible for keeping memory alive (87).

<sup>35</sup> Also a close friend of my parents. Lawoko has been a constant presence in my life. I am grateful for his contribution as a journalist, storyteller and witness to the contemporary history of Uganda, and that of my family.

<sup>36</sup> For Toni Morrison, "beauty, of course, is a duplicate of what we already know, intensified, rarefied. Or what we have never known articulated" (*The Source of Self-Regard* 250); whereas for Dionne Brand, beauty is contained in the person who is themselves in their body (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 194). Therefore these two events almost half a century apart are beautiful; Acholi people, in themselves, in their body, and in the presentation of that, are already known to be beautiful.

powerful recollection of social love and celebration – in order to emphasize the powerful grief afterwards more than gruesome repetitions can ever do.

The consecration date of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1969 finally arrived. After the prayers and other official ceremonies, it was time for the great feast. People mingled freely and helped themselves to delicious Acholi cuisine. The main pavilion was reserved for the president, Dr. Apollo Milton Obote and his ministers. The president flanked the newly consecrated bishop to the left and the Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda and Boga-Zaire, Dr. Erica Sabiti, sat to the right. The Catholic Archbishop of Kampala, Cardinal Kiwanuka, was also participating in the ceremony [...] After the presentation of gifts and the deliverances of speeches ... it was announced that performances by different cultural groups would follow [...] After a while it was time for the troupe to perform the popular royal dance of the Acholi, the Bwola. About two hundred men adorned in traditional leopard and skin attire, and with tall ostrich feathers on their heads, danced their way into the arena [...] The troupe of dancers made their way made their way around the stadium, receiving wild cheers from the public. Policemen on duty were having difficulty restraining the public from storming the arena to join the dance [...] Having danced around the stadium in the tight knight triple formation, the troupe finally formed into a circle immediately in front of the main pavilion. The main guests were now cheering wildly with the rest of the crowd as they watched the breathtaking performance. Suddenly the music and the drumming stopped and the circle of dancers each sat down on his small drum with well-rehearsed precision. Only two men remained standing in the middle of the circle [...] it became apparent that [it was] Dr. Okot p'Bitek and Mr.

Abe [...]Mr. Abe, relishing the moment, spoke first [...] He then allowed Dr. p'Bitek<sup>37</sup> to recite some poetry in Luo before the dancing resumed. (Lawoko 36-37)

In Lawoko's recollection, there is obvious pride in the Acholi identity. He notes and credits the organizing committees that included both Oryema and Oboth-Ofumbi at the national level, as well as those who worked locally in Acholi (with contributions from at least one person who lived in exile). I relish Lawoko's telling of the dancing and the intervention by my father and his friend because it is a memory of confidence, of provocation, daring and pride. The Acholi are a people of song and dance; they are a dancing body. It is also a public demonstration of the poet/storyteller as central in the Acholi tradition and in the celebration of Luwum's 1969 consecration.

These dancers were not the 'anxious man' from Fanon's *White Skin Black Mask* who "cannot escape his body" (65). They did not need to escape their bodies<sup>38</sup>. They were in their bodies. Inside the dancing, poetry and ululating are people who have not been separated from their own sense of themselves. Inside the dancing was memory in the formations, the ostrich feathers, the drumming, the bodies glistening with sweat, the ululations of the crowd, the poetry, and the song. Inside the dancing, were memories distilled from the

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<sup>37</sup> Our father had smuggled himself across the border for this event at Pece War Memorial in Gulu. A provocative person, he knew that he did not want to miss the event but he also wanted to make it clear that the powerful knew that he was present and that there was nothing they could do about it.

<sup>38</sup> Fanon describes the alienated man as one full of "[s]hame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out it's not because of my color. Either way, I am locked inside the infernal circle" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 114). In this way, Fanon's alienated man resembles Okot p'Bitek's Ocol who cries: "Mother, mother / Why, / why was I born / Black?" (*Two Songs* 129) Both Fanon's alienated man and Okot p'Bitek's Ocol suffer from "colonial alienation" (Thiong'o *Decolonizing the Mind* 17).

environment and from society, an ‘at-homeness’ that would have marked the lives of the veterans who lived in exile for seven years in Tanzania.

As I read Lawoko’s words describing the 1969 consecration I have a sense they foreshadow the commemorative events for Luwum in 2015 as I describe later in section 1.7.3 of this chapter.

### **1.7.2 The Reburial of Lt. General Bazilio Olara Okello**

The second weekend of February 2015 was an intense time to be in northern Uganda. I was based in Gulu, so I could travel to Agweng, Lira, Kitgum and Lokung to speak with veterans and to trace their steps as they recounted them to me. On Saturday February 14, I attended the reburial of Lt. General Bazilio Okello, who was one of the leaders of Kikosi Maalum<sup>39</sup> and who had been the president of Uganda for a brief six months in 1985. He was also the father of my friend Sam Olara, who has been integral in supporting this research project.

The reburial of Okello, like the commemoration of Luwum that was to be held two days later, was headline news and was attended by representatives of the army, all main religious groups, several politicians and thousands of ordinary Ugandans like me. Okello had died in 1990, in exile in Khartoum, Sudan, and after several years of negotiation with the current government, permission had been given to repatriate the body back to his

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<sup>39</sup> Kikosi Maalum means ‘Special Force’ in Swahili. It was the name of the largest militia force formed with the blessing of President Jules Nyerere of Tanzania by Milton Obote to fight against Idi Amin after his overthrow in 1971. It was comprised mostly of the Ugandan exiles who lived in Kigwa and was under the leadership of Col. Oyite Ojok and General Tito Okello. Other Ugandan militias that were formed included Save Uganda Movement (SUM) under the leadership of Ateker Ejalu and the Front for National Salvation (FRONASK) under Yoweri Musveni. The umbrella term for all the militias was the Ugandan National Liberation Front (UNLF).

ancestral home in Madi Opei,<sup>40</sup> near Kitgum. As the son of a chief himself, Okello's reburial was also a royal affair. Like the bishop's consecration in 1969, the royal dance, Bwola, was performed to much appreciation from the throngs who attended the event and surrounded the dancers out in the field, the power of the dancers raising the dust of the dry season covering us all in it, marking us belonging and at home.



**Figure 6. Dancers await their turn at the reburial of Lt. Gen Bazilio Olara Okello.  
February 14, 2015. Madi Opei, Kitgum**

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<sup>40</sup> Madi Opei is the home from where Dr. Obonyo hailed and where he, his wife Kevina and daughters, Marjorie and Eliza, were buried. The Okello family and Obonyo family homes are close in proximity and the children from both homes call each other cousins.

In an email to a friend, I wrote:

Yesterday we went to attend the burial of an Acholi and Ugandan hero, Lt. General Bazilio Olara Okello. It was a big, big occasion. There were about 1000 people to feed and they were all fed! Rice and beans and beef and ugali. If we had spent all this time thinking about victimhood and the hard times that we've come through, then this was the occasion to remember that we are a gorgeous, proud, people. The traditional dances were fantastic. When it started with Otole, the war dance, and then Bwola the royal dance, I was a bit concerned<sup>41</sup> about the message. Mind you there were parliamentarians present as was the army who took over for a while and did their ceremonies including the 15-gun salute.

(Personal correspondence, Sunday, February 15, 2015)

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<sup>41</sup> At the time, I thought that it was brazen for both Otole the war dance and Bwola the royal dance, to be performed at this event. The legacy of Bazilio Okello in Uganda has not been favourable. Even though the president of Uganda sent a message of support to the family, and there were several dignitaries present and there was a 15-gun salute, I was worried that the dancing might have been misread as a provocation to the government. I'm happy that the only memory I carry from that day is of immense privilege, none of it associated with anxiety resulting from the performances.

### 1.7.3 The Commemoration of Archbishop Janani Luwum

I make note in my email above, of Otole, the war dance, because on the following Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, the commemoration of Archbishop Luwum, took place in Wii Gweng, near Mucwini, not far Madi Opei, still in Acholi, northern Uganda. I was concerned that if there was any tension raised from the February 14<sup>th</sup> event, it would affect the commemoration two days later. One of my closest friends, Phoebe Luwum, is the daughter of the late Archbishop Luwum. My cousin Patricia and I had spent the night before the event at the Luwum family home in Mucwini at Phoebe's invitation. The commemoration of Janani Luwum has been an annual event for several years, organized by the Church of Uganda. Notable members of the organizing committee included the politician Ambassador Olara Otunnu, whose parents had been instrumental in proselytizing the young Luwum to join the ministry.

Wii Gweng is a rocky outcrop whose name means 'on top of the rock'. There is a church there, built and established by Luwum. This is also his final resting place. On this occasion, a beautiful marble gravestone would be unveiled by President Museveni. The evening before, as Patricia and I socialized, we were reminded that the friendship between me and Phoebe extended far beyond us – our fathers, like Phoebe and I, had been friends who loved each other, and others loved them, too.<sup>42</sup> The next day, we attended the commemoration service at Wii Gweng. The service was conducted by Archbishop The Most Reverend Stanley Ntagali with the Church of England represented by the Archbishop of

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<sup>42</sup> What it is to come from a community of people that are beloved!



York, Dr. John Sentamu. The attendees included<sup>43</sup>: the Archbishop of Gulu, The Most Reverend John Baptist Odama; the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni; the Bank of Uganda governor, Emmanuel Mutebile; Sheik Musa Khalil, Khadi of Acholi Muslim community; Bishop Nelson Onono Onweng; Father Julius Orach; head of the Orthodox church in Acholi, Retired Bishop MacLeod Baker Ochola; leader of the Democratic Party (DP), Nibert Mao; leader of the Uganda People's Congress, (UPC) Olara Otunnu, as well as thousands of ordinary Ugandans. As the event was held in Acholi, the majority of people in attendance were local and there was a deep sense of pride in the air.

This was no ordinary event. In past years, the commemoration had not garnered the attention of international media, political and religious dignitaries or even so many local people in attendance. This year, 2015, was to be the year that February 16<sup>th</sup> was declared a national holiday. Separate from Martyrs Day, a public holiday held annually on June 3<sup>rd</sup> to commemorate the killing of thirty Christians in 1886, by Kabaka Mwanga,<sup>44</sup> Janani Luwum Day had a special resonance. It was to celebrate the life of a man who had stood up to state power by denouncing Idi Amin publicly. In his last public address to Amin, Luwum had written a public letter, co-signed by seventeen Ugandan bishops and archbishops, criticizing the attack on his home in the early hours of February 5, 1977 in which armed men forced themselves into his home and accused him of hoarding arms. That letter also described the general fear that had gripped the country because of disappearances and killings, the brain drain that was happening as a result of insecurity and the possibility that

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<sup>43</sup> Which is to say that none wanted to be known for having skipped this event. Everyone wanted to be seen to be there.

<sup>44</sup> Kabaka Mwanga was the king of Buganda. It was during his reign (1884-1897) that Uganda (which was then Buganda) was declared a British Protectorate. He was exiled by the British in 1897. He died in exile in 1901.

the Ugandan president (Amin) was being controlled by outside forces. The letter, which is included in the appendix of Henry Kyemba's *A State of Blood*, is signed off with the national motto, "For God and My Country" (276). Within days of publication of the letter, Luwum was assassinated.

Janani Luwum is more than a religious figure –he was politically astute, and was embraced by all Ugandans, not only Christians. Many of the speakers at the event, including the now retired journalist Apolo Lawoko (who had written his memories about the 1969 consecration), spoke about Luwum's bravery and his faith; about how he spoke truth to power and yet remained a beloved figure among people. Among the speakers, Leander Komakech Sr. made the connection between the death of Luwum as a galvanizing moment for Ugandan exiles to begin organizing and training, so that when the moment for action eventually revealed itself in Amin's October 1978 incursion into Tanzania to claim the Kagera Salient, they were ready to fight.

After the formal events – the prayers and speeches<sup>45</sup> – the arena was opened to contemporary Acholi musicians and troupes of Acholi traditional dancers, each representing a region, each there to pay their respects. Eventually, the master of ceremonies invited everyone to the arena. This is your party today, he repeated. Acholi! This is your day!

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<sup>45</sup> A notable speech was made by my friend, Phoebe Luwum, who was interviewed by the BBC a couple of days afterwards. This speech launched her into a political career – she ran for election in the 2016 Presidential elections.



**Figure 7. People are invited to celebrate at the commemoration of Archbishop Janani Luwum. February 16, 2016. Wii Gweng, Mucwini.**

My presentation of these three occasions of memory is intended to show that each contains a claim made for identity, for belonging, for at homeness. Consciousness, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o teaches us, resides in memory (*Remembering Africa* 85), and these occasions, commemorations and celebrations of lives of highly accomplished and well-loved people are also spaces where people gelled, celebrated themselves and remembered. Rather than retelling an account of his torture and murder, it is the memory of Janani Luwum's consecration in 1969 and his commemoration in 2015, and the retelling of these celebrations, that helps me illustrate the depth of feeling exhibited by the veterans when they told me why they were motivated to take up arms and return to Uganda when they heard the news of the assassination of Oryema, Oboto-Ofumbi and Luwum by Amin.



**Figure 8. Posters display the smiling face of Janani Luwum in Gulu in the days leading up to the commemoration on February 16, 2015.**

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's claim that memory resides in language makes a powerful argument against, and to counter, the alienation from colonialism. Dance, culture, belonging, memory, language, remain targets of those who would control the historical narrative by retaining the colonial construct of history as claims to nobility, conquest, and civilizing missions. By telling our own stories, steeped in our own memories, we imbue our consciousness with the sense of ourselves in the present and as connected to the past and the future.

Telling our own stories is dancing, is storytelling, is song, is poetry and is memory and re-membering.

#### 1.7.4 Landscape as the Carrier of Grief



**Figure 9. Corner Ogwech in Lokung**

**The bodies of over four hundred men lie beneath our feet. This is a peaceful place, quiet even; the wilderness is astounding.**

After the reflections of memory in dance as the site for joy, identity and reclamation, we return to the journey of the hapless Ugandan exiles who tried to cross the border to join others in Owiny ki Bul in April, 1972. They had been intercepted by the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) and returned to Uganda where they were held hostage at Ngom Lac primary school. Abdon, who had been the teacher in the school at the time, accompanied me to the school and told how the Ugandan captives had been held there for three days before being taken to nearby Lokung where they were massacred. He described how the men were lined up and shot into a large hole that other prisoners had been made



to dig during the time that their colleagues were held at the school. There were gunshots all night long, he said. A simple grave marker marks the site.

To get to this grave marker, we had to drive in through thick high grass and bush for about two hundred and fifty metres off the road and then walk fifty metres to a tree that was cloven at the bottom – it grew like Siamese twin trees. A few metres beyond was this marker, the only physical reminder that four hundred and seventeen men lie here. Ants were terribly busy at its base and were disturbed by our activity. We are not very far away from the school, perhaps a kilometer or so. We were four of us parting the long grasses with our hands and feet: my cousin, Abdon Okumu and the driver who took us to Lokung.

At the site, we are surrounded by green. It is a quiet space, except for birdsong and chirrups of crickets. There is a soft breeze. The light is soft, the air sweet. Beneath us lie the bodies of at least four hundred men. There is a marker. A blank tile. Abdon tells me that it was placed there by Milton Obote when he returned from exile in 1980. Obote had promised, Abdon said, to commemorate April 17 as a day of national mourning. He says that there was a promise to follow up, to honour these dead and that there was going to be an inscription to follow. After the contested 1980 elections, the second Obote government was besieged by the detractors who accused him of cheating at the polls, leading to a protracted guerilla war from 1981 to 1985 when he, Obote, was overthrown by General Tito Okello and Major General Bazilio Okello, the leaders of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) as the Uganda army after the Liberation War was called.



**Figure 10. The 1971 Lokung massacre marker at Corner Ogwech.**

**Not far from the burial site is a cross at the base of a tree that splits off from the bottom into two trees. The unnamed leader, an officer, was buried separately from his men, I'm told.**

I am deeply uneasy in this field – I cannot reconcile the horror that went on four decades earlier with the peace and beauty around me now. Later, I would learn about *moyo piny*, the cleansing rituals<sup>46</sup> that are done in areas where violence has occurred. Four years after my visit, I would have the privilege of a conversation with the Acholi Prime Minister Ambrose Olaa, in which I ask him what is to be done when there are no lists of names of the people

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<sup>46</sup> Abdon Okumu references these rituals in his written account. See Appendix C

who died to be found. In Acholi, he tells me, everyone is accounted for. How? I ask, expecting a response that includes a census of some kind. He responds: when you have lost someone, when someone goes missing, when someone doesn't return, don't you know?

My frantic and futile search for names did not mean that there was not an accounting for the people who lost their lives on that day. In Acholi, no matter where we are, we are accounted for. That was a powerful lesson to receive.



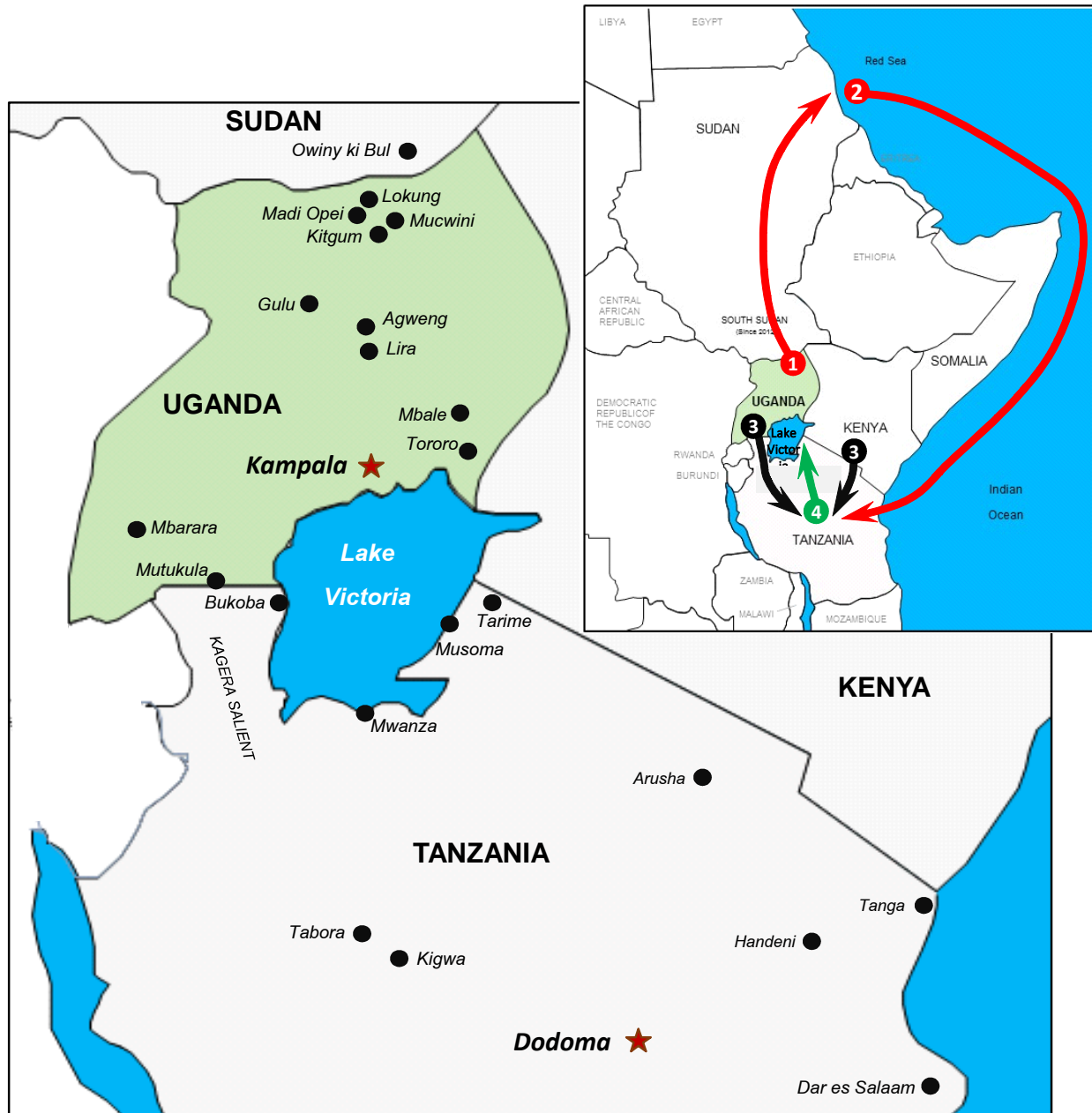


Figure 11. Location Map with names of some of the places mentioned in the text.

Inset shows the journeys various groups of exiles made to reach Kigwa; some traveled through Sudan (1) and on to Tanzania by sea (2); others came direct from southern Uganda or via Kenya (3); and then in 1979, they traveled from Kigwa to Musoma on Lake Victoria where they boarded the fateful ship. (4).

## 1.8 Summary of Chapter 1

In this introductory chapter, I have traced the story of a sunken ship from a threshold in London, through a historical account of Ugandans who sought exile to escape and to fight the regime of Idi Amin and all the way to the joy-making memories made in Acholi that can be traced back almost half a century. I lay out the challenges of what it was to discover that my family stories were part of the narrative that I was looking for and how my father's writing and influence found a space in this dissertation. I locate myself as an Acholi woman writing and thinking in the unceded, ancestral and traditional lands of the Musqueam, the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people; my opportunity to think with and think alongside Indigenous scholars for spaces of solidarity in this decolonizing project is a privilege. Finally, I introduce Black women writers whose work frames this dissertation as a decolonizing project in working through refusal, care, resistance and reclamation as ways to return to a poetic space of *wer*, also song, also poetry.

In the next chapter, I illustrate how this research led to song, a space for political memory from a traditional practice in Acholi where the poetry is historical text.

## Chapter 2: *Wer*: A Journey to Song

In this chapter, I trace my journey to *wer*, through the process of becoming a poet, of finding a song, and finding community from which I learn to sing. I also define *wer* by extending the technical definition of Okot p'Bitek's song which is widely thought of as a book-length poem with a single protagonist. *Wer* / *wei* / noun, an Acholi term, translates as both poetry and song. Placing the concept of *wer* here, before both Chapter 3 (my methodology chapter) and Chapter 4 (on "Songs of Soldiers"), enables me to find community within that of writers like Dionne Brand, Toni Morrison, Christina Sharpe, M. NourbeSe Philip and others, whose work in refusal, care, reclamation and resistance inform and are in solidarity with Acholi traditional poetry that does similar work. At the same time, it allows me to acknowledge the impact of their work on my research through a reflection on the major works of these writers and how these have guided my thinking in this dissertation.

### 2.1 Homeland: Where were we from again?

This homeland reflection presents the landscape as script and context from which I trace my identity, and spaces from which I did this research. Notably, it is from this reflection that I began to see how land informs what and how we speak and think. I thought for a long time, that my diasporic life limited me because the land I lived on was not the land of my ancestors. I learned from these scholars about how land informs thinking and how this provides spaces for solidarity. I acknowledge the scholars who have left a deep impression on me, their work keeping me company and offering solace and guidance. In poetic form, a

version of this reflection was previously published in *Room Magazine's* 40.3 issue on migration.

### 2.1.1 Migrations: Salt Stories

#### 1 Ash<sup>47</sup> to salt

I have carried a copy of *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* for a long time, returning to it often and regularly when I've been in need of re-orientation, or to escape. From this offering of Dionne Brand, the most searing invocation comes from the idea that colonialism was and remains disorienting by definition, and Frantz Fanon's claim of colonization as alienating (*Black Skin, White Masks* 38) and alienation (112). The maps that were created to help the European sea-farers and enslavers were not meant for the bodies that were stolen, to find their ways back home. Brand orientates us in various ways – first, through a quote from Derek Walcott that “the sea is history” (12). For an African like me, who is not of the Caribbean, the lesson is to look elsewhere, to look at the landscape, beyond the text. Brand writes:

I am constructing a map of the region, paying attention to the faces, to the unknowable, to unintended acts of returning, to impressions of doorways.

Any acts of recollection is important, even looks of dismay and discomfort.

Any wisp of a dream is evidence. (19)

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<sup>47</sup> Dionne Brand: *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*

Before Tina Campt's theory of the haptic, Brand was already teaching me to pay attention and to consider literacy as the ability to read the land as a map. After all, she provokes, since the body is already the site of captivity (35), "what if the cognitive schema is [also] captivity" (34)? Brand asks that we pay attention: "their coherence is incoherence, provocation of scars and knives and paradise, of tumbling wooden rivers and liquid hills" (*A Map* 218). How we read, or come to know, will depend on how we read and come to know the world around us.

## 2 Salt<sup>48</sup> to land

Nishnaabeg writer and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson looks to her cultural traditions to seek foundational knowledge in order to create a vantage point "through which to view our own liberation" (51). Like my Acholi tradition, the Anishinaabeg people use concepts like *Biskaabiiyang* to re-create the conditions for wellbeing and flourishing (51). *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* teaches that the Indigenous traditions of people as far away from the Acholi as the Nishnaabeg are, are valuable in the concepts that resemble and allow us to re-assemble ourselves in spaces of solidarity. Along with *Biskaabiiyang*, are *Aanjigone* (non-interference) (54), *Naakgonige* (careful deliberation) (56), *Debwewin* (truths) (59) and *Gdi-nweninaa* (deep listening) (61), theories that I know from my own traditions but had not considered them as tools through which to do this work. As a decolonizing project, I'm reminded to seek orientation to my thinking from the land on which I live rather than, in the colonial tradition, continue to depend on European thinkers

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<sup>48</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*

to guide my work. I am grateful for Simpson's generosity in sharing (through this publication) the guiding philosophies of the Anishinaabe people which so closely resemble my own. "Regeneration or restoration is at the core of re-balancing relationships," Simpson writes (23). Similarly *Roco wat i Acholi*, which translates into "the restoration of relationship in Acholi," is a core requirement for reconciliation in Acholi traditional justice. *Roco Wat i Acholi* is also the title of a 2005 report by the Liu Institute for Global Issues which sought to analyze the role of Acholi traditional justice systems in post-war northern Uganda. The intention to heal relationships, *roco wat*, is based on the idea that healing<sup>49</sup> is not limited to the individual but also to the wider community, the collective. These are spaces of solidarity that sidestep the colonial ways of thinking, and doing research.

### 3 Land<sup>50</sup> to sea

*Krik? Krak!* is the first collection of short stories published by Haitian-American novelist and essayist Edwidge Danticat. In the first story, "Children of the Sea," the sea is heaven (12), the middle passage (6), the place to tell stories (14) and where stories go to die (27). From this story, I think about the inland sea which is central to this project. Like the protagonist of this story, the people who died on Lake Victoria carry memories, even as they become "children of the sea" (28). M. NourbeSe Philip has "wondered whether the sounds of those murdered Africans continue to resound and echo underwater in the bone beds of the sea" (*Zong!* 203). For Danticat, the sea is a repository for all except memory

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<sup>49</sup> See Thomas Harlacher and the Caritas Gulu Archdiocese's Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi: Cultural Provisions for Reconciliation and Healing from Wari (64).

<sup>50</sup> Edwidge Danticat: "We claim our ancestors at the bottom of the Atlantic. We are the children of the Sea" (28).

(*Krik?Krak!* 28), therefore the job of the story teller is to listen, translate and transcribe memory which may be all evidence there is of stories.

#### 4 Sea<sup>51</sup> to sky

From Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, I learn that I must work with the information that I have. On a single page, Rankine lists the names of the dead from police violence – “In Memory of ----” (134) – and down the page, there are no more names and the text fades to grey. In my earnestness to find out the list of names of the people who drowned on that fateful ship, I needed the reminder that a conclusive list would not include heartbreak, longing and loneliness.

#### 5 Sky<sup>52</sup> to story

I'm in a taxi in Dar es Salaam. We drive by a stark white building against a startling blue sky. As the driver tells me, this is Statehouse, I already know. I have described elsewhere as the feeling of being caught inside a gasp. My knowing is not predicated on ever being there or even looking at pictures. From Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, I am grateful for the concept of rememory and the caution to think about how to pass on a story. At Statehouse in Dar es Salaam, I have bumped into someone else's rememory, my brother's, and this quote from *Beloved* jumps out at me. Sethe is speaking to her daughter, Denver.

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<sup>51</sup> Claudia Rankine: *Citizen: An American Lyric*

<sup>52</sup> Toni Morrison: *Beloved*

Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over – over and done with – it's going to always be there waiting for you. (36)

Morrison's rememory, unlike a haunting, suggests a relationship. One has to be aware, to be able to acknowledge, recognize and conjure a rememory.

You rememory me?

Yes I remember you. (*Beloved* 215)

I reflect on an account in Gulu by the first person who independently told me about Keny in Tanzania. Keny went to Statehouse, I'm told. He spent time there. In that moment of incredulity, I did not want to know what business my brother might have had at the Tanzanian statehouse, least of all that he was even there.

But after that, what? What happens to a story that I'm not wanting to think about passing on? At the end of *Beloved*, a refrain: "this was not a story to pass on" (274-275). I unpack this phrase (later in this chapter) to think about the work of a writer: responsibility,



positioning, location, respect, love, solidarity. Toni Morrison teaches that the literary imagination is required in order to create ourselves (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 4) and reaches beyond the narrative that has defined us through colonialism, slavery and globalization, and that this work is not of the margins (5). A literary imagination requires that we read and write beyond intellectual domination (8), the repository of knowledge that has been used to limit and define our lives in the present, in the text and in history. It also requires memory, what Morrison calls “a form of willed creation” (“Memory, Creation, and Writing” 385).

## 6 Story<sup>53</sup> to land

In *Lose Your Mother: A Transatlantic Journey of the Slave Trade*, Saidiya Hartman traces the steps of her enslaved ancestors in a bid for recognition and memory, but the physical journey leads her to a deeper understanding of living in the aftermath of slavery. The enslaved are our contemporaries, she argues (169), and therefore their fight for freedom extends further than a bid for reparations. “To what end does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present?” (170). Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe and M. NourbeSe Philip think and write about our relationship to the dead and all three are clear, that our lives in the present are inextricable from the struggles of the dead. Sharpe’s theory of the wake is fully illustrated in Hartman’s book. Wake work is process (Sharpe 21); it is an acknowledgement of the weather (134), and clear in Hartman’s re-turn (that is not a return) is a recognition of the afterlife of slavery in the

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<sup>53</sup> Saidiya Hartman: *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*

present. *Lose Your Mother* is a powerful guide for me to consider tracing the experiences of the people I write about, of those who return, those who don't and those who can't because of the weather.

The weather from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is the definition of complete loss and utter disorientation in the last paragraph: "By and by all trace is gone and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but the wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamour for a kiss" (275). Sharpe develops the concept of the weather into one of the aspects of the wake – the ship, the hold, the wake and the weather. "The weather is the total climate and that climate is anti-black" (104). "The weather is anti-Blackness [...] it trans\*forms Black being" (106) – it is the condition, the hold, the durational effect of slavery, and for me, also colonialism.

## **7 Land<sup>54</sup> to threshold**

Before reading *Zong!*, I had read Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and was struck by the idea of the tongue dumb, dub-tongued, damn dumb tongue, mother tongue, father tongue and English as a "foreign anguish," most powerfully from the poem "Discourses on the Logic of Language" (30-33). I was fully primed then, for the challenges she faced in writing the story of *Zong!* a slave ship from which the owners claimed

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<sup>54</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip: *Zong!* I am grateful to Ashok Mathur for introducing me to Philip's *Zong!*

insurance for lost property after having thrown slaves overboard. In what language does one tell this story? Who are the drowned? What are their names? How do we take care of these dead? Philip seeks to “bring the stories of these murdered Africans to light – above the surface of the water – to ex-aqua them from their “liquid graves”” (202) from the “bone beds of the sea” (203). Alongside Danticat’s “Children of the Sea” and Morrison’s *Beloved*, Philip’s *Zong!* is possible if memory does not live only in the sea, and if or when we bump into or conjure rememory.

I seek language from tongues that have been marked, excised, complicated and destroyed by history. What does it mean to write in the colonial language, or one in which your tongue is, numb, damned or “dubbed dumb” (*She Tries Her Tongue* 13)? From Morrison’s use of a literary imagination in becoming (*Playing in the Dark* 4), *Zong!* extends Hartman’s invocation to work in solidarity with the dead in order to transform the present. From Philip’s *Zong!* comes the lesson to dare, to work in silences and against the White and white spaces of the page. *Zong!* and Philip teach me about the importance of giving words breath and space on the page. Language matters; where on the page words are placed, whose rules are broken, and when, are all part of the decolonizing project.

## 8 Threshold<sup>55</sup> to step

I read Cecily Nicholson's *Wayside Sang* during a road trip to a small town, Shaniko, Oregon, touted as one of the best places to watch the solar eclipse in August 2017. I don't drive, so I read as the car swallowed the road, occasionally looking up from the book and catching her poetry as it was illustrated about us.

escaped fields to ditches

through school yards and parks

plants plowed back into soil

come back to me

as the way dives by dry lakes

150 miles to the next gas station

60 miles to the next church (Nicholson 60)

*Wayside Sang* is Nicholson's third book of poetry. Her other two, *Triage* and *From the Poplars*, are deeply rooted in place. *Wayside Sang* is not. It is deeply personal; she writes: "I set out to place myself in relation to my birth father's history" (104). Yet Nicholson takes the reader, this reader, through all the familiar places – "coming to terms with non-belonging as being habitat in and of itself, and not a particularly unique one at that" (105). I place Nicholson at the 'threshold to step' because her writing turns and re-turns me; it

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<sup>55</sup> Cecily Nicholson: *Wayside Sang*

orientates me to process, to a never landing: “ends to the going, an arrival to return” (81). Nicholson reminds me of the place I write from and to, and in her work, all the others come true. “To realize profound mobility and belonging in black aesthetics is to build solidarity unrestrained by borders” (107). So even though I write and think about a specific event, one defined by geography and calendar, I do not write alone and I do not write in a space of settlement, or ever landing – this is a constant never-arriving. My work speaks to a wider goal and comes from a deeply political community of women who think about our relationship with the past as freedom making, as becoming, as fluid, and as relational.

## **9 & back & back & back**

In Section 2.1 I lay out the location, background and lessons from reading the work of the scholars above.

### **2.1.2 This is where I write from**

On this land

& in time

What else will stave off the demons?

#### **1 Ash to Salt**

Having been locked to land & free to home, we discover ways to salt from ash. Also, salt licks; also, salt panning – what did we need the sea for? Never bound by the ocean; not until the slavers came down the Nile & marked us in chains, us terrorized, us enraged, us subdued, us faces drawn, us waiting, waiting, waiting, still kind, still here.

I can draw you a map.

The emissaries of the sorcery queen arrived, bearing gifts, as they do. Show us your chief, show us your queen, your warriors, ours demanded. We will not speak with mercenaries. We will not hold court with you.

They showed us the king in the barrel, the king in the Bible & the king in the bounty & they went home to draw lines that mapped us differently.

To make salt from ash is to live within your means. To make salt from ash is to live inside a story, to draw your own maps. This story is our means. I can point out the stars & show you where it started.

## 2 Salt to Land

This is land to salt, to cement bags & rusting tin walls, I tell you. This is land to salt. To shanties, to shanty towns, to tears, to sweat-stained handkerchiefs, to walking down the street in Nairobi. Land to salt, to blood, to red dust. Land to map stories. Land to salt stories – we never made it across the road. We were bound by mendhi patterns like maps of the places we'd been – round, round, round, giddy & far too young to be looking for love. At the end of the day, children still laughing, children still playing, chasing the train that races through Kibera:

Come city,<sup>56</sup> come county,<sup>57</sup> come towns,<sup>58</sup> come boundaries,<sup>59</sup> come red roads,<sup>60</sup> come rust rails<sup>61</sup>

Go train, go train, go, take our dreams with you

We might never cross the street

We may never arrive

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<sup>56</sup> Dar es Salaam, haven of peace – port of slave trade. Dar es Salaam of the white sands, of tourist love, of Swahili, of tanzanite, of love and of everyday people, of course

<sup>57</sup> What did we ever know about counties except what they showed us in glass mirrors that they carried in their pockets?

<sup>58</sup> In 1915, or thereabouts, my maternal great-grandfather, Mohammed Lagara, an employee of the colonialists, arrived in Gulu to work as administrator. This is the story I have been told. Gulu was founded as a town that year. It was named after the hot springs that gurgled over there: guru guru. What hot springs now? Even the swamps were drained in the name of development.

<sup>59</sup> At Berlin in 1884 why wasn't there a single African leader sitting with Europeans to map out a continent? Not even one? Why not? Why don't we talk about this? Even the Americans were there.

<sup>60</sup> During the dry season, red dust rises off the road, creating a fantastic silhouette of the world. We cover our faces with kerchiefs, head scarves and *kitenge* as we ride the backs of trucks, hitching a ride from Madi Opei to Kitgum. We drop the cloth from our faces as we step off onto the road, thanking the driver. All our eyes are masked with red powder; our days with broken and rusted testimony & our nights with lust for beauty.

<sup>61</sup> Because we had to dig out the train tracks to prove that there used to be a train that ran this track. Because these tracks were proof of what the text books never told us. Our great uncle returned from the Second World War, bearing colourful basins from Nakuru. He came by train, he said. There was no memory of the train until we dug out the train tracks.

### 3 Land to Sea

At Mombasa tales arrive in sacks on the backs of men that off load sacks, unload tears; off load sacks, unload memory; off load sacks, unload craters, unload boxes, unload bales, unload paper. Off load sacks, unload the tallest of lies in crystal form, all bubble wrapped & precious, on the way to prestigious museums abroad. Upload, upload, upload, horns, fantasy, white sand.

Land to sea bones

Land to sea salt

Land to sea flesh

Cries of excitement & heartbreak

Shanties shanties

Tell me again where you come from

& I'll draw you a map to the salt lines beyond borders that lead to my home



#### 4 Sea to Sky<sup>62</sup>

The thing that was there is the thing itself which is this: there was a story, itself the thing and that's all there is.

Two shadows walk with me, hand in hand, our feet in step. Do they know, these shadows, that they are the thing that is the thing itself that this is? I remember the warmth between our palms. You're always already here. You are the thing that was already the thing that is this story. Now we know that the orbit of stars does not depend on this love or any other. We hurtle to nothing, crash or implode & the sky remains an illusion & a fact.

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<sup>62</sup> This is the road from Vancouver to Whistler in British Columbia, Canada. This is the road that men built. This is the road that men built. This is the road that men built. This is the road that we cut out of forests that had had the view of the sky for millennia. This is the road that we blasted into being. This is the road whose walks we hold up with chain links, so that angry rocks don't fall into traffic. This is the road that men built. This is the road that required men to pay to come across the sea, by head, by tax, by head tax. This is the road that was expanded for the 2010 Olympics, also in Whistler, also in Vancouver. This is the umbilical cord between city and town. This is the road that men built, died on, and were buried in. This is the Sea to Sky Highway, from coast to heaven. This is the road that men built.

## 5 Sky to Story

We landed with nothing, into nothing & onto nothing. We came to nothing spaces, with nothing people, speaking nothing words, doing nothing, looking at us with nothing in their eyes. Us, with stories at hand, memories still unpacked in envelopes, photo albums, skin that had yet to tingle when the sun was right – where were we again?

We spoke into our own mouths,<sup>63</sup> taking, eating, doing this in memory of us,<sup>64</sup> the way we learned to do in church. We swallowed our words like bodies & blood,<sup>65</sup> looked up at sunsets with pinked hues, moons with rust rings that reminded us of salt.

The Sisters arrived. The Sisters arrived with crosses & cool hands. The Sisters arrived with crosses & cool hands & prayer & rulers to rap our hands when we got sums wrong & spoke in our first tongues. The Sisters with nothing eyes looked for times when we spoke into our own mouths & couldn't see a thing. We held on to our hands, never letting go. Not even today when we have shapeshifted, as we must.

Wednesdays, we ghost the line. On Wednesdays, we line up, we line up, we line up. We snake around the block waiting for a turn. & then we turn, & then we turn, & then we turn & turn & we're gone home.

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<sup>63</sup> We spoke ourselves into being. How else would we know that we were alive?

<sup>64</sup> Like Christ, like Christ

<sup>65</sup> Like Christ, like Christ

Hello sensual smoke, I've been waiting for you. Hello, glory, I'm not going back. I'm not going back. I hope not to return to this place of nothing people with empty eyes. Good bye, good bye again. Good bye, for real this time.

## **6 Story to Land**

So then, let's not lie today. Let's not lie. These are snake plants. These are air-cleaning plants. These are air-cleaning plants bounds in pots & sold at the grocery store, the gardening centre, the hardware store. These plants will clean the air in your house & in your bedroom.

But snake plants are also sold in pots along the road to Kabalagala in Kampala. A local graduate cannot compete with globalization & a history of colonialism & the gift of free trade & the uselessness of the arts diploma with the edges brown & worn that will never open any doors but can do with cleaner air & these plants will clean that air too. These plants will clean the air polluted by traffic, by stale stories, by lies & nightmares of never-ending documents that require signatures. Snake plants will clean the air, bound in pots made elsewhere, locked in stories to benefit the market. Snake plants will set you free. Tell me again, about the need for clean air & I'll trace the road to you where we're going.

## 7 Land to Threshold

Step off, get off, I'm landing here. I'm landing.

I'm reaching for hands that can hold mine. I'm taking shape again, making constitution, becoming solid, getting my skin sewn back on. I'm walking to the door. I'm waiting for the lock. I'm pushing the door open.

Here is where our skins meet, where our stories clash or sometimes come together in the gentlest and sweetest of ways. Tell me a story.<sup>66</sup>

Here, where the arctic meets tropical winds, where our skins meet, where our stories clash or sometimes come together in the gentlest of ways. Tell me a story.

Where we are now, people have always been. Let's not lie that this migration, that these ones are the only ones that matter. Tell me a story about the origin of this land & I'll trace my way back through salt lines, to where mine began.

## 8 & back & back & back

So now we've resorted to drawing daisies. Once there was a circle, then a loop back, then a loop back always touching the circle then moving away & back home. We draw circles. Our hands loop back at the elbows<sup>67</sup>. We're dancing<sup>68</sup> again.

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<sup>66</sup> In the beginning was the Word, your word, your language, your name. We have none inside your beginning. Before your words, before your world, there can only be an arrogance that claims the beginning. What else?

<sup>67</sup> In gratitude for life sustaining stories from sisters who won't let up.

<sup>68</sup> For the privilege of community and opportunity to witness on this land.

## 2.2 Homeland: Narrative through Curse

“The curse is an open prayer [...] embodying an intricate and lovingly ornate vision or revenge [...] the curse, if properly prepared and recited, will bring about the wish it expresses.”

(James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* 42-43)

Repeatedly, from the veterans that I spoke with, I heard about how the mother of Brigadier Pierino Okoya made an utterance at her son’s funeral, a pronouncement that the death of her son would not be hers alone to bear. I heard this story from various tellers, teaching me that this also is a possible beginning, like other beginnings, each of which are centrally reverberating and affective beyond the linear. To think affectively might require that we also imagine the mothers of each of the soldiers who never returned, each complicating the relationship to community that feels, the nation that demands and the state that controls.

Repeatedly, over the months when I spoke to people who were connected to this project, the curse of Okoya’s mother kept returning. It is important to note that Mato Oput,<sup>69</sup> a reconciliation ceremony, was recently conducted between the families (of both Okoya and Akello) and the community of the person who confessed to killing them. To consider a curse as place to begin a story is also to acknowledge a narrative already in *medias res*, or to take special note of the importance of a particular articulation. I asked one of my interlocutors in Gulu what he thought about the curse. He reminded me that in Acholi,

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Labeja’s “Government Finally Settles Restitution of Brig. Pierino Okoya” (*Uganda Radio Network*) outlines the ceremony that was conducted between the Pageya and Lamogi Sub Clan of Pujwani. Rayimondo Oryema, now deceased, had confessed to the assassination but healing and reconciliation is as important between communities, even after the death of those involved. As the assassination of Okoya and Akello took place while he was a soldier on national duty, the government of Uganda is reported to have paid part of the restitution.

resolution was important and that the lack of resolution (in any untold number of wrongs that have been perpetrated by and on Acholi) was itself a curse. The mechanism for seeking resolution exists in Acholi, but there are other utterances, other debates, decisions spoken out loud, that have come to define the country Uganda and therefore Acholi communities in Northern Uganda. What are the rituals; where are the spaces; in what language can we confront the legacy of the seeds of colonialism in Uganda? What are these seeds of colonialism and how do they become a national fashioning, a citizenry in the making?

In the following Homeland section, I consider the effect of the British parliamentary debates as a “fashioning,” as an example of Scott’s “lovingly ornate visioning” (*Hidden Transcripts* 42) that has nothing to do with the people of the land that would be caught inside this created narrative. The curse as “just retribution” (Scott 43) can also be, as Sverker Finnström argues “violations of any form of blessings, alleged or real, sanctioned by elders or ancestors” (*Living with Bad Surroundings* 213), thereby placing the power of the curse on the violators and the ones in “imagined kinship” (Finnström 213) and not the one who curses. This is helpful for thinking about the people who shared their stories and saw themselves as caught up in a curse. It also allows me to move away from the idea of the curse of a bereaved mother while recognizing the powerful effects of such stories. After all, the foundational story of the Luo speaking people begins inside a curse.

That story, as it came to us, was of a fight between two brothers, Labongo and Gipiir. Much of the time, the story focuses on the fact that the brothers separated at the Nile and this explains why there are Luo speaking people on both sides of the Nile. One brother picked up a spear to chase away the elephant from the garden. The spear, which belonged to the

other brother, remained in the side of the elephant and so the brother gave chase and ended up at the home of the elephant whose mother forgave him. She gave him a special bead and returned the spear. On arrival back home, the daughter of the spear owner swallowed the bead, as children do, with small things. The bead owner demanded his bead and the father of the girl cut open his daughter, removed the bead and returned it.

This is the legacy we carry, we descendants of fighting brothers. For an elder who spoke with Sverker Finnström, this origin story is principally about the curse from the act of spilling filial blood; for a war veteran who referenced this story, the curse was the inability to seek resolution between the two brothers. In addition to this complex beginning is the legacy of the colonial history of Uganda. To complicate the history of Uganda by reading yet another curse at a moment of genesis and out from which, time spreads further past the scramble for Africa, is to acknowledge the tremors that still reverberate. I illustrate how poetics can offer a space from which to regard the colonial narrative and peel back the intentions to reveal the lie behind David Livingstone's assertion of "commerce, Christianity and civilization" as what would save Africa.<sup>70</sup> There are many curses, many moments of genesis. The curse of a mother is one powerful and enduring image to carry through to keep this telling honest.

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<sup>70</sup> In the introduction to *The Scramble for Africa* Thomas Pakenham states outright his intentions to lay bare the intentions of the colonialists in Africa. The quote about the three Cs by Livingstone is carved on his tombstone at Westminster Abbey, London, but in time, the fourth C, conquest, would become apparent in the symbol of the Maxim gun used in the various violent encounters the Europeans forced on Africans (xxiv-xxv).

I offer “Day 36,” my poem from *100 Days*, to connect the power and intensity of a curse through time and space, in solidarity, in form and in resistance against the colonial bind.

Day 36

Oh I curse you

I curse you long & hard & deep & wide

I curse you with fire in your mouth

I join everyone with fire in the mouth

wherever we live & wherever we lie

we curse you

we curse you

we curse you (69)



## 2.3 Homeland: The Labour of Creating Uganda inside the British Hansards

Earth hunger is the wildest craving of modern nations. They will shed their life blood to appease it. It gratifies national vanity and economic expansion both at once. No reasoning can arrest it and no arguments satisfy it.

(William Graham Sumner, *Earth-Hunger and Other Essays* 50)

### 2.3.1 The Wildest Craving

Today, there is such a thing as a Ugandan accent, Uganda dress, the Busuuti for example, and a way of being – the nation in evolution has produced people who are often defined by temperament and in their distinction from neighbouring people. In this Homeland, I trace the notion of Uganda<sup>71</sup> from my lived experience of having discovered my Ugandan-ness as a young girl to the idea that Uganda was a creation from a kingdom that existed and then expanded into border carvings that protected the vested “interests” of people who lived continents away. To be Ugandan, from Uganda, of Uganda, is a fluid way of being, both from inside and from outside claims to Ugandan-ness as an identity.

The term Uganda is a misnomer. Manuel Muranga states outright that “the name Uganda is an imposition” in his chapter “Uganda: Reflections Around the Name” (*Uganda: A Century of Existence* 112). Muranga, a linguist working out of Makerere University, breaks down the history of the term Uganda, as a derivation from the name of the kingdom of Buganda that had existed long before the colonial encounter. Uganda (not ‘yuganda’), the “the first and

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<sup>71</sup> By this I mean the coming together of various peoples as Ugandans as outlined by European politicians, not the genesis of people who lived on the land. To be sure, the Uganda that was spoken about was initially limited to the Kingdom of Buganda and would eventually, through treaty, trickery and force, include other peoples that now make up the country, Uganda.

deepest meaning of Uganda [...] is this cultural spiritual self-awareness of a member of the Baganda family” who can trace their lineage back to the first man, Kintu (115). “The word will primarily evoke the essence of being a Muganda, a member of the Baganda family, and only secondarily [...] remind [one] of the other fact, namely, that ‘Uganda’ also means the place where the Baganda live” (116). The semantic breakdown of ‘ganda’ in Luganda, the language of the Baganda, can be taken to mean three things, each delineated tonally: bundle, blood bond and spiritual bond (117-22) which lends to the meaning of country as

a country for those who have been bound, bonded together and bundled together, that is to say, united by fate and destiny and history, whether tragic or comic, and not merely by blood; those whose different cultures have undergone syncretisations and their philosophical and religious outlooks experienced a syncretisation with non-African religions and philosophies.

*(Uganda: A century of Existence 122-23)*

Uganda therefore is a conglomeration that includes different peoples who have been joined through a common history of British colonialists on their lands. Different from Kenya, whose landscape offered cooler temperatures for European settlement, Uganda was not a settler colony. There were no White Highlands like the Kenyans had. Tanzania, to the south, was originally colonized by the Germans and Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was colonized by the Belgians. To the north, Sudan<sup>72</sup> (now South Sudan) was part of Equatoria, a province of the Egypt and eventually part of British

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<sup>72</sup> Sudan has a much longer history of colonization that this sentence does not do justice to.

influence. Suffice to say that what we now call Uganda experienced British colonialism differently in different parts of the land, but also differently from its contemporary neighbours. Colonial rule was disseminated indirectly, through a governor who was the representative of the British throne. In Uganda, (both Buganda and eventually, the wider Uganda) the British adapted or instituted (where there were not similar existing hierarchical power structures) representative chiefs who would do the bidding of the colonialists, such as enforcing gun taxes and hut taxes and forced labour.<sup>73</sup> At independence in 1962, Uganda was going to have to contend with its self as a new nation that was both heir to a British colonial system as well as older, indigenous political and social systems.

Today, Uganda is recovering from more than two decades of guerilla war between the government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army. Much of the literature on Uganda focuses on this period and hearkens back to the colonial encounter, suggesting much of the time that contemporary tensions arise from how differently the colonialists treated us, depending on where we came from and how we have been treated since independence, by various governments in succession. There are not enough accounts about the effects of these encounters; there isn't enough from the voices of those who suffered from the effects of these encounters until we started to pay attention<sup>74</sup> to the voices of survivors and witnesses. This isn't to say that Ugandans have not written their own stories in their own

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<sup>73</sup> For more on forced labour, gun tax and the hut tax see The Uganda Agreement, 1900, sections 12 and 13

<sup>74</sup> I'm ever grateful to Erin Baines who teaches and reminds me of the importance of listening from various positions and the need to create solidarity and relationship in trying to understand the politics of memory work. I began my PhD trying to articulate the stories of formerly abducted women of the Lord's Resistance Army and I have taken the skills I learned in those years to listen to the veterans of the years before the LRA.

voices. This is to say that we're not close to any kind of saturation point for stories from ordinary Ugandans who can help us decipher the bundle that is this country. And for those of us who are diasporic Ugandans, the idea of return is often romantic – we can never return to what we imagine/remember of what home was/is. Home as imagined or remembered has a long background, attenuated by the media and, for us children of exile, by the stories that we overheard our parents and other adults tell. Home is also complicated by the triple legacy of colonialism and the resultant disruption of indigenous systems and the various states of political instability in the country we call Uganda.

In his Caine Prize winning story, "Discovering Home," and later in his memoir *One Day I will Write About This Place*, Kenyan writer, Binyavanga Wainaina, whose mother was Ugandan, describes the difference that he observes as a Kenyan in Uganda:

This is a country I used to associate with banana trees, old and elegant kingdoms, rot, Idi Amin and hopelessness. It was an association I had made as a child, when the walls of our house would leak and ooze whispers of horror whenever a relative or friends of the family came home, fleeing from Amin's literal and metaphoric crocodiles [...] Kampala seems disorganized, full of potholes, bad management, and haphazardness. It is the kind of African city that so horrifies the West in all of us. The truth is, it is a city overwhelmed by enterprise [...] People do not walk about with walls around them as they do in Nairobbery [...] It's strange how things turn around. Uganda was my childhood bogeyman, and now Kenya teeters, and Ugandans everywhere are asking me what is wrong with us. (*One Day I Will Write* 155-156)

Like Binyavanga, I grew up in Kenya, listening to our parents speak in hushed voices about what was going on in Uganda. As we got older, we read the headlines – the association of Uganda with horror was steeped in the stories about Idi Amin – at school, I suffered the taunts of my classmates after they discovered that I was not Kenyan like them. My classmates first heard that I was Ugandan when as a grade four pupil, I'd had to explain that our family could not go to our ancestral home for holidays because we were Ugandans. My parents had explained this to me as a way to explain, I suppose, that Uganda was too far away for us to go home for holidays, and that we could not in fact<sup>75</sup> go home. "Ugandans eat people!" my classmates would shout after me.

In reading the British Hansard of the 1890s, I'm struck, but not surprised, by the weight of the debates that were based on a deep ignorance of the people of the lands the British sought to colonize, and the "earth hunger,"<sup>76</sup> a phenomenon describing the European scramble for possession of other people's homes for political and economic reasons. We were all caught up in that curse, in that hunger, weren't we? We became bound by this imagined kinship, bringing Sverker Finnström and Benedict Anderson's conceptions of belonging<sup>77</sup> in a

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<sup>75</sup> It would take time for me to understand the 'inability to go home' as exile. My mother used to go visit our family in Uganda when she could, but our father never went as far as we knew and neither did us kids, until after the 1979 Liberation War, when the government of Idi Amin was overthrown. It was only later, in reading about my father's presence in the 1969 consecration of Janani Luwum that I knew about his having smuggled himself back through to Acholi. Tellingly, my father was never able to attend the funerals of both his parents who died while he was in exile. This fact remained a permanent ache for him.

<sup>76</sup> In *Earth-Hunger and Other Essays* William Graham Sumner defines earth hunger as "the wildest craving of modern nations" (51). He delineates between economic earth hunger: access to more land without assignable limit, because in that way they get a good living more easily and improve their class position" (46) and political earth hunger, which he defines as "the appetites of states for territorial extension as a gratification of national vanity" (46). Both these points are discussed in the debate between Grey and Dilkes in the *Homeland* containing the British Hansard excerpt.

<sup>77</sup> As indicated above, Finnström's "imagined kinship" is defined as those who are bound by a curse while Benedict Anderson definition of a nationhood is defined also by an imagination of others who belong. What is it to be bound by, and know ourselves as brought together, not by culture, language, or kinship, but by the idea of a curse? An elder tells Finnström: "What is happening in Acholiland is not only bad. It is also something beyond Acholi tradition and culture [...] spirits that present themselves through Joseph Kony, the rebel leader, are alien and even evil, "not Acholi," and

terrifying definition that imagined us as belonging inside a curse. We reconfigured our familiar selves into disguises as recognizable everyday Kenyans. We were not Kenyan; we understood that, but we didn't want to be outed. We retained the Kenyan-ness that we had grown up with and, during the late eighties, when Ugandans were being deported back to Uganda,<sup>78</sup> we remained as Kenyan<sup>79</sup> as everyone else, all the while aware, both Binyavanga and me, of the "already mythic"<sup>80</sup> of our selves.

The sixties had been the first decade in which Uganda existed an independent African nation. Having received independence from the British colonialists in October 1962, and having been carved out as a colony from 1894, Uganda had begun as a fiction. It was a drawing of lines that brought together people from different ethnicities, languages and cultures and introduced to the British people in a series of cartoons such as that from *Punch Magazine* of April 21, 1894, as "The Black Baby," swaddled in a cloth labeled Uganda, and abandoned on the doorsteps of John Bull.

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therefore beyond immediate comprehension" (*Living with Bad Surroundings* 202). Even though this quote is directed at the spiritual limitations of Acholi cosmology, the effect of colonialism, the fact of the decisions being made elsewhere and affecting local people, in fact functions like a curse.

<sup>78</sup> For example, a 1987 article from *New York Times* summarizes the tensions between the Kenyan and Ugandan governments around harbouring each other's insurgents. We used to hear about people being rounded up and taken by bus to the border. Ugandans were evident from their accent and dress, but not us. See Sheila Rule's "Tensions Deepening Between Uganda and Kenya."

<sup>79</sup> During fieldwork in Tanzania, people constantly thought I was Kenyan. Initially, I wondered why, but I was told that I spoke Swahili with a Kenyan accent. Even in these days, people are more likely to guess that I'm Kenyan when I speak English, rather than Ugandan. We were marked in our accents, and marked ourselves as Kenyan when it was dangerous to be Ugandan. So now, what?

<sup>80</sup> From Brand's *The Map to the Door of No Return*. What it is to hear of the near inexistence of you and your world defined in maps of uninhabited islands, in fables written by others, in the newscast from abroad, say the BBC, as they go over the news from the centre of the world and you might exist when they say: "In other news..." (13). We only existed inside ourselves.



### THE BLACK BABY.

MR. BULL. "WHAT, ANOTHER!! - WELL, I SUPPOSE I MUST TAKE IT IN!!!"

**Figure 12. Mr. Bull. "What Another!! Well, I must take it in!"**

*Punch Magazine* April 4, 1894. Used with permission.

In this cartoon, John Bull, the quintessential British man, is presented with opportunity disguised as a small abandoned African child. Colonialism is portrayed as the act of paternal generosity. At the same time British newspapers present colonialism as a relationship of stewardship, and in the British parliament the debate is decidedly about

opportunity and profitability as much as it is about the abolition of the slave trade and the protection of converted Christians.

In June 1894, Colonel Henry Colville, a British administrator, declared Uganda a British Protectorate, a year after Sir Gerald Portal had raised the British flag in Mengo, the capital of the kingdom of Buganda in April 1893, an act that relieved the Imperial British East African Company from the responsibility and expense of trying to secure open access to the resources “inland” and an open market for British goods. By June 1894, the Sir Edward Grey, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs was still arguing against the presence of the British in Uganda.

The country is on the equator; it is not 4,000 feet in height, which means that it is fatal to European child-life, and dangerous to European life; and, after he had found this out, the unfortunate Sir Gerald Portal and his brother died of it. It is profitless and remote, with a chance of disaster thrown in, and it can be held only by the use of the worst of native allies, of Emin's brutal blacks. Shall we ever see our money back? Will there ever be return for the many lives lost there—return for Portal's life alone? Is it not lunacy to go to such a place at such a cost, with objects so vague and shadowy? If we glance round the world, is there a more undesirable region for us to hold?”

*(Hansard June 1, 1894)*



For Grey, if the country was not deemed worth for European settlement, extraction and access, what was the point?<sup>81</sup> It is interesting to read the *Punch* cartoon against the debates by the parliamentarians as the cartoon informs the British reading public of their role in part of a wider imperial scheme. For the British reader, the work of writers like Joseph Conrad was equally important in laying the groundwork for the British public to adopt the idea of the expansion of empire in Africa. On the role of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for European readers who might never go to Africa, Edward Said argues that beyond just a story, with "'only' literature' to represent Africa is to enter the battle over Africa, inevitably connected to later resistance, decolonization and so forth" (*Culture and Imperialism* 80) because of the political context under which these works are produced. Like *Heart of Darkness*, which Said writes is a "politicized, ideologically saturated Africa which, to some intents and purposes was the imperialized place, with those many interests and ideas furiously at work in it" (80), the April 24 *Punch* cartoon, more than a depiction of ridicule, is also steeped in the investment of Uganda introduced to the British literate population as deserving of patronage. John Bull stands on the doorsteps, a threshold<sup>82</sup> and proclaims his duty to adopt Baby Uganda, to "take it in" (*Punch*), to offer patronage. There were other 'intents and purposes' at play, the security of the source of River Nile<sup>83</sup> notwithstanding. Of the relevance of the source of the Nile to the Europeans, P. Godfrey Okoth writes:

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<sup>81</sup> I reflect on this in the following Homeland essay.

<sup>82</sup> A portal.

<sup>83</sup> In high school we were taught that the British interest in Uganda, which Winston Churchill had referred to as the "pearl of Africa" made us, Ugandans, special. The source of the Nile, we were taught, was in Uganda and was discovered in 1862 by John Speke. As a mnemonic, we learned the following: who controlled the source of the Nile, controlled the Nile. Who controlled the Nile controlled Egypt. Who controlled Egypt controlled the Suez Canal. Who controlled the Suez controlled the Red Sea. Who controlled the Red Sea controlled the passage to India. Who controlled the passage to India controlled the world. We learned to think of ourselves as beautiful (the pearl of Africa)

This was something more than an ordinary field of exploration. In Egypt and the Sudan, the river was life itself for the British, the French and the Italians who were interested long before the war of the Mameluks in the 1790s. With the construction of the Suez Canal in 1856 the race for the source and its control intensified. For whoever controlled the Nile's source would control the Canal as well. The exposure of the "Discovery Theory" would come to light in 1889 when Britain convinced itself that occupation of Egypt would be prolonged. Britain, therefore, decided to bar any European power from gaining control of the life blood of Egypt – the source of the Nile. (qtd. in Okoth et al. 6)

Meanwhile, behind parliament's doors, British parliamentarians duked out what they believed the role of Britain might be with regard to Uganda; they debated the crass and finer points of taking on Uganda (as the Kingdom of Buganda was even then referred to). "Uganda" was declared a British Protectorate in June 1894 but Sir Gerald Portal had raised the British flag at the Kabaka's palace in Mengo in April 1893, thereby implicitly taking over administrative responsibility from the Imperial British East Africa Company; however, in the British parliament the debate raged on over several implications of this decision among which were:

- What was the cost to the tax payer?
- Who was beholden?

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and as necessary for the functioning of the British Empire. It is not lost on me that neither the British parliamentarians nor the British populace, then and now, thought of Ugandans the same way.

- What gains were to be made?
- Whether or not the land was suitable for European settlement
- What was to be gained from this venture?

### 2.3.2 Earth Hunger

The opinion expressed in the *Spectator Newspaper* of April 14, 1894 is that it was necessary that the British “take responsibility” for Uganda for the protection of the Protestant and Catholic converts. In addition, the view was that the British must participate in resisting the “creed of Islam in Central Africa, one of the most frightful undertakings conceivable by man [...] They would be bound to do it, or let some other European State do it” (“Sir Gerald” 7-8). The question of whether the British should “protect” Uganda was in earnest amongst the public as well as in parliament. Much of this angst can be captured in the views expressed in the parliamentary debate between the MPs Sir Edward Grey and Sir Charles Dilke, for example.

What follows in this section is an excerpt of the “bound” debate between Grey and Dilke on June 1, 1894 in the British parliament, just over a month after the *Punch* cartoon appeared. In this extended excerpt, I retain much of the text that is relevant to the issues, having gleaned out relevant passages that deal with key issues. I cross out text I deem to be least important, performing the erasure exercise and then, in the next section, I reveal the finished work as an erasure poem.

Employing erasure poetry here allows the words of the parliamentarians to speak for themselves, stripped out as they are, while at the same time encapsulating the justifications

given in a far-away place for the formation of a nation that would – more than a century later – develop beyond the boundaries of the Kingdom of Buganda into a way of being in the world as Uganda.

Excerpts from a speech given by Sir Edward Grey, MP, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in a Westminster Commons sitting on June 1, 1894<sup>84</sup> during a debate on a motion to allocate funds for Uganda:

On what grounds ought we to have withdrawn British influence? ~~The ground most frequently put forward is that the country is commercially worthless. The old idea about Africa used to be that there was a fertile edge to it, but that when you passed that you got into impenetrable jungle and desert that people could not traverse. I leave people to form their opinion and to support their own opinion upon that point...~~

If you had not decided to establish a Protectorate, what would you have gained?

withdrawal would have cost you ~~something in order to have been established to have been accomplished in safety, so great you would have had the natural feeling of indignation that in that part of the world amongst people who, rightly or wrongly, had come to regard these pledges as British pledges...~~

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<sup>84</sup> Hansard, 1 June 1894, HC Deb 01 June 1894 vol 25 cc181-270

On the other hand, what would you have lost?

~~You would have lost the chance of new markets, though I have not insisted strongly upon that...~~

~~The interests of the working classes of this country depend greatly upon wide and far-reaching measures, both with taxation and social reform, which must be bold in design and must be pressed with strength and zeal.~~

~~If we abandoned Uganda we should have had, month by month, news of the most sinister consequences reaching this country.~~

Excerpts from speeches given by Sir Charles W. Dilke, MP (Liberal Party), in a Westminster Commons sitting on June 1, 1894<sup>85</sup> during a debate on a motion to allocate funds for Uganda:

~~The Annual Report of the Aborigine's Protection Society, which watches over the interests of African natives and which has just come out [...] observes with "deep regret that the main result of the Berlin General Act has been systematic development of projects for European encroachment in Africa, in which political expansion and commercial advantage, whether intended or not, have been aimed at in disregard of the true interests of the natives, and under the dominant interest of a desire on the part of each of the intruders to~~

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<sup>85</sup> Hansard, 1 June 1894, HC Deb 01 June 1894 vol 25 cc181-270

forestall its rivals in the struggle for appropriation of territory in Africa—"an insane desire, I should call it.

Sir Gerald Portal has gone beyond that argument. His argument is this—and it is undoubtedly the strongest—that in some way we're bound by honour; that we cannot help ourselves, that whatever the difficulties, we must do as proposed.

In the first place I ask, to what is it that we're bound in honour?

We're "bound in honour" to Uganda, I suppose—to Uganda only? Now, if this were so, I for one would sooner cut off my right hand than disregard the obligation...

But it is easy to say "bound by honour," and when any adventurers or patriots, however reckless—any jingoes let us say—want to commit us to unprofitable advance it is always said... If the country is obviously so worthless that it is clearly unprofitable to acquire it or retain it, the "bound by honour" is what is always said. It was said of Kandahar, and because it was said, or because unwise promises were given, the Government of India is burdened... It is said of Egypt, and its being said is one of the reasons why we stay there against our own interests, against the wish of the Khedive and of his people.

But the government says, "Gerald Portal tells us that we are bound in honour."

~~What does Captain Lugard, who was the agent of the company, say about these Treaties, to which Lord Rosebery and Sir Gerald Portal attach such importance? ...~~ Captain Lugard, who was the agent of the Company, discusses this statement ~~of Sir Gerald Porter~~ that we are bound in honour and denies it, because he says that the chiefs when they signed the treaties did not think that they were placing themselves under the Government of the Great Britain... and that this phrase was distinctly translated to them on every occasion, and that its significance was thoroughly understood by [Kabaka] Mwanga, and in all cases by the missionaries who acted as interpreters, and who were directed to make it clear, and who invariably did so...

When did we become bound in honour?

In November 1889, [Kabaka] Mwanga accepted the flag of the Company for Uganda. In February, 1890, [Kabaka] Mwanga signed a treaty with Germany for the same dominions. In April, 1890, [Kabaka] Mwanga refused to sign a Treaty with the Company. In December, 1890, [Kabaka] Mwanga was forced to sign a Treaty with the Company. ~~There is a distinguished man who is a high authority upon missionary questions, and upon all the questions in which the Church Missionary Society has been engaged who has written this episode of December, 1890, which, I believe, led to his resignation [...]~~ he quotes Captain Lugard's description of the affairs of December, 1890, at length, and he adds – This is the spirit in which this Treaty was forced upon

the unfortunate King.” Yet he goes on to say it is – “The only charter of your rights in Uganda.”

What greater hypocrisy can we pretend we are in Uganda by the wishes of the King or people? ~~This writer adds—~~ “If we do occupy Uganda, it will be by brute force, having at our command ... Maxim guns and the Soudanese.”

~~The Chancellor of the Exchequer conclusively proved, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1892, that we were not then committed or bound in the way described. Is it since that day—~~ it is pretended that it is since the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1892, that we have become bound?

When, then, ~~did this obligation of honour come about?~~

~~Are we bound in honour to the Masais, who have done throughout all that lies in their power by fighting and absolute refusal to treat, to keep us from their land?~~

~~I ask, then, if we are bound in honour now, how far this obligation extends, when it arose, whether we are bound before the Chancellor of the Exchequer lay down the noble doctrines of his speech of the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1892...~~

In August, 1891, the Company notified Lord Salisbury of the intention to abandon Uganda on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December of that year. Lord Salisbury did not object to the withdrawal, but he advised the Company, for the sake of other interests to announce that the withdrawal would be temporary, and



suggested that they should afterwards subsidise [Kabaka] Mwanga to the extent of £1000 to ensure his good behaviour and loyalty to British influence.

Not a word about "bound in honour."

~~£1000 a year [Kabaka] Mwanga was to receive from the Company, and that was the Alpha and Omega of Lord Salisbury's policy.~~

~~The strip leased to us between Tanganyika and Albert Edward Nyanza is unexplored, and the character and disposition of the tribes unknown. I am not aware by what arms for we are to take possession of this country, which lies at the very centre of Africa, under the Equator.~~

~~The Chancellor of the Exchequer laid down the true doctrine with regard to missions, the doctrine on which this country has always acted. Is it now that we are everywhere to be bound to follow missions with our arms and flag, and which missions? Those of the London Missionary Society?~~

~~Not the Roman Catholic missions, I suppose, against the priests and converts of which in Uganda we direct our Maxim guns, an act for which heavy compensation will have by this very house undoubtedly to be paid.. But I suppose the missions of the Church of Church of England. I can remember the subscription to send out these very missions, when they first went to the countries to which they have gone. There was nothing about the British flag. There was nothing about Maxim guns and Sudanese. We were told — our contribution were asked for on the ground — that they were taking their lives~~

in their hands, and going to wild barbarous countries in which British protection could be given and where they would form a true Mission Church among the heathen.

Who wants us in Uganda except some of the supporters of the Church Missionary Society, who went there without a conception in their minds of annexation or of Protectorate? In 1868, I ventured in a series of letters in *The Times* to ask the Missionary Societies of this country whether they intended to support the policy—the gunboat policy it was called—of their missionaries in China, and the Nonconformists of this countries censured their missionaries for calling upon the secular arm.

This talk of slavery, when we remember the condition of our Protectorate in Zanzibar, is hypocrisy; and with regard to the steps taken in Uganda against Roman Catholicism—the unfortunate incident of the heavy fire of the Maxim guns—we shall have to discuss that when we debate the proposals which will be made with regard to compensation.

I have dealt with this main argument, that we are bound in honour, either to chiefs, or to the missions, because if it were true, there would be no more to be said. But it is talk. I come now to the remainder of the case—slavery and the Slave Trade for example. This is a question of cost; a question whether what we can do in the particular place is worth the cost involved. Uganda is not, and has never been, the centre of the Slave Trade; and the cost of the operations contemplated in Uganda and its neighbourhood is

~~disproportionate to any special advantages upon these heads that may be gained.~~

~~[Uganda]~~ is profitless and remote, with a chance of disaster thrown in, and can be held only by the use of the worst of native allies, of Emin's brutal blacks.

If we glance round the world, is there a more undesirable region for us to hold?

~~The Member for Dundee declared that when we stepped in wars that were going on there which without our interference, would have been disastrous. Well, we caused one—the worst on that ever devastated Uganda—the war in which Roman Catholic Christians were shot down by black pagans and Mohamedans under our directions with Maxim guns; and the French and German Roman Catholic claims, consequent upon that destruction, ought to, but I fear will not, be paid out by the company out of ivory, for as Captain Lugard says—"The large amount of ivory captured by is in the war will largely indemnify the Company's expenses in connection with the fighting". But the hon. Member soon dropped his "earnest religious people" and "our common Christianity" and let the cat out of the bag. "The motto of Englishmen and Scotsmen everywhere should be 'forward'" Does he know what his late leader called that view? He called it "earth hunger," ...~~

~~But Uganda I cannot understand.~~

~~I am not one who are against all extension of our boundaries, although I  
attach more importance to our possession of adequate force to face our  
responsibilities :-~~

~~I ask the Committee to pause before they incur this vast new burden, without  
proved need or adequate reward.~~

### 2.3.3 Uganda Bound in Honour and Locked Inside an Erasure Poem

...we propose that our arrangements should not go beyond such agreements  
with chiefs as may be necessary for the maintenance of friendly relations  
between them and the Protectorate, for the control of the Slave Trade and for  
affording facilities to commerce.

(Sir Edward Grey, Hansard, 1 June 1894, 1)

What? Another? I suppose I must take it in.

(John Bull, *Punch*, 24 April 1894)

### Bound in Honour: Earth Hunger and Other Responsibilities

On what grounds ought we to have withdrawn British influence  
if you had not decided to establish a Protectorate  
what would you have gained

On the other hand  
what would you have lost  
new markets  
interests of the working classes of this country  
taxation and social reform  
which must be pressed with strength and zeal

If we abandoned Uganda we should have consequences reaching this country

The Annual Report of the Aborigine's Protection Society observes with "deep regret that  
the systematic development of projects for European encroachment in Africa

have been aimed at in disregard of the true interests of the natives  
an insane desire

We're bound by honour

to what is it that we're bound in honour

We're

bound in honour to Uganda

bound by honour

bound by honour

was said of Kandahar

it is said of Egypt

and it's being said is one of the reasons why we stay there against our own interests against  
the wish of the Khedive and of his people

Gerald Portal tells us that

we are bound in honour

Captain Lugard agent of the Company denies it

because he says that the chiefs

when they signed the treaties

did not think that they were placing themselves under the Government of the Great  
Britain...

and that this phrase was distinctly translated to them on every occasion

and that its significance was thoroughly understood by [Kabaka] Mwanga

and in all cases by the missionaries who acted as interpreters

and who were directed to make it clear

and who invariably did so...

When did we become bound in honour?

In November 1889

[Kabaka] Mwanga accepted the flag of the Company for Uganda

In February 1890

[Kabaka] Mwanga signed a treaty with Germany for the same dominions

In April 1890

[Kabaka] Mwanga refused to sign a Treaty with the Company

In December 1890

[Kabaka] Mwanga was forced to sign a Treaty with the Company

A distinguished man quotes Captain Lugard's description of the affairs of December

This is the spirit in which this Treaty was forced upon the unfortunate King

Yet he goes on to say it is

The only charter of your rights in Uganda

What greater hypocrisy can we pretend

we are in Uganda by the wishes of the King or people

If we do occupy Uganda

it will be by brute force

having at our command

Maxim guns and the Soudanese

we were not then committed or bound

It is pretended that it is since the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1892

that we have become bound

When then

this obligation of honour

bound in honour

bound in honour now

In August 1891

the Company notified Lord Salisbury of the intention to abandon Uganda on the 31<sup>st</sup> of

December of that year

Lord Salisbury did not object to the withdrawal

but he advised the Company

for the sake of other interests

to announce that the withdrawal would be temporary

and suggested that they should afterwards subsidise [Kabaka] Mwanga

to the extent of £1000

to ensure his good behaviour and loyalty to British influence.

Not a word about "bound in honour."

I am not aware by what arms we are to take possession of this country



the true doctrine with regard to missions

the doctrine on which this country has always acted

I can remember the subscription to send out these very missions

when they first went to the countries to which they have gone

there was nothing about the British flag

there was nothing about Maxim guns and Sudanese.

this talk of slavery

when we remember the condition of our Protectorate in Zanzibar

is hypocrisy

We are bound in honour

either to chiefs

or to the missions

because if it were true

there would be no more to be said

Uganda is not

and has never been

the centre of the Slave Trade

Uganda is

is profitless and remote

with a chance of disaster thrown in

and can be held only by the use of the worst of native allies

of Emin's brutal blacks

If we glance round the world

is there a more undesirable region for us to hold?

The large amount of ivory captured by is in the war will largely indemnify the

Company's expenses in connection with the fighting

earth hunger

our possession

our responsibilities

## Chapter 3: From Defence to Song

...because the author, she is a fiction in a certain reality, a spectre in a certain dream,  
a haunt in a certain nightmare. Since what I might be is uncontainable.

(Dionne Brand, "Verso 11," *The Blue Clerk* 68)

My people, I'm appealing to you, please hear my case

(*The Defence of Lawino*

by Taban lo Liyong translated from Okot p'Bitek's *Wer pa Lawino* 2)

### 3.1 Poetry, Song, Aesthetics and the Law

What is left after the process of unveiling the words and intention of British parliamentarians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? What's left after the revelation of racism, greed, opportunistic lens that explains "earth hunger"? I turn and return to my own responsibility to the text to consider what else it might mean to tell a story. I turn and return to Dionne Brand, Toni Morrison and Okot p'Bitek to reflect on the relationship between song and poetry.

In her 1993 Nobel Prize-winning speech, Morrison tells the story of an old woman, Black, wise, who was known far and wide for her "transgressions and the law" (*Source of Self Regard* 102). The old woman, a storyteller, is asked by some young people to tell her whether the bird they have in their hand is alive or dead. Morrison reads the bird as the metaphor for language and herself as a writer (103) and the rest of the speech is an unpacking of the responsibilities of the writer and that of a society that would take a language for granted. In the telling, Morrison illustrates a beautiful example of how to craft a story. So return to the beginning of the speech where the old woman is known for her

transgressions and the law, I'm reminded of Okot p'Bitek's essay "Artist, the Ruler" in which he presents the artist as the conduit and the guide for the moral and aesthetic values of a society (*Artist, the Ruler* 38-41). The artist, for Okot p'Bitek, "proclaims the laws but expresses them in the most indirect language: through metaphor and symbol, in image and in fable" (39). He goes on to say that the artist

uses his voice, sings his laws to the accompaniment of the *nanga*, the harp;  
he twists his body to the rhythm of the drum to proclaim his rules. He carves  
his moral standards on wood and stone, and paints his colourful do's and  
don't's on walls and canvas. In these and other ways, the artist expresses the  
joys and sorrows of the people... Ordinary language, with all its rules of  
grammar and logic is too shallow to contain, too weak to convey, too slow to  
effectively tell the message. (*Artist* 40-41)

Similarly, for Morrison, the old woman, (the artist by Okot p'Bitek's definition), demonstrates work of the writer to keep language alive, to pass wisdom to the next generation and to create something beautiful. "Finally," the old woman says, "I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together" (Morrison). It is not the bird that is lovely. It is the product, the art, the story between them. It is beautiful and it is beauty.

To take Morrison's resolution even further, in Acholi *ber kit*, to be well-mannered, to have an awareness of social cues and taking responsibility, is what make a person human, *dano adana*. By the end of Morrison's story, there are no longer two sides, one that is threatening and one that is silent -- two generations face to face, with a potential life or death situation

between them. In Acholi, it would be generally understood that the young people have come to wisdom; they know how to be in the presence of this writer, this elder, and have participated in the creation of beauty. Going forward, they have been bestowed with the gift of the process and the memory of this creation; they have become *dano-adana*, they are human persons, as Opiyo Oloya defines the term in English (*Child to Soldier* 16-18). In taking on the meaning and responsibility of writing, I reflect on another phrase of Morrison's – "it was not a story to pass on" – from the last two pages of *Beloved* (274-75), in order to think about the responsibility of the artist and how stories create *dano-adana* from the ravages of history.

### 3.2 Memory, Art & Transformation

Toni Morrison begins her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, with a rewriting of that first reader, the Dick and Jane series. *Look* is the direction. Look. Look at this family. Look at them. Look. Look at this white family. Look at how they live. Look at the dog, look at the cat. Look at Jane, Dick, Mother, Father. This is how we also learned to read. This excerpt is repeated three times as the prologue of *The Bluest Eye*, each taking on a faster pace until the last iteration where the words are mashed in together – in a dizzying contemplation. The chapter titles of the novel are excerpted from this prologue but the story of Pecola Breedlove that unfolds, a young Black girl, impregnated by her own father is one we're asked to listen to. We're asked to think about why the marigolds don't flower in the spring of 1941, not just to take note of the fact. Since it's such a difficult story to say why, the narrator suggests, we should try to show how (7).

This is where I finally get my direction to write the dissertation I've been struggling with. Morrison asks that we about think about how, because this is a difficult story. A ship sank over Lake Victoria in 1979. A hundred and eleven Ugandans lost their lives on it, as did an unknown number of Tanzanians. The archive demands that we look. The texts demands that we look. To look is to focus the gaze, to be held in the spell. To look maintains a distance by creating an Other – the one to be looked at. To consider the how, as Morrison compels us to, is to employ other senses, to listen, to create with semblances of memory and to remain inside the story.

I listened to people who remembered the sinking of the ship. I listened to the ways they remembered, how they deflected, when they forgot, how they skirted around it and the force when they went straight to the heart of the story – it was not an accident! These narratives demanded space, they demanded silence. For months, I could not touch them. I looked, I tried, but they would give me no access. I listened to the recordings that I had. Sometimes stories would emerge that I hadn't understood or heard before. And then the same stories and the ones I'd held on to, rejected me. Or I was drawn away from them. I got distracted by poor health and anxiety. I worried that this project was the wrong thing to have started. I thought about giving it up. I wanted to get on with getting on with life. Two of the people I interviewed had died and I had no more recourse with them. And so I returned to Toni Morrison.

### 3.3 Meditations on “A Story to Pass on”

Morrison concludes *Beloved* with a technique that we first saw in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. The repetition of a phrase repeated three times in the last couple of pages of *Beloved* (similar to the three times repetition in the prologue in *The Bluest Eye*) – to focus our attention away from the gaze. “This was not a story to pass on” (274-75). Beloved, the ghost or not ghost, whom Morrison calls the “ultimate Other, clamouring forever for a kiss” (*Origin of Others* 91), is the entry point for the reader to consider what it is to be othered. She’s the one who repeats three times: this was not a story to pass on. Morrison demands that we pay attention to repetition. This was not a story to pass on. She provides a methodology, a strategy against the dominant narrative that directs our gaze with: look! The methodology of the listener, the witness and the storyteller is to think about what to do with a story that is not a story to pass on. I offer some orthographic treatment of the phrase “a story to pass on.”

1. **This was not a story to pass on:** to go on ahead, to leave behind. This story demands attention. Listen. A ship sank on Lake Victoria in 1979. There may be no official records but there are some people who remember. Listen to them. Listen when they say that your brother was on it. Don’t pass. Listen to what that detail might mean. Listen when they say: if your brother was not on it, then all his mates were. Listen to what to the mates of your brother could be saying. Listen for their voices. This is a long memory, a quiet one, but one that remains, nonetheless.
2. **Not a story to pass on:** to ignore, to forget. “Remembering seemed unwise,” Morrison writes (*Beloved* 274), but *cen*, the haunting, is real and its effects dire. A ship sank on



Lake Victoria. It was not the singular loss of lives in the 1979 Liberation War that has already been forgotten<sup>86</sup> in the Ugandan calendar. To pass on it is to ignore the caution we've been given. *Gin ma onongo tye en aye ni*<sup>87</sup>: The thing is, the thing that was that, it was the thing that it was. "Memory meant recollecting the told story" (Morrison *Source of Self-Regard* 332). Seeing it for what was, is now what it is. This is not a thing to pass on. Listen. Memory always contains a seed. Seeds signal the possibility of a future. We need to imagine a future; for this, we need seeds.

**3. Not a story to pass on:** to lay aside. Other stories web from and to this one. There was a massacre of about for hundred men in Lokung in 1971, years before, on their way to join Ugandan exiles in Tanzania who would ultimately lose their lives on that ship in 1979. In another story, a veteran recalls the botched attempt to overthrow Idi Amin in 1972: "In Mbarara, they hold up tomato plants with our bones." How so many of them died in Mbarara. How they too, were deemed forgotten. How do we know ourselves when we forget the thing that was what it was? Memory is evidence of the *longue durée* – various countless examples, countless names, countless families, countless years, dates, moments when people were wrested from themselves and from their own lives. Memories are long; they are also wide and related.

**4. Not a story to pass on.** Hauntings are difficult, *cen*<sup>88</sup> is real, but the responsibility of the story teller is to exorcise the ghost by giving it space, by acknowledging its presence.

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<sup>86</sup> April 11 marks the date Idi Amin was overthrown and used to be Liberation Day in the Ugandan calendar. It is no longer the case. Instead January 26<sup>th</sup> is now celebrated as NRM Liberation Day. This date marks the date the government of Okello and Okello was overthrown by NRM/A.

<sup>87</sup> Acholi filler. In English, it might translate as "the thing is." The literal translation provides a poetic and somewhat philosophical entry into the difficulty I encountered with this story.

<sup>88</sup> Acholi for vengeful spirit.

Morrison teaches us that writing “... must bear witness and testify what is most useful from the past, and that which ought to be discarded; it must prepare for the present and live it out; it must do that without avoiding problems and contradictions; it must not even attempt to solve social problems, but should certainly try to clarify them” (“Memory, Creation & Writing” 389). Writing, talking, making music, dancing, touch – writing always exceeds the page.

5. **Not a story to pass on.** Stop. What does this story tell us about who we thought we were? Where are the spaces in history where we can locate our own voices? This story demands that those voices articulate what they remember and how they remember it. M. Nourbese Phillip reminds us that some stories don’t want to be told and that some stories can’t be told (*Zong!* 196-207). We do what we can with what we have but we must keep listening for ways that the stories reveal themselves.
6. **Not a story to pass on:** to employ as a way of getting by. As in race, or class, for example. It will trip you up. It will out, like trauma as Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery* (1). It will put you in your place. Or mine, as this one did. I could not not listen. I could not ignore the intimate familial connections to the story, otherwise it would not be true. And so I sat with the story, not wanting to pass it on, and waited for it to reveal itself, as it did.
7. **Not a story to pass on:** to carry along and deliver elsewhere. Remembering the poison of some stories and how they have poisoned us to think as we do in this moment. Look, those stories said. Look. Storyteller as seer, as healer, pointer, dancer, and singer: learn what to transmit, when, where and how to leave the poison.

**8. Not a story to pass on:** what to leave the behind. What to take with you. What to carry along. What to go through. Ultimately, to pass on this story is to take the on the responsibility for it and the extent to which stories continue to define us in these passing days, in these days where some of us can pass and some won't.

**9. Not a story to pass on:** not the one to let kill you. Not the one to let break you to pieces. Not the one, even with its bare fangs, accusing you of forgetting. This is the story to stand up to, to say: enough. You have haunted us enough. Now is the time to lay the ghosts to rest.

### 3.4 Tears of Dead Poets

In the 1976 Bernth Lindfors interview, my father confesses that every time he went back to his “Song of Soldier” manuscript, it made him cry to think of the friends and relatives that he lost in the struggle.

Following are some of the voices that have come from these stories that were never meant to be passed on. Differently from the “Songs of Soldiers” in Chapter 3, I have, as an exercise in improvisation, written against and woven words alongside my father’s “Song of Soldier” that he never got to finish. My words are indented as they riff off “Song of Soldier”. Some of these stanzas reappear in “Songs of Soldiers”. These are poems not to pass on and not to leave unattended<sup>89</sup> in an appendix, or by the wayside.

Here’s to the tears of dead poets.

1     He arrives soon after midnight  
       the sky is overcast weeping  
       his torchlight lights up the horizon  
       like the rising sun

          He arrives after midnight after independence  
           after liberation after the *saba-saba* guns have stopped vibrating  
           he arrives as clouds race towards a high moon

          perhaps he arrives with a grim countenance  
           perhaps he has small hope a handful a memory of wide open skies

---

<sup>89</sup> The four existing “Song of Soldier” poems appear in the appendix of Okot p’Bitek’s *Artist, the Ruler*, which was published posthumously. I present them here in the company of my words because they need the company of other words.

His black<sup>90</sup> face is

hidden under the bush hat,

Under fierce under power under metal under nightmare under a low  
moan under a growl death squalls bubbling under brittle under tough  
under mangled under blood spray under stories that no one ever wants to  
investigate because headlines because scholarship because journalism  
because Conrad because liberation day came & went & was calendarized  
differently

His eagle eyes burn fiercely

like molten iron

like caves dark silvery shiny  
like the echo of lead in the chamber of the gun that swings from his shoulder  
like incontrovertible nothing like games he played as a child on sunny days  
that eventually ended because then these days would begin

He caresses the butt of his gun

as the lover fondles the breasts

of his woman

as if  
as if she might have stood with him  
as if she might still be young  
as if she might still stand by him  
as if she won't turn away

---

<sup>90</sup> His black face under the bush hat at night  
even with a full moon would be a black face  
it could be a tarred face  
a Black man's face a black African Ugandan  
a man with a bush hat whose face is darkened by the night  
but silhouetted under a moon with clouds on its tail  
a face silhouetted by days weeks  
months of battle under a bush hat  
what features were you looking for?  
one aware of a triple legacy of crosses & blessings & curses  
a Black man, indeed

as others have  
 as others do from others like him  
 like him  
 as if she still stands  
 like everyone who was called the liberator for a brief time  
 briefly  
 just before the nightmares had them screaming at night  
 smoking in the day to steady hands that remember the slipperiness of blood  
 at the trigger  
 or the black rubber holding the stained bayonet to the gun

2     He sneezes  
 a dark whirlwind engulfs the land  
 gripping it tightly  
 like a python  
 strangulating a waterbuck  
 like the killer  
 throttling his victim  
       like the extraordinary undefined but ordinary after all  
  
       in those days  
       & in these days & after all this time  
       murder by strangulation  
       by shooting stabbing drowning & rape as small sneezes & big sneezes  
       as small whirlwinds in private spaces

He coughs  
 the sounds of machine guns  
 fills the air  
 mad jets tear at the sky in fury  
 scattering death across the land

Did you think we would forget those days  
 oh but we tried to forget those days  
 we choose what to remember  
 mad jets tearing the sky  
 gulu gulu gulu gulu gulu  
 kitgum  
 we remember gardens where our bones hold up tomato plants  
 where our blood darkens the soil in perpetuity

Ten thousand mad dogs  
 break loose  
 blood gushes  
 like the swollen Nile  
 after the rains in the mountains

water sprays brown red white  
 pink spray dissipates into imagination  
 as the life forges on through bodies that were just  
 just now  
 just just now alive

Young widows mumble  
 their broken dirges<sup>91</sup>  
 shuffle  
 fingers laced over backs of heads the occasional scream a cry a sob  
 older mothers widows aunts girls & boys silent or whispering

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<sup>91</sup> what songs do we sing by the graveside  
 outside the ones that we already know?  
 what poetry emerges from the grave site  
 what bone whitened soil  
 what blood stained dust  
 what witness can we bear?  
 what witness can we bare?

new orphans who swarm the countryside  
 like hopping young locusts  
 their tears cover the land  
 like dew on the lush April grass

His laugh  
 mingles with muted funeral drums

His white teeth flash  
 like daggers  
 glint like peace

freedom  
 mercy  
 nation

he shouts  
 freedom  
 freedom from what from who why  
 freedom like an assertion like a right like a job like a demand like a strategy  
 like doom

### 3 All around him

the corpses open their festering wounds  
 the soil of Mutukula & Mbarara yield again<sup>92</sup> & again<sup>93</sup>  
 they lured us with lies of safety  
 & we killed them with *arege*-infused blood

you can't be killing women & children just like that  
 you can't be killing women & children sober  
 in guerrilla war no life matters you know that

---

<sup>92</sup> In 1972 we were hundreds killed

<sup>93</sup> In 1979 we killed hundreds



you can't be killing women & children without a drink  
without many drinks

many many small bottles<sup>94</sup> of *arege*<sup>95</sup>  
to coat your eyes

Bodies with stomachs cut open  
the intestines full of holes  
bored by beetles

If you have time  
I will take you where our bones stick out of the soil  
I will take you  
where children play on the rusted remains of a tanker  
where the people dig their gardens around our bones  
where there were

corpses with penises in their mouths....

- 4      Freedom they said  
freedom to kill  
What am I a soldier for?  
Why did they give me this sword?  
If I am not to use it  
do you think  
I am just going to march past with it?

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<sup>94</sup> No, thanks. I don't touch the stuff he said. I haven't touched a drink since, he said.

<sup>95</sup> Uganda Waragi, a type of gin

5            In 1978  
              Obwona presented the plan  
              & just like that we were  
              Kikosi Maalum & just like that we existed  
              we were free to fight  
              we were given swords  
              guns   training  
              strength   plans   ideas  
              a dream of return   of return  
              far away from this place   home

6            I heard a great rumbling  
              on the horizon  
              it was like thunder  
              like an earthquake

             the cock that crowed all night long  
              none of us slept easy  
              some of us   not at all  
              we heard the barking dogs  
              the Moslem call for prayer  
              & still & all night the cock crowed

             Two nights before we left  
              three nights   four  
              a crying dog  
              a crying dog  
              a crying dog all night long

             how long did that dog cry  
              for how long could it cry

7      Now I see a cloud of dust  
        raised by marching men

       Forwaaaaard March

*twende safari*

*twende safari*

*twende safari*

*twende safari*

       No matter how we looked  
        no matter how we looked  
        we stood straight  
        looked ahead  
        looked ahead  
        looked towards the final safari

One hundred thousand of them  
 ready to crush          to destroy  
        to conquer  
        to take back  
        what was already always ours

8      The cock that crowed all night long  
        was slaughtered in the morning

       It might have been announcing  
        that this day wouldn't come  
        its own death song stuck in its throat

       Yesterday the clouds descended  
        & brought with it a deep cold a bone cold

Today is very warm  
 the dead of Lake Victoria must be cold all the time  
 & the dead of Lokung  
 must be baking  
 in the relentless heat of the dry season  
 in northern Uganda  
 except when it's not that hot  
 except also  
 that it never gets bone cold

9

Two ghosts in Arusha  
 sit on a ledge  
 look at Mount Meru  
 whose shyness is hidden in the clouds  
 there's no time  
 says one to the other  
 there's no time  
 there's no time  
 there's no time

Some of us had become fishermen in Musoma  
 we cast nets & later hired others to cast nets  
 I had seven men casting for me  
 & when the news arrived  
 that there was something at Mutukula  
 I said there now it's time  
 it's time to go

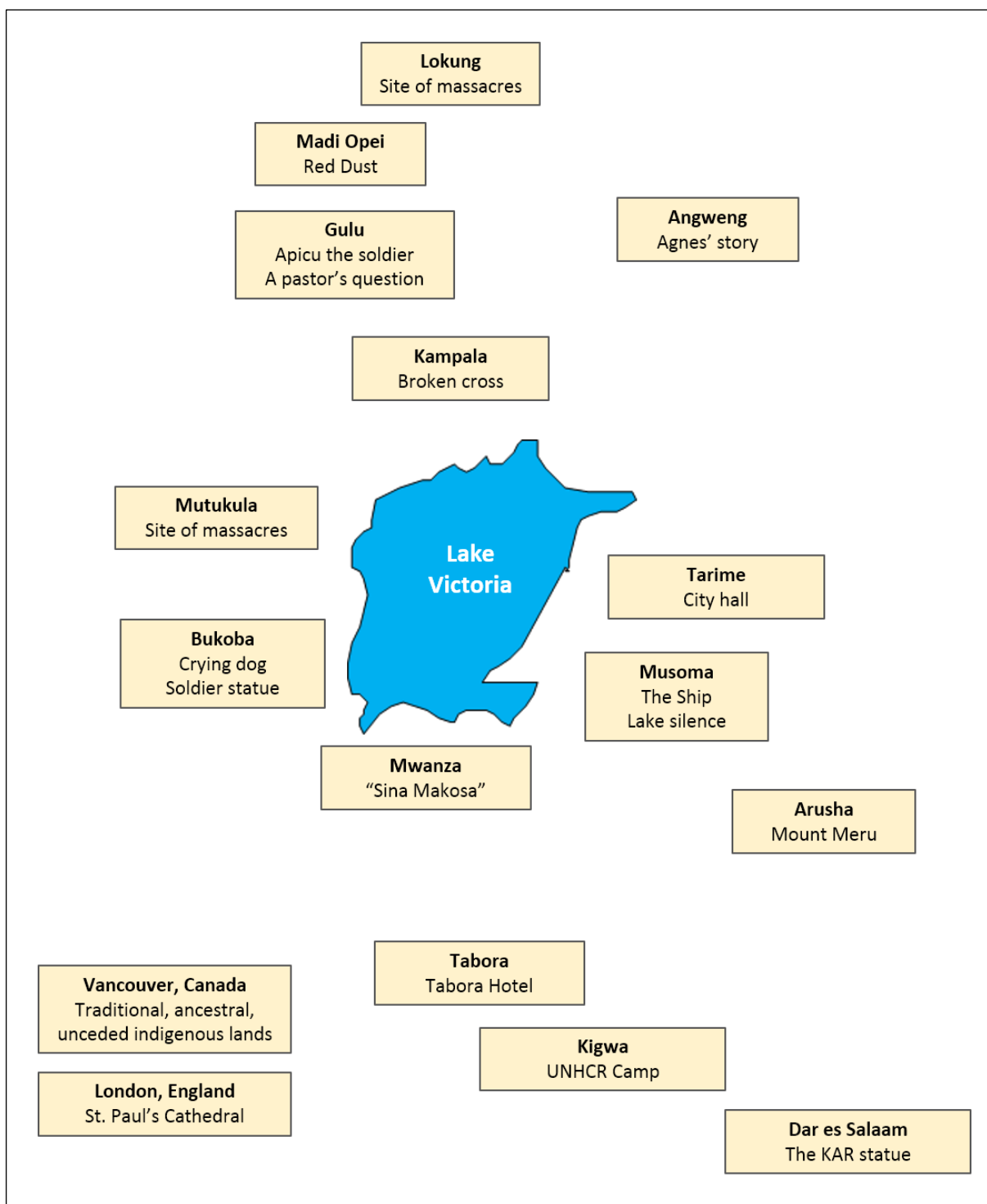


Figure 13. Tracing stories, tracing steps

### 3.5 A Fiction, a Spectre, a Haunt

Embracing Dionne Brand's maxim from *Blue Clerk*, that to be an artist is to be an "impossible containment" (68), I recognize the challenge of my dissertation in extending Okot p'Bitek's notion of "thought system" (*Artist, the Ruler* 39) that holds the social imagination together while attending to the beautiful thing, the creation. Some thoughts:

- (a) At the end of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Pilates urges Milkman to sing: "Milkman knows no songs, and had no singing voice" (336) but he tried to sing and then shouted Guitar's name into the hills which echoed them back, and then he took flight (337).
- (b) A singer does not need a melody, a tune, or a singing voice, but the ability to challenge the status quo, gather the courage to state the case and risk everything, if that is what is needed in order to sing. When Okot p'Bitek's mother asks him to sing<sup>96</sup> *Wer pa Lawino*, he is struck by the fact that he does not have a tune for it.
- (c) *Wer pa Lawino* was published in 1956 fourteen years before Okot p'Bitek translated it to English as *Song of Lawino*. Taban lo Liyong began his own English translation in 1970, finally completing it in 1992, and publishing it as *In Defence of Lawino* as a series of chapters in which Lawino presents her case, stating her thesis that African culture, is valid and necessary and that her husband, Ocol is wrong. In his dismissal of Acholi culture in his introduction to the translation of *Song of Lawino* lo Liyong declares he is upset that the *wer* had been relegated to a "mere song" (*In Defence of*

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<sup>96</sup> Okot p'Bitek recollects this in the Bernth Lindfors interview.

*Lawino* xiii). lo Liyong believes that the “song” concept is modeled on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* (Okot p’Bitek himself claims it inspired him), i.e. an appropriation of a foreign form to present *Lawino*’s story.

- (d) That *Lawino*’s case is a song, does not mean, I believe, that it can or should be carried in a tune or that it would be less impactful because it is called a song. Morrison’s Milkman states his case to the hills which echo back his voice. *Lawino* states her case to her clansmen, which in Okot p’Bitek’s translation, is presented as a case carried in a song, albeit, one without a melody. *Wer*, song is also a case, is also a defence, is also a scream into the mountain and can also be a tune. *Wer* is the containment for the artist; *wer* is the tool. The work of the artist then is to present the case, is to get out of the way – to become Brand’s fiction, a spectre and a haunt (*The Blue Clerk* 68).
- (e) To think about the ‘Songs’ of Okot p’Bitek (*Prisoner, Malaya, Soldier, Lawino* and *Ocol*) as defences, as cases, is to extend the idea of the song as a poetic device that carries the voice of a singular protagonist through a book-long poem, as in Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha*.<sup>97</sup> All of the voices in Okot p’Bitek’s “Songs” are steeped in the land. lo Liyong notes that Okot p’Bitek’s *Wer pa Lawino* comprises phrases, ideas, voices from the landscape around him (*In Defence of Lawino* x) including phrases and language from Bantu, English and ki-Nubi (xvi) mirroring the society of the time.

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<sup>97</sup> Now read as a problematic text in the tradition of the “noble savage” trope.

Songs are all *voices* that are contemporaneous with the socio-political<sup>98</sup> events of the day.

Okot p'Bitek is at once the singer of songs and the one through whose pen, singers sing, or as lo Liyong would have it, present their cases. The singer is the one who distills the voice of a society so as to tell the truth, to “contribute to the celebrations of real life here and now” (*Artist, the Ruler* 23).

*Wer*, therefore, are songs; *wer* are defences, presentations, arguments, cases, situations, arenas for debates and celebration. *Wer* are African songs in African voices; they are songs by Africans on the African context. To extend this thought to the end, *wer* are locational – they depend on how the singer locates themselves and the land from which the singer is a spokesperson.<sup>99</sup> As a decolonizing tool, therefore, *wer* are spaces from which Africans can state their case; *wer* are spaces of agency; *wer* are evidence of life. *Wer* are always about this moment and, ultimately, *wer* are all we have.

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<sup>98</sup> A claim that led to the exile of Okot p'Bitek in 1968 was that some powerful politicians believed that he was writing about them in *Song of Lawino*. More than the case of an aggrieved woman, the song of Lawino is work of the artist: to shake things up and get out of the way.

<sup>99</sup> Okot p'Bitek refers to Lawino as a spokeswoman in an interview with his friend David Rubadiri (22). Lawino, he says, speaks in the vernacular to address an audience who is involved in some of the questions (20), which is to say the song is always heard on the land it comes from.



### 3.6 A Methodology of Trace

#### 3.6.1 Ghost Poems as methodology

In this chapter, I utilize ghost poems as a methodology to trace out fieldwork as my encounters with ghost people, ghost making, ghost information and ghosting. These ghost poems illustrate most clearly my inability to cover everything I thought I'd need to, but also my intention, following the lead of Edouard Glissant's notion of opacity<sup>100</sup> and Rebecca Belmore's apparition,<sup>101</sup> to not reveal everything that I found out. My employment of opacity, the right to not reveal all, to retain knowledge, is a balancing act between what is useful for this project, what can be manipulated to harm others and how to show respect and solidarity with those who were generous with their time and resources and shared their stories with me. Opacity and apparition have political origins that can be utilised in the creation of *wer*, which after all, are also political by nature.

In this chapter, I also consider the challenges of writing difficult stories which in part, informs the decisions for the opacity of ghost poems. Even though that section refers principally to my experience of writing about the lives of formerly abducted women of the Lord's Resistance Army, the ethics of care that arose from that experience – to do no further harm while honouring the deeply traumatic experiences of the women – still apply.

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<sup>100</sup> Edouard Glissant's notion of opacity, outlined in his *Poetics of Relation*, is the idea that the "opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, and which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence" (191).

<sup>101</sup> Rebecca Belmore's "Apparition" is a video she produced for *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools*, an exhibit at the Helen and Belkin Gallery at UBC. In her artist statement, she refers to the video as "a silent portrait of this loss" (35), the loss being the devastation from losing Indigenous languages from the history of residential schools in Canada. In his essay, referenced below, David Gaertner reads Belmore's video as refusal. I take Belmore's apparition and Glissant's opacity as spaces of agency.

As is true for Belmore's experience that I discuss below, there is need for the storyteller to find spaces of agency, places to resist the interminable greed for knowing the stories of the suffering of others. In writing this section, I want to underscore my deep belief that stories can be as fragile and powerful as they can be deadly in the moment and through time. Sometimes I had to choose between nightmares, to paraphrase Joseph Conrad's Marlowe from *Heart of Darkness*.

*Apparition*, the title of Rebecca Belmore's 2013 silent video in which she sits in a chair with a tape on her mouth, speaks to the decision/hesitation I must take to write. Belmore writes in the artist statement in the *Witness: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* exhibit catalogue: "Apparition is an artwork that reflects my understanding of the loss of our language" (35). She goes on to speak of her awareness of the devastation caused by the Canadian Indian Residential School system, which leads her to conclude that "[a]pparition is an image of myself, a silent portrait of this loss" (35).<sup>102</sup> The tape on her mouth symbolizes her refusal to speak the loss or to try and articulate what it means. Belmore shows, without words and yet she retains the ability to articulate the loss. These ghost poems, in particular the superscript in the body of the poems, are like Belmore's tape, evidence of loss, articulations of the awareness of the loss, resistance to expose the wounding and still the ability, the agency to show without telling everything.

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<sup>102</sup> To this, Gaertner reads the tape on Belmore's mouth as the refusal to "bare witness," thereby interrupting the "victim perpetrator dialectic of testimony/apology and subvert[ing] settler expectation, which circle around knowing the pain of the other" (Gaertner 138).

I write out my methodology in poetic form because I'm a poet. I choose poetry because it is the form that I best know where I can use beauty as a method. Poetry gives me courage and space to deal with the most difficult subject matter. Poetry is also the form where I can encounter my father most directly. These ghost poems are excerpts from the only existing pages of my father's unfinished *Song of Soldier*. I footnote the ghosted versions in this chapter to be in conversation with my father's writing and also to have these experiences meet up with the early attempts of my father to write out these poems in solidarity with the people he mourned for, those who lost their lives in a bid for freedom. It is in this space that my experiences of the field speak most directly with my father. In this space, the fieldwork is highlighted but also presented as foundational for the *Songs* that were written decades earlier. I imagine that time is not linear. My father's tears<sup>103</sup> as he struggled with the writing of this manuscript flow from the painful articulations of the veterans I spoke with.

Finally, ghost poems are a way for me to be in conversation with my father who has been dead since 1982. While I was in London, I visited St. Paul's Cathedral to have a visit with my father, to imagine that I was walking where he had been, that he was walking with me. A major gift from my father during that visit came in form of an insight as I stood in front of the crypt bearing the body of Sir Charles Gordon. During my father's last visit to Britain, a few months before his death, he had sent me a postcard from London, with St. Paul's Cathedral on one side and a short note on the other. It is important to me that I acknowledge that my relationship with my father, whether it was through his

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<sup>103</sup> Bernth Lindfors' 1976 interview (292).

encouragement to write poetry, or the time he took to write to me, or the material and cultural gifts I received from him. In the presence of the crypt of Gordon, I became aware that bodies of royalty, politicians and religious leaders were interred in that building; standing in that space that I came to know what it meant that the history of Uganda is bound up in the relationship between the cross, the scepter and the gun.

### **3.6.2 What Choice Between Nightmares?**

#### **Intersecting Individual, Local and Global Stories of Pain**

In this section, I focus on the responsibility of the listener/writer in the presence of difficult stories in the aftermath of violence. I draw upon a single story to illustrate the ethics of storytelling: what to do with stories that are difficult, traumatic and yet necessary in the peace and recovery process after mass violence. I recognize the need to give voice, visibility and agency to people whose voices are often contextualized and rooted in victimhood, and a storyteller's responsibility to honour their experiences, and yet not do further harm in the re-presentation of these stories. This section outlines the challenges of, and a possible way to return to harmony, as Ambrose Olaa, the Acholi Prime Minister would have it, through a focus on care and responsibility of the listener/writer and in alliance with survivors of trauma.

I focus on both the reader and writer (who I imagine is also listener who will then re-present the story elsewhere). I also offer an original short story by way of illustration of the theories I discuss. Sara, the person around whose story this was written, is part of a larger group of women who were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (now largely defunct)

that waged war between 1987 and 2007 against the government of Uganda. When the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) overthrew the government of Uganda in January 1986, several rebel organizations arose from the ranks of the former government army and later included civilians who joined them in resisting what they claimed was ill-treatment by the new NRM government. The Pece Peace Accord (1988) that was signed in Gulu between the Ugandan government and the Uganda People's Democratic Movement (UPDM) signalled the dissipation of major resistance towards the NRM government. The subsequent emergence of the LRA followed on the heels of the defeat of the Holy Spirit Movement in 1986-1987. Originally made up of a small group of volunteers, the LRA began to kidnap civilians when it was apparent that people were not willing to join them. Tens of thousands of people from northern Uganda – children, women and men – were forcefully taken from their homes, off the street, from school, or while at work in their gardens. These abductees were often kept in captivity for years. Some escaped, many died, some returned home to northern Uganda and many have never been seen again.

The history of the war in northern Uganda between the government of Uganda and the LRA provides the context for the story on which this section is based but the culture of storytelling harks back to a cultural tradition of storytelling among the Acholi people on whose lands this story is located. *Wang'oo*, storytelling around the evening fire, was traditionally the time and place for education, dissemination of information and entertainment in a homestead after dinner. *Wang'oo* was formed by the formerly abducted women who worked with Erin Baines and Ketty Anyeko at the Justice and Reconciliation Project (hereafter JRP) in Gulu to work through and make sense of their experiences by speaking the truth and articulating their stories to each other. I worked with Baines and

Anyeko, in my capacity as a writer and storyteller, to document the stories of these women's narratives in poetic and prose form for a wider audience. I came to this project as a woman who hails from northern Uganda and wanted to show solidarity by listening/reading and writing/compiling their stories.<sup>104</sup>

Like the recollections of the 1979 Liberation War veterans who spoke with me, the stories of the women at the JRP were often laden with pain, but were also coded with moments of resistance, memories of better days and sometimes, a more beautiful past. Too often, stories of formerly abducted people are couched in the suffering they encountered in captivity and the only identity ascribed to them is as survivors. In the presence of the stories, my responsibility was to listen and/or to read, but as a writer I had to balance the respect I have for the experiences that were narrated and the need to document them within the goal of imagining and creating a future without harm. This meant that I had to deal with what seemed, sounded and felt like impossibly difficult narratives to work with, and at the same time seek out and highlight spaces of agency, support and solidarity within these narratives. I felt the need and responsibility to allow space between these stories of suffering and imagining another beginning through Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's re-membering,<sup>105</sup> Toni Morrison's rememory and re-storying. I focus on Sara's story to outline the challenges

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<sup>104</sup> *Stories from the Dry Season* (unpublished) is a compilation of the stories and poems from the experiences of women of the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN).

<sup>105</sup> In *Re-membering Africa*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o analyzes the relationship between memory, identity and power as the tension between the legacy of colonialism and the need to return to Indigenous African ways of knowing. "Is the recovery of the African historical memory and dreams, too difficult a task?" (100) he asks. I take this provocation (since I work and write in English) as a way of re-storying our story in a way that imagines a future that is not dependent on the horrors of a difficult past. This is not to undermine the suffering that survivors have come through but to celebrate the survival, the coming through and document what Thiong'o refers to as "the seeds of communal and self-confidence" (v).

of retelling this especially difficult story and then offer a story written in response to what I heard and had to record. This in turn provides a practical method for dealing with and representing stories that are laden with painful experiences and re-storying the seeds of renewal – to return to harmony.

### **Sara<sup>106</sup>**

Sara is a formerly abducted woman who lives in Gulu, my hometown. She, along with tens of thousands of young people in northern Uganda, was abducted by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army who had been fighting the government of Uganda since 1987. Sara is a member of a storytelling group who later organized themselves into the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN). WAN has as its mandate, the need for women's stories to be taken seriously in post conflict policy debates in the post war recovery in northern Uganda. Her stories, like many of the women survivors, are full of horrific details. However, Sara's remarkable recall and detailed telling marks her stories out from the others.

Sara recounts an event in the forest in which she came across a body in a shallow grave and made concession<sup>107</sup> as she must, for disturbing the rest of the dead. I must be clear here, that Sara's story of this event is not in itself remarkable. Sadly, such stories are all too ordinary as many bodies of people who lost their lives in the war have never been recovered and it is not uncommon to come across a shallow grave. Sara's story affected me at a profound level. So much so, that I was quite prepared to let it remain unwritten. But the

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<sup>106</sup> Not her real name.

<sup>107</sup> It is customary among Acholi people, on encountering a dead body, to place a branch or a leaf over it and apologize for disturbing its resting place.

story stayed in my mind and body. For months, I experienced insomnia, irritability, headaches and had nightmares when I did sleep. Sometimes my then husband would wake me up, telling me that I'd been crying in my sleep. Although other things may also have been affecting me, this experience was deeply haunting.

What stood out in Sara's account was how much that event dripped with pain. The excruciating and harrowing details she provided will not be repeated here but suffice to say, it hurt to read, as much as I'm certain, it must have rent the hearts of those who heard her tell it aloud. Sara, in her telling, locates herself as a person who couldn't have been responsible for the death, but knows that there must be serious repercussions for disturbing the dead. She appeals to the dead to forgive her for being in this space and prays that her ritual act of placing a leafed branch on the body will signify her remorse for its death and lack of proper burial. If, by itself, this was not a remarkable story – many people have spoken about coming across unburied bodies, then what business of mine was it to re-tell this story? What is the work of re-storying beyond telling as documentation? Bound by the exquisite refrain from the women of WAN – our stories must be told – and Sara's powerful telling, I knew that my work as a story teller would entail the responsibility of both documenting and seeking ways towards a possible future without the weight of this painful encounter from the past.

Stories bind us; in the telling or reading, we're caught in the narration or events that suspend the world and afterwards the world is changed because it has been imbued by the experience of the story. I had to reproduce Sara's account. This was a story that insisted on



itself, much like the way NourbeSe Philip writes about<sup>108</sup> in the Notanda to *Zong!*. This was a story that could not be told and yet had to be told, she writes (196-207) – “[a]nd only in not-telling can the story be told; only in the space where it’s not told – literally in the margins of the text, a sort of negative space, a space, not so much of non-meaning as anti-meaning” (201). Like Philip, and in the tradition of Toni Morrison, I felt a responsibility to both the story and the dead. In the italicized introduction to *The Bluest Eye*, an un-named narrator, possibly Morrison herself, says of the difficult experience of Pecola Breedlove about to unfold. “There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since why is difficult, one must take refuge in how” (Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 6). I went about thinking *how* to tell this story without distancing the reader through a direct recounting of the tale while respecting fully the ways in which the teller and the listener are connected by the tale. I needed to connect with an unknowable reader, to make this story universal and yet have it *remain* a particular, intimate and localized story. I had to find a way to reach a reader who would have limited access to, but still be able to relate to an untold horror. I needed to access the senses, evoke hearing, feeling and memory of the inaccessible – to speak/write the unspeakable. The story I wrote finally emerged from months of working itself out.

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<sup>108</sup> “Can I? Should I? Will I? Must I? I did” (Philip *Zong!* 200)

### **A Groan, a Wailing**

It was a clearing in the forest on the way to the well, or to collect firewood. It was a clearing in the forest that claimed silence, even with everything alive, around it – birds, crickets, mute worms that inched along on their bellies, ants carrying and passing on, stories and luggage, luggage and stories. It was a clearing with fallen leaves, half composted, soft underbrush, some grass, thin branched trees, bushes, really.

It was an afternoon. It could have been late morning, perfectly warm, still, not yet hot. It could have been high noon.

It was definitely a clearing.

It was a clearing in the forest on the way to fetch water, or was that fire wood or an errand to run? It doesn't matter. It was a clearing in time, a moment that yesterday and today and yesterday before it and before it stretched back, much like this moment right now. It was a silence that spoke without saying anything.

Look!

Fallen leaves half composting, leaf siblings still on the tree waiting for a gust in the wind, waiting for the bang at the door in the middle of the night – get out! Get out right now or we will kill you if we have to come inside. Get out or we will burn the house down! Get out or we will come in and shoot you all.

Get out!

Leaves on the tree, not yet broken off, hanging on, hanging on.

Oh, grant me peace in these thy tender mercies. Prayers remained stuck in the moment.

What's going on? What's going on?

A moment like that followed another and another in those days. It was everywhere – going to the forest to get firewood, run an errand or was that to fetch water? It doesn't matter now. It didn't then.

In this moment, yesterday and today collapses and nothing speaks. Nothing says a word. Nothing whispers that this, too, is a haunted space. This too, like everywhere else we step on, in all the days of our lives are haunted spaces. Here, where everywhere is now and never was, we know to pick up a branch and lay it on the ground and say, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm not the one who killed you. The shame is mine, and it is not mine.

I'm ashamed.

I'm ashamed to be here. The shame is mine. The shame is not mine. Still, I'm ashamed to be here and I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm ashamed. All I know is to pick up a branch, lay it on the ground and say, I'm sorry. I didn't kill you. It was not my wish to desecrate your resting place. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

A murmuring, a muted conversation. Others walk by.

A spot of sunlight overhead, or is the sun already thinking of setting out in the horizon? A quiet heart, a moment unlike any we've ever had, and yet this is the moment. This is the moment that is yesterday and right now and yesterday before it, and before that.

We return and look to fit in an existence without this story. We wish to fit as if nothing happened. We need to fit again. We want to be like everyone else. We want to think that this never happened. This never happened, I tell myself, so that I can forget. But the shame remains, trailing a story I wish I never told or never had to tell. And after all this, we're nothing without our stories. I'm ashamed of this story and yet I am of it. It was not my shame and it is my shame. Here I am. I know to place a branch on the body. I know to say I'm sorry, and I am.

We return to nothing and the leaves won't even acknowledge that we were ever here. And so we pass on these stories and whisper to the bark of trees that still stand against the wind.

### **The Unspeakable, the Untold, the Cannot Be Told**

In writing “A Groan, a Wail,” I was cognizant of the need to present nature as a witness, one that would not testify and yet would remain in solidarity with Sara. I needed to evoke an insistence on that memory and allow it to be in the realm of the unforgotten and yet not be completely remembered. It had to be a recollection that could not be pinpointed to a specific day or time – something that is familiar to readers – something almost lost, but not quite. I use allegory, repetition, anthropomorphy, prayer chant and absence to indicate Sara’s utter aloneness along with evidence of Sara’s prior knowledge to save herself, to clear a path forward. Rather than focus on the horror, this re-telling should also remind us that there is hope to be found in what we already know. In so doing I hope to touch a reader who has felt alone; who has wondered about fate; who has lost faith in prayer but continued to pray anyway; and for whom the moment seemed to signify everything. I felt that there was no need to focus on the graphic detail of death that would hijack Sara’s experience. Instead, I aim to focus on an empathetic connection, one that can carry forward in a way that does not re-create but alludes to the horror and to what others might deem the unspeakable.

Many post-colonial writers have reflected on what to do and to write in face of the unspeakable. The main thesis from Thiong’o’s *Re-membering Africa* is that re-membering is part of the process of decolonialization so that formerly colonized people can re-history and re-claim their own country and being. Similarly, Morrison’s ‘re-memory’ is a way of re-creating the past that lives within individuals, peoples and nations. I suggest that this process of re-membering or re-memorizing and re-storying is part of healing – whether

from colonization or other trauma; but more than this, these are tools with which to take charge of one's story both in the past and towards the future. Further, there is a responsibility to do this that extends from individuals, to nations, to all those who hear or listen to stories.

Canadian First Nations writer Thomas King and Black scholar Saidiya Hartman both believe in the transformative power of the ability to construct a new, competing and subversive, history narrative in the face of the dominant and violent version of history of their people. Hartman, in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, is explicit that re-telling stories of violence must have an end-goal of subversion of that violence in a process of reconstruction of society. She asks, "To what end does one conjure the ghosts of slavery if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present" (171)? For King, as he writes in his collection of essays *The Truth About Stories*, "[st]ories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous [...] once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world" (9-10). To tell a story is to be cognizant of the way it makes the world. To speak these stories is to speak a different truth.

For these reasons and in other ways, the violence of some stories remain 'unspeakable'. That is, the violence of slavery, colonization or other forms of violent domination represents "violations of the social contract that are too terrible to utter aloud," as Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery*.<sup>109</sup> And yet, as above, post-colonial authors and others insist upon the importance of speaking the unspeakable. These unspeakable stories,

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<sup>109</sup> The term "unspeakable" is a recognition of the terror and unspeakable of atrocity for which language sometimes has no place.

these unspeakable histories, are a condition of the present, and, as both King and Hartman argue, a pre-condition for imagining and creating a new future. Indeed, as Leanne Simpson suggests in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, storytelling and the writing of stories can be a *method* that helps create a just reality (32-33). This is a bold claim and it is obviously not always the case because writing can and has contributed to unjust realities.

Several writers have reflected on how trauma can initially prevent expression. Herman's work on the effects of silencing and silenced stories in *Trauma and Recovery* is remarkable in the parallels that she draws between war veterans and victims of rape; both demographics remain stymied by the way the world seems to present as a place that is unwilling, unready and unable to bear the stories of their experiences. According to Herman, survivors of trauma exhibit the same symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), implying that the effects of the battlefield may also be found in the domestic space, a terrifying collapse of insight (Herman 32). Survivors of rape and war veterans remain vulnerable because their experiences shatter the way the world reveals itself. She quotes Leo Eitinger, a psychiatrist who worked with Nazi concentration camp survivors: "War and victims are something the community wants to forget; a wall of oblivion is drawn over everything painful and unpleasant [...] on one side victims who perhaps wish to forget but cannot, and on the other those [...] who very intensely both wish to forget and often succeed in doing so" (Herman 1, 8). And yet, as Herman maintains, "atrocities refuse to be buried" (1). For Herman, it is not so much a responsibility to express the inexpressible as it is an imperative impulse – there's no escape from the telling, even though the intention might be to relegate the accounts into wordless formations, like an opacity that prevents sight and access to understanding.

Other writers highlight how silence, not speaking or not writing, can be a form of expressive communication. Veena Das, in her work with women victims of violence in India show in *Life and Words: Exploring Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* that along with the inexpressible burden of difficult knowledge, silence may also be a *tactic* used by victims to underscore the weight of horror of their experiences.<sup>110</sup> Das shows how some women in India decided to keep silent about their stories of trauma, refusing to pollute the world through words that might create the possibility of reoccurrence. They chose, instead, to let their stories remain inside their bodies, like un-birthing babies (184-204). It is important to recognize that these women were not simply passive. The silence of these women can be seen as gatekeeping, holding in anything that might interfere with the establishment of peace after mass violence. Das explains their need to hold on to these stories, arguing that

there is a deep moral energy in the refusal to represent some violations of the human body, for these violations are seen as being against nature, as defining the limits of life itself... The intuition that some violations cannot be verbalized in everyday life is to recognize that work cannot be performed on these within the burned and numbed every day. (90)

These women thus take on the responsibility of their individual and societal stories by refusing to continue the shattering of the moral order which their experiences represent.

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<sup>110</sup> Das asks: What is it to lose one's worlds? (2) Das is interested in the effects of violent memories on people (8). For further reading on silence as a strategy that doesn't rule out the showing of devastation, see Chapter 11 ("Revisiting Trauma Testimony and Political Community") of the same book.



However, these women also mark their bodies out as polluted, speaking the trauma of their experiences visually in an embodied way. In other words, they both speak and do not speak the pollution of their stories; they are a constant reminder to society of past events and their visible pollution challenges society to take responsibility for the brutal past. But at the same time, in their silence, they do not continue the violation of the moral order.

Conversely, Toni Morrison, in "The Site of Memory," insists that writers have a moral responsibility to "to rip off the veil drawn over proceedings 'too terrible to narrate'" (*What Moves at the Margin* 70) and that we must use the tools we have, even re-invent traditional tools, to tell them (65-80). For Morrison, it is the things that happened long ago that hold sway over us. The work of the writer, she asserts, is to alleviate this hold and mould it to help us ascertain who we are today. It seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time (*What Moves* 64). In her 1992 collection of essays *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison observes the relegation of Black Americans to the edges of representation in literature, encased as sexualized and racialized beings who are also immutably powerless and voiceless in the American canon. Being only marginally represented, and then usually by white others, Black Americans remain only partially (or racially hyphenated) American (1-28). That these representations are to be found in the literary canon of [white] American fiction must give us pause to think about what it means to claim a cultural identity that is founded on "a fiction of nationhood that is steeped in a toxin of [the] past" (Morrison "Facts"). Morrison is interested in implicating both white male writers and the reader (*The Bluest Eye* 214), a daring and necessary step in taking responsibility for the stories we acquire and read. She challenges storytellers to take

responsibility to tell difficult stories, but, like the Indian women whom Das discusses, Morrison places a responsibility on *all* members, the teller and the audience of a community, for their stories.

Earlier writers have explored these themes in different ways. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the responsibility of the storyteller is bound to the teller as an arbiter, or an editor, of pain. In that novel, the unnamed narrator positions the character Marlow as the person who carries the legacy of Kurtz back to Europe, representing a recreation of an image of the European in colonial Africa that we still see in the media today. Kurtz is the savior, the entrepreneur, the brave and selfless man who dies in the Congo among the locals who mourn his death. Marlow knows, as does the reader, and the unnamed narrator and all three other men sitting in a boat, that the telling of the story in the end will be defined by the measure of the audience's ability and capacity to receive the details. Kurtz's Intended, presented as the first audience of Marlow's tale, is fragile in her beauty and innocence – a rendering of Europeans as unable and incapable of redress for the reality of European damage in colonial (and contemporary) Africa. Marlow wants to protect the Intended from the truth and so he tells her what she wants to hear – a protective fiction, even though Kurtz's last words were actually "the horror! The horror!" (112). Marlow tells her that the last thing that her fiancé, Kurtz, uttered was her name, which ironically binds her to colonial terror that is inflicted by the Europeans in Africa. Both the narrator and the reader recognize that he is guilty of painting over truth with something more palatable and re-presenting this as the truth. More than this, the narrator comes to associate the horror with the Intended and she comes to represent her own lack of awareness as well as the ignorance and inability of Europe to deal with the truth of its colonial interests and horrific

activities in the Congo. Indeed, we're all implicated in the horror, especially when we resolve it, as Marlow does, as the realization of the loss of preciousness. In this instance, the not telling, whilst still an act of gatekeeping, represents a replacement of truth with a lie. Marlow makes, and must live with, his "choice of nightmares" (79).

Thus the challenges for Conrad, as indeed for the other researchers and writers above, *and* their readers is: what do you do with difficult knowledge? How much do you let it burden you? What is your responsibility to a terrible tale? What kind of world do you create with what you have heard or read? By the end of Conrad's tale, the Thames is still and dark and nature remains the ultimate witness. But after the telling is done, the responsibility for the tale remains with the audience.

I use intimacy as method to recreate a world in which the personal and the global collapse through the experience of the story. In the act of telling/writing or listening/reading, a community is created that is bound by the story. Like Herman, I internalized the trauma of Sara's story and came to feel that it was a story that must be told in order to move beyond the unspeakable, both for myself and for the society from which this story arises. As Morrison advocates, it is the responsibility of the reader/listener to take the story forward in co-creation with the teller. The "choice of nightmares," as Marlow would have it, remains a difficult aspect of social repair among artists who need to document the horror without replicating it. Morrison's goal to claim a canon worthy of its culture is an important one for we who claim a heritage as rich as the Acholi one in northern Uganda.

In this section I have combined practice and theory to explore how writing can cut through the unspeakable. Memories drenched in pain are difficult to touch, to listen to and to

engage with. Nevertheless, by focusing on this story and then offering an imaginative response, my intention has been to highlight the difficulties of re-narrating painful stories. This obviously may not always be the best way to express the unspeakable, but it does provide an example of a practical way of dealing with and re-presenting stories that are laden with traumatic experiences. This in turn can be a good way for laying the foundations for imagining peace from a foundational past that is not always laden with pain.

### 3.7 A Method for Mapping<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> I trace my fieldwork alongside ghosts whose poems cannot be read but must yet be known to be there, unseen – haunting as evidence. For this I acknowledge and I’m grateful to M. NourbeSe Philip (*Zong!* 196-207) for the teaching on the agency and voice of our ghost kin; to Veena Das for the lesson on witnessing also as guardedness – there is validity in “in everyday life while holding the poisonous knowledge of violation, betrayal and the wounded self from seeping into the sociality of everyday life” (Das 102); to Eduardo Glissant for opacity – not everything is for telling – and the opaque is “that which cannot be reduced” (191). From Christina Sharpe, the importance of taking care of the dead through the tension between imaging and imagining (114) in the context of a colonial history that erases and continues to do violence on the living and the dead.

These poems provide space from which such violence cannot be enacted or re-enacted. These ancestors speak in their own voices; they cannot be redacted or reduced. They speak, they resist, and in their telling they resist transparency and yet their presence functions as presence (see Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* 8). The footnotes to these ghost poems function, in part, as one side of a conversation – this is a narration of my experience of fieldwork and the illustration of the intimate spaces and relations that were formed and in place long before I began to think about this project.

The footnotes are a record of the generosity and kindness that was shown by my interlocutors to demonstrate and undermine the idea of a power relation between the researcher and the researched. Only in and through myself as a daughter (never as researcher) was the opportunity and gift of knowledge and insight presented to me, both by people and also in and by the landscape. I am always in relation. I am in conversation with my late father, my late brother and all who keep step with me in the field and since I returned and began to write.

The footnotes are the articulation of the hailing (in the Althusserian sense) by those who walked with me, those I encountered, and the environments where I found myself. The footnotes, as form, also function as a way to practice Sharpe’s idea of Black annotation. She writes: “I am imagining that the work of Black annotation is to enact the movement to that inevitable – a counter to abandonment, another effort to try to look, to really see” (117). If footnotes are traditionally the space of the meta and the foundational, these are a way to expand what that meta knowledge might look and sound like, and how the foundations function outside the archive.

<sup>112</sup> I arrived in London in the fall of 2014; the centenary of WWI was in full swing. London, the old city and the new city, was awash in memory, nostalgia and pride. The Tower of London was draped in thousands of poppies, war films like *The Monuments Men* (2014) were being advertised; the statues of soldiers, politicians, religious leaders and royalty, mostly men, were solidly in place, as they had been for decades, centuries, holding on to and representing the myths that were sewn on that land and dispersed across time and space. I was in London in the fall of 2014 armed with an education that had defined this city as the centre of the world.

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<sup>113</sup> I arrived in London, missing my father sorely. The last correspondence I had with my father was in form of a postcard. It featured St. Paul's Cathedral in the front and in the back a few lines: a greeting; a phrase about the weather – it was cold, he wrote. He asked that I pass his regards to the principal of my school and signed off: Dad. I treasured that postcard for a long time. It was in a ratty bag, along with my other treasures I had carried along for years. (One day, in a fit of cleaning the house, someone had thrown out the bag). I was finally in London with some time to go to St. Paul's and visit with the ghosts that had walked the same path. These ghost poems are a conversation that happens, happened, continues to keep me company. These ghost poems are an articulation of the journey I took as I did fieldwork and remain with me. My recollections are also evidence of the methods, who I walked with, how I felt and how the landscape spoke back to me.

<sup>114</sup> That last correspondence I had with my father was in the form of a postcard that he mailed while I was at school in Kampala and he on a trip to London. That postcard featured St Paul's Cathedral on one side. I decided to visit the church while I was there. I imagined that my father would be waiting for me, that we could spend time for a while. I didn't stay long, but it struck me powerfully that General Charles Gordon, the colonial figure that died in Khartoum and featured in our high school history texts, was buried there, alongside royalty and church figures. This was powerful illustration of the trinity of colonialism in Britain: David Livingstone's maxim of capital, church and 'civilization'.

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- <sup>115</sup> In Bukoba, a lesson from a crying dog that had me up all night. I called the front desk of the hotel at 2 a.m to enquire about the dog whose cries seemed to be emanating from the ground floor beneath my hotel window. No one picked up the phone. After a while I went downstairs, there was no one at the desk. In the morning, I complained bitterly and the receptionist apologized profusely. When I returned from the field, he told me that the dog that had been crying all night had had all her pups taken away from her. The horror of the sounds of all the mothers whose sons never returned began to dawn on me. There is no depth to that sound.
- <sup>116</sup> Also in Bukoba, I was taken to what I was told was the grave of Emin Pasha, a European explorer who we'd had to learn about in high school. Here he lay, according to his tombstone, overlooking Lake Victoria for eternity. I read up his life story online, when I returned to Vancouver. Pasha, they said, was killed in the Congo and his daughter sold off in slavery, never to be seen again. Pasha also has a gravestone marker in West Nile Uganda, where a tourist site has been developed. Online, in an obscure thread, someone is looking for information on an uncle with the same name who was an explorer, that they understand was killed while exploring in Africa.
- <sup>117</sup> Also in Bukoba, the ravages of the 1979 war are cheek by jowl with the German buildings. The man who took me around town taught me to read the German style: they were solid, he said. These buildings survived both world wars and the 1979 Kagera War, he tells me. Against the sky, on top of a small hill, are the ruins of a church, bombed out by the Ugandan army. The blue of the sky and the green of the grass around it, like an enduring witnesses, function also to draw the eye towards the ruins. Not far, a public statue of a soldier holding a gun. The man tells me that it's a reminder to Tanzanians, that Uganda will never attack Tanzania ever again. When you go to Dar es Salaam, look for the brother statue. Will it also be facing Uganda? I ask him. He laughs.
- <sup>118</sup> In downtown Dar es Salaam, I ask around and find the askari on a traffic island. Like the one facing Uganda, he is holding a gun, but differently, while the Bukoba statue is dressed in contemporary army fatigues, the one in Dar is dressed in long shorts, like a King's Army Rifle soldier, an askari, in long shorts, which is probably what he is. The one in Dar is a World War II memorial. The two statues cover the breadth of mainland Tanzania, both lonely figures, both surrounded by life that insists, long after the wars. Near Mutukula is a mausoleum, I'm told, dedicated to the six Tanzanian men who lost their lives when the Ugandans attacked in October 1978.

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<sup>119</sup> In London, Kampala and Gulu, I heard about the mother of Pierino Okoya, who was assassinated in 1970, along with his wife Anna Akello. Min Okoya his mother, reportedly cursed out at the funeral of her son, made an utterance about the weight of this death not landing on her alone. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the title of Hemingway's Spanish Civil War novel, and the line from a poem by British poet John Donne reminds us that Min Okoya, in her sorrow, was using a script that was already in the world: the death of her son and daughter-in-law was the death of all of us. And here we still were, seeking to know for whom the bell tolled.



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<sup>120</sup> In Agweng, P told me about his last encounter with my sister, Agnes. There had been an accident. A bicycle rider was struck by the car in front them. Agnes, P told me, had rushed to the fallen cyclist who had a deep head wound and comforted the man as they waited for help.

Earlier, I was in my hotel room in Lira, settling in for the evening when there was an urgent knock on the door. P, I was told, was waiting to see me, could only see me that evening. I quickly got ready to leave, armed with my notebook and recorder in a small bag. A boda-boda, a motorcycle taxi, took me over. I expected a twenty minute ride which turned out to be at least a couple of hours which included sheltering at the home of strangers, against a dramatic rain. The strangers offered us tea. We declined. We arrived at the home of P at nightfall, soaked to the skin, caked with mud on one side where a passing truck had splashed at us as we rode in the rain. As soon as I reached, P began to tell his story. First, he wanted me to know, that he knew my sister, and that she is the bravest person that he ever met. I struggled to focus on his account, grateful that the recorder was on. P spoke about his experience of leaving Uganda, of exile, and return – all I could think about was my sister holding a man's broken head in her lap, whispering words of comfort. Since then, I've reflected of the story on the demands on the body, to make sense, to pay attention, in the context of no sense and deep bodily discomfort. The intimate scene – Agnes cradling the broken head of an accident victim – haunted P and he in turn, offered the story back to me even as he practiced care and kindness towards me.

At the end of our visit, he offers me a copy of the resolution from the veteran's meeting which they'd had in preparation for meeting with officials from the President's Office. (See Appendix B.)

We sat on the verandah as his daughters were shelling freshly harvested groundnuts. We had tea with roasted groundnuts. A bed was made for me with the rest of the family for the night. The dawn in the morning was astounding, a deep yellow against the black of the silhouetted forest beyond the homestead. I left early, hitchhiked a ride back to Lira. When I told Agnes to remind of the bicycle accident, she laughed. I had already forgotten that, she said. That was such a long time ago.

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<sup>121</sup> All we wanted to do was return home, O tells me. All we wanted to do was go home.

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<sup>122</sup> W spoke about a horrific traffic stop, manned by government soldiers, where, like other stories we read and heard before and since, people were taken out mistreated and sometimes killed. W told me about being disguised as a woman. He spoke about trembling, about his awareness that the soldiers would see his nerves and call him out. W spoke about his gratitude for the help he received from strangers along the way. W also spoke about his love for his family and children; about their hopes, their goals. Like others, he said he'd never had the opportunity to speak this story, which itself was in context of his life story. To read these recollections on their own, out of context, is to create orphan stories, the kind that created whole countries at the 1884/85 Berlin conference and the legacy of other people's telling of ourselves.

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<sup>123</sup> F went to school. And then he worked. Speaking from his London apartment, he spoke about the ability to find work because his Ugandan qualifications allowed him access to work in Tanzania and support his family. All these years of exile in Britain, F is a bitter man. His oldest son died while he was away, as has his first wife. He shows me a photograph of his late son. Another with his grandchildren. He lives with ghosts, photographs, memories and music. He sings for me when I visit. He plays both the accordion and the keyboard. He cooks a lunch for me and the next day, we have tea with cookies. Don't ever let them tell you that we were only good for soldiering, he tells me. We were people before they came.

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<sup>124</sup> In Gulu, after some inquiries, I was informed that B would only see me if I had been vetted – I had to meet someone else first. He was a pastor in a local church. He came with a friend and I was there with my cousin, Patricia. We met in a small restaurant. We had some soda but did not eat. He did not want us to take notes. Just listen. The pastor asked me if I knew/understood who I was. I let him keep going with this line of thinking. He told me about a prophecy, about the fate of Acholi people, about the reason why he believed that Alice Lakwena was not successful. He thanked me for my work – this was going to be very important for our people, he told me. He also said that B would only meet me by myself and then he gave me instructions for the date, time and place from which to await further direction.

<sup>125</sup> A couple of days later, I sat on a bench outside a shop near Acholi Inn, waiting, watching the day go by, waiting for further instructions. I noticed a man who looked at me closely as he walked by. About a half hour later, he returned and asked if I was the one. Follow me, he said. I went with him to the back of the shop where he directed me to go to the TAKS building.

<sup>126</sup> That morning, I had visited Gulu University. On learning my name, a man who had given me directions pressed some money into my hands. I tried to reject the offer. This is for your father, he said. You can't understand what he did for me. This moment primed me for the encounter later in the afternoon, where my father's name would be evoked again.

<sup>127</sup> At TAKS, a mural of my father overlooks the grounds. We sit under a mango tree, facing the mural. B tells me that he picked this spot because he wants my father to witness our conversation. He tells that he went to high school with my sister. B tells me that he met my brother in that war. B tells me that my brother was given a code name. This is incredulous. It is the first time I have any inkling that my brother was part of this war. B tells me that he should know, that everybody knew. B tells me that he was accorded the position of being my brother's bodyguard; he was to make sure that nothing happened to Apicu, the son of the poet.

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- <sup>128</sup> B is a man I wrote about, long before I met him. B is the man who was the “bush husband” of a woman who was formerly abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army. This woman, whose story also I wrote, was greatly harmed by B. I am sitting with him under the shade of a mango tree with my father’s face as witness. I cannot abide by myself.
- <sup>129</sup> In Kampala, G believes that my interest in this story arises from the fact that my brother died in that war. I tell him that in fact, Keny did not die in that war. He does not believe me. Of course, he did, he tells me. This was the source of heartache for him for a long time, that the poet’s son died in that war. He had the list, G tells me. He gave the list to the former president of Uganda, Milton Obote. There were a hundred and eleven names on that list, all Ugandans, he says. Do you have a copy of the list? I ask him. He shakes his head. Sadly, he says, all his papers were lost when his house went up in flames. Are you sure about your brother? He asks again. Are you sure?
- <sup>130</sup> After our chat, his relative walks me to the bus stop. She tells me that her home is neighbour to where my father’s home used to be; where my brother is buried. She tells me a story about a man who was seen trying to break off the cross on my brother’s grave. She tells me about an old woman who screamed at him. Make one more blow, she threatens him. Make one more blow on that cross and I will curse you. I don’t know who the old woman is but I’m told that my brother’s grave, is still there, with its broken cross.
- <sup>131</sup> She also tells me that my grandmother loved her dog. She tells me that if anyone saw my grandmother’s dog, she’d be close by. She tells me that she was told that when the dog showed up without her, they had an idea that something was wrong. They followed the dog home and found that my grandmother was no longer alive.

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<sup>132</sup> I think about my paternal grandmother and what she might have said in her last moments. Sometimes, her words appear like snatches, and then fly off again, ungraspable, almost intangible – but I know, I know.

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<sup>133</sup> K relishes in the storytelling. I ask him if he has written or is writing his memories. He tells me that he lost his notes. Devastating, because of K's encyclopedic narration which he tells me is nothing like what he had before. He assures me, though, that he has lost many details because he had been confident of relying on his notes. We spend hours in the hotel gardens, far from any other company. We're looking for privacy and quiet. The flame trees are in bloom. The staff is courteous and the birdsong is pleasant in the background. In listening to the recording afterwards, the birds are in full chorus and our conversation are the backdrop. How do we conduct research that doesn't account for the narratives of nature who was witness all along?

<sup>134</sup> Like everyone else I have interviewed, K has read and signed to give me permission for this interview. I remind him, as I do others, that this work is part of a dissertation and that I am grateful for his time. I want to pay for the meal that we're going to have. He brushes my offer aside. Like others, he wants me to remember our social relatedness that he, too, can take care of me. I have no material gift to offer that would be of more value than appreciating K's generosity and dignity. When I return, I read about the imposition of outsider ethics on research subjects. I think about the research fatigue in the Downtown East Side, Vancouver, and the culture of reciprocity among First Nations people and the long established strength of voice among the Indigenous women from that neighbourhood who continue to lead the annual February 14<sup>th</sup> Women's Memorial March. I think about the generosity of the people who I have spoken with and how the process of applying for ethics has no space for acknowledging generosity. I think about how the idea of creating relationship in research is based on the passage of time to come, and not in the time that has led to the moment. How it is that all the people I have had the privilege of spending time with, have seen me, recognized me, and I am already inside this already established relationship that existed before I got here. We had great conversation.

<sup>135</sup> Later, when I return to the recording, the birdsong is prominent. The birds remind me that their voices matter, too. They remind me of the unstable times during the eighties, when we lived between government takeovers. Gunshots would dominate the sonic atmosphere, and then quiet and then afterwards, always, the birds would return.

<sup>136</sup> K's generosity is not limited to the time we spent, his generosity and hospitality. He also tells me that in a few days there would be a congregation of veterans from the 1979 war. They have been offered some compensation by the President's Office, in recognition for their efforts. They have also been offered a retirement package. They need to get organized. K invites me to the meeting. He tells me that I will meet as many people as I would like to meet. My economic resources are limited and I cannot afford to pay the difference to change my flight back to Vancouver.



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<sup>137</sup> S offers to meet me at the Gulu Post Office. He's on a bus from Kampala. We wait for him, my cousin Patricia and I, but after three hours, he calls to say that he will be able to meet us instead, at Gulu Independent Hospital. Wearily, we take a couple of boda-boda taxis to Gulu Independent. S arrives; he is agitated, highly excited. He tells me that he has just come from the President's Office and that he has information that he cannot share with civilian people like me. I assure him that I'm not interested in state secrets, just his memory of the ship that sank over Lake Victoria in 1979. S agrees, but keeps reminding me that he will not divulge state secrets. He shows me newspaper clippings to support his claim that he had been to the President's Office. He shows me a list of names of the people he has collected so far, including the name of my brother. As I read my brother's name on the list, I see why we could never have found my brother's name on registration lists. He had enlisted by using a combination of his middle name and my grandfather's last name. Kidega Bitek.

<sup>138</sup> Kidega Bitek. I'm aware of my inability to focus as I see this list; of S's excitedness; of the clinical nature of the boardroom in which we met, of the warm dark wood of the large oval table of a meeting room at Gulu Independent Hospital; of the newspapers and lists scattered about before us; of the possibility that my late brother's children might finally receive some recognition of their father's contribution to the war effort; and the possibility that this was the most comprehensive list of names that I had so far seen. I asked if I could crosscheck with the list that I had, if I could take a photo. No, he said. If you want them, you must write them out one by one. I offered to type out the handwritten list for him and print them out for him. He agreed, if we could return the next morning with them. Much of the evening and into night, I type the names out, five hundred names, over a kerosene lamp at my mother's house. I have them printed next morning and delivered to S. He is grateful. Pass my regards to your mother, he says. I ask how he knew my mother. Your parents were very kind to me when I ran to Kenya during the seventies. When I ask my mother if she knows this person, like my sister, Agnes, she laughs. So many people came by our house, she says. How can I remember all of them?

This project is no individual effort. My family is an integral part of it over time and through distances I cannot imagine. Through acts of kindness and relatedness, they have created the relationships that was needed to this work. I needed to step into the project and grow my own faith. From Saidiya Hartman's "Wayward: A Short Entry on the Possible": to be "[w]ayward [is to] to wander, to be unmoored, adrift, rambling, roving, cruising, strolling and seeking. To claim the right to opacity [...] Waywardness is the practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by smashing out, are foreclosed. Waywardness is an exploration of what might be; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated..." (*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* 227-228).

<sup>139</sup> The excitement that is embodied by S cannot be denied and yet, in this moment, it defies articulation of anything beyond itself. I think about Dionne Brand's assertion that "our cognitive schema is captivity" (*A Map to the Door* 29) and how limited my understanding is and yet how irritating my disorientation is, my not knowing. S was so excited that it seems that he could burst, erupt, give in, to whatever was making him vibrate so. Evidently, he could. And that, too, was the point.

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<sup>140</sup> I went to Tanzania to trace the steps of the Ugandan exiles. I was hoping for evidence in the present, for tracings, for echoes. Dar es Salaam in January of 2015 – I hadn't been there before. I was aware of my newness in the landscape, and how what familiarity showed itself to help me navigate myself in this city. When I spoke Swahili, folks picked up on my Kenyan accent. Quickly, I surmised that I needed to spend time in the spaces that my interlocutors had spoken about. I travelled to Tabora, Mwanza, Bukoba, Tarime, Kigwa and Arusha. I flew, travelled by bus, taxi, tuk-tuk, boda-boda and on foot. I had the generosity of strangers and the expertise of guides; sometimes I traversed the spaces by myself. At each town, a reckoning – who are you to do this work? Why are you here? How can you reconcile the text with the evidence on the ground? How can you read the landscape? What are the songs of this land? What does power look like? What does vulnerability feel like? How does your memory and accumulated knowledge rub up against your presence at this time, in this place?

In Tarime, I'm directed to go to City Hall because someone there might direct me to where the Ugandans congregated before they headed off to Musoma, just before the fated sinking of the ship. At City Hall, I greet the people in English. We don't speak that language here, I'm reminded. My Swahili isn't that great – where will I find words like research in it? My everyday Swahili is good enough but I'm doubting myself in the moment. Why do you want to know about the Kagera War? Who are you? I introduce myself as a doctoral student from the University of British Columbia. Why are the Colombians interested in this war? No, the university is located in Canada but it is called the University of British Columbia? Why are the Canadians interested in this war? I'm the one that's interested, I say. I tell them that I trace my roots to Uganda. For sure, they say, we are not going to be talking with Ugandans about the Kagera War. With that, I'm summarily dismissed from the offices at City Hall.

Fieldwork was a new arrival for me, and a re-arrival in the sense that I went over and through some of the places in which my family had been inside and part of the narratives I had been given in Gulu, Agweng, Kampala, London and Lira. The environment was the text that depended on my ability to read. My literacy depended, in part, on how well I could access the haptic resonances (Tina Campt) and recognize Morrison's "rememories that you can bump into, even if they did not happen to you personally, that are waiting for you, even if you think they are finished and gone" (Gordon 197). Morrison's concept of rememory, the images that exist outside the physical body as manifestations of memory, can be experienced as haunting, as flukes, as coincidences, as conjurings, as return. However, rememories, as they presented themselves in Tanzania, were also the spaces from which I could connect what I knew and felt and heard from the conversations I'd had. Together, these moulded knowledge making and understanding as a totalizing experience.

## Chapter 4: Songs of Soldiers

Ultimately, Indigenous theory seeks to dismantle colonialism while simultaneously building a renaissance of *mino bimadiziwin*.<sup>141</sup> What if this was our collective focus?

(Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* 31-32)

Tell us what it is to be a woman so we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew.

What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company.

(Toni Morrison, 1992 Nobel Prize Lecture)

### 4.1 Methods of Song

This section bares the background for “Songs of Soldiers”; it presents some content analysis; defines these poems as decolonizing by nature; discusses the work of the poet, and the collection of poetry as a collaboration.

Okot p'Bitek believes that social institutions of Indigenous people exists in their creative works (Rubadiri 21), a thought that Leanne Betasamosake Simpson echoes in her critique of “cognitive imperialism [as] perpetuating the idea that Indigenous Peoples were not thinking people” (32). In the interview with David Rubadiri, Okot p'Bitek offers songs as guides, as spaces from which philosophical discussion can be heard. He says: “Lawino is trying to sustain the myths of the

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<sup>141</sup> Simpson translates this phrase as one used “to denote ‘living the good life’ or ‘the art of living the good life’” – one that “promotes rebirth, renewal, reciprocity and respect” (27). This quote begins this chapter in solidarity with the Acholi philosophy of return to harmony as an ongoing life goal.

people, trying to ask major, major questions. For instance, what is time? And she tells you that time in her tradition is not a clock but activity – you know, we wake up, we do things” (21). He goes on to suggest that Lawino, the spokesperson of her people (22) is also a prisoner of the time she lives in and is implicated in the *Song of Prisoner* by her name, Lawino<sup>142</sup>. The awareness of her limitations and her agency provides a deeper appreciation of her need to state her case, to win over her husband, Ocol, who believes that the modern life imposed by colonialism means that he must reject his Acholi tradition completely. Lawino’s song becomes more urgent; time and her life are at stake. Lawino’s song requires a deep appreciation of the context in which she makes her case because, as Okot p’Bitek suggests, she is the spokesperson for her people (22) and not only a woman whose husband has rejected her.

Re-reading the interviews with Okot p’Bitek reveals the methods and the challenges that he considered as he did his work. He offers a guide of sorts to the form, context and politics of writing which enables me to write songs in solidarity with him.

I return to Simpson’s idea of decolonization, not as a way to “dismantle the master’s house,” as Audre Lorde would have it, but to “(re)build our own house” as Simpson suggests (*Dancing* 32). To return to *wer* is a way to recognize song as the space for philosophy, debate, celebration, artistry and reflection, as discussed in Chapter 2. This project builds from what my father started

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<sup>142</sup> Lawino is the name given to a person who is born with the umbilical cord around their neck. *Wino* is also also associated with beauty – it is the word for the tail of a horse, a giraffe or a warthog that can be woven into delicate and beautiful bracelets or necklaces. The same word is associated with a sign of beauty or the folds on a woman’s neck. Okot p’Bitek, in his discussion with Rubadiri suggests that the umbilical cord, the necklaces, the lines on the neck, all might suggest a noose, and therefore Lawino’s imprisonment. “Lawino is the imprisoned one, and she wants to break out. It connects up with the *Song of Prisoner*” (26).

without minding about the “master’s house,” utilising the form *wer* as the space for “the philosophy of life of his society [...] the celebration of life here and now” (*Artist, the Ruler* 23).

“Songs of Soldiers” is written with guidance from ghosts using deep listening,<sup>143</sup> crafting, and a firm sense of belief. I consider nationalism, subject-making and Acholi ethnicity as the frame for writing the voices that come through my poems, many of them from the interviews that I held, but some come from Okot p’Bitek’s lone soldier. The poems grapple with what it means to soldier in that army, one that was formed in that time, of that place, by those particular people. These poems also include the voices that come from deep listening, from responding to the haptic and working through serendipitous moments to translate experiences of the non-human.<sup>144</sup> “Songs of Soldiers” also includes voices of kin – mothers, daughters and fathers. Some are “voiced” by my brother.

## 4.2 Deep Listening

In Chapter 2, I address the journey to *wer* and define *wer* as a political and artistic space from which Africans can articulate their lives. How to write a song, the process of *wer* becoming *wer*, involves an articulation of the relationship between the artist and their tools. The body, story, song, weather, tradition and the craft are all involved in building our own house, as Simpson

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<sup>143</sup> Deep listening is a term I borrow from the Nishnaabeg term *Gdi-nweninaa*, which Simpson uses in her discussion on what it means to “listen with our full bodies” (*Dancing* 61).

<sup>144</sup> An example of the non-human is the dog that cried all night in Bukoba and marked my heart with its sadness. It was only at the end of the next day that I realize that this functions as a serendipitous moment and I think about the mothers of the men who were massacred in Lokung. The crying of one dog all night means that we don’t have to hear all the mothers crying. “Absence is the guide,” as Mahmood Darwish teaches in “In Her Absence, I created Her Image”; he goes on to conclude the poem with this admission: “If it weren’t for the mirage, I wouldn’t have walked to the seven hills” (Darwish). The mirage, the miracle, the luck, serendipity occurs in the moment like a gift. The sorrow of the dog in Bukoba teaches me about our incapacity to hold the awfulness of the cries of hundreds of mothers, but in her sorrow, we come to see these men as related and kin, and therefore, despite the absence of their experience, never as forgotten as beloved or belonging.

proposes. Deep listening encompasses an awareness of the body's ability to listen with its whole being with the intention of refusal, which Tina Campt defines as "a practice in response to sustained everyday encounters with exigency and duress that ruptures a predictable trajectory of flight" (10). Deep listening is an intentional focus that requires the ability to escape from the moment, to inhabit the haptic mode – in the awareness that sonic resonances can be provocative and impactful or "ordinary and exceptional" (7-8) and then to write them down, or sing. Deep listening is the ability to "redact and annotate, to [see] something that is caught in the excess of the frame towards seeing something beyond the visibility [...] to try to look, to try to really see" (Sharpe 117). Deep listening, then, is not limited to an aural exercise, but an awareness that arises from knowing the landscape, the histories and the contemporary contexts from which the voices are to be heard.

To illustrate deep listening, Okot p'Bitek describes how he came to *Song of Prisoner* which he wrote after having spent a night in jail:

The next weekend Tom Mboya was killed. He was a good friend of mine. [...] When the news was announced, the [soccer] game was abandoned. I went straight to my office, locked the door, and wrote the first two chapters of this poem with the killer of Tom Mboya, as it were, beside me, speaking. The killer of Tom Mboya is the prisoner in *Song of Prisoner*. He hadn't been captured yet. I captured him first, in this poem. (Okot p'Bitek qtd. in Lindfors 290)

In *Prisoner*, the killer of Tom Mboya, whose voice my father "captured," pleads "drunkenness" (12) "hunger" (23), "insanity" (24), "smallness [...] fear [...] helplessness [...] hopelessness"

(33) within the first four chapters. He is caught in the “foul smell of the world” (21) and is haunted by the frustrations of his wife, the sobs of his hungry children (24) and his own sorrow at being unemployed and homeless, or without his own plot of land (109). The killer presents himself as a sympathetic character but as the book evolves, and for us, knowing that the killer/prisoner is also an extension of Lawino (see footnote 101), it becomes apparent that other forces, such as the weather, have come to define his predicament.

Nahashon Njenga Njoroge, the man suspected of assassinating Tom Mboya on July 5, 1969, went on trial on August 13 and by November 8 of the same year, was sentenced and hanged to death. Okot p’Bitek’s prisoner, like Njoroge, is locked in a particular milieu and a terrible fate, but he is contextualised as a person who finds himself in a particular set of circumstances.<sup>145</sup> My father’s claim of having “captured” the man’s voice first is evidence of his awareness and ability to pay attention with his whole self and then write it down. Having spent even a brief time in jail, and carrying the knowledge of the socio-political environment of Kenya in 1969, Okot p’Bitek was deeply aware of what it could mean that someone might assassinate Tom Mboya. That it was not Njoroge’s actual voice that he captured is unimportant because Njoroge, like Lawino, like anyone else caught up in that milieu, could have been the prisoner.

The haptic encounter is where the frequencies meet the body that must respond. Okot p’Bitek’s experience offers an entry into the prisoner Njoroge’s mind/voice, and the sorrow that he feels about the news about his friends and relatives who have died at the hands of soldiers allows him to write a critical response to the role of the contemporary African soldier.

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<sup>145</sup> The everyday man as the killer means that he is not exceptional, even though, historically, he is.

“Song of Soldier” examines the destructive role of the military in Africa [...] the book will have a slightly different structure from most of the others because there is also a narrator who comes in every now and then. (Okot p’Bitek qtd. in Lindfors 292)

My father’s soldier is a man out of place but in conversation with others. He is a man who

enjoys blood and he’s very cynical about democracy and freedom. He talks about the freedom to kill, for instance. What am I a soldier for? Why did they give me this sword if I’m not to use it? Do you think I am just going to march past with it? But this is a very terrible book because I lost quite a number of relatives in the Uganda coup, a lot of friends too, and after I write a few lines, I drop it because it causes a lot of tears. (Okot p’Bitek qtd. in Lindfors 292)

This soldier, perhaps, is an armed civilian, and like many of the veterans of the 1979 Liberation War, not a career soldier. His voice carries through in some of the stories I was told by the veterans. But by Okot p’Bitek’s own account, his “Song of Soldier” was going to be different from the other songs that he’d written. Whereas Songs of *Lawino*, *Ocol*, *Malaya* and *Prisoner* each feature a protagonist whose voice carries the narrative, Okot p’Bitek already planned on a song with multiple<sup>146</sup> singers/voices.

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<sup>146</sup> I adopt my father’s intention to incorporate several voices but I will not present dialogue between the murdering soldier and his victims. In recent years, I have grappled with what it means to focus on un-agentic stories of pain. In *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essay Speeches and Meditations*, Toni Morrison writes about learning to “disassemble the gaze” from Chinua Achebe (286) and the challenge of inhabiting [slavery] without surrendering to it (309). Both the gaze and the terrible power of the slavery narrative depend on a pornographic gaze (309). The way out, she suggests, is by locking out the voyeur who relishes and looks for pain and suffering as the excuse to read (310). If the role of the storyteller is, in part, to note the poison in stories and flush them out, then one way to “disassemble” that gaze is through expression of the agentic in the voices that speak to the experience without the focus on harm.



[... even] the corpses, the victims of the soldiers will speak and interact with their murderer and then the narrator will push the story on to the next phase.

(Okot p'Bitek qtd. in Lindfors Interview 292).

To maintain a multiplicity of voices and represent a call-and-response I include my father's voice, my brother's voice, my own, an unnamed narrator and several other soldier voices, each coming from a different location to create multiple songs of soldiers, each representing the truth of their experiences, reflecting the environments they sing from, to an audience that recognizes their vernacular (*Rubadiri* 20). There are poems that are informed by location, some by theme, some written from direct quotes, and some in collaboration with ghosts, like my brother, who spoke to me through the stories of the veterans, occasionally in places where I sensed his presence.

### 4.3 Crafting with Godlings

Toni Morrison shares an account of a visit with a woman who was fishing in the river near the house that Morrison had just moved into. The woman “wears men’s shoes, a man’s hat, a well-worn colorless sweater over a long black dress. She is Black” (*The Origin of Others* 32). This example is taken from an essay entitled “Being or Becoming a Stranger” in which Morrison considers what it means to miss a woman with whom she has had a fifteen-minute interaction only for the woman never to return, nor ever having been recognized or even remembered by folks in the neighborhood. What does it mean for someone who is familiar to behave like a stranger and yet take up so much psychic space?

For Canadian singer Leonard Cohen, the familiar-but-haunting-by-disappearing stranger existed in the form of a Spanish man who taught him to play six chords (that he claims he relied on during his whole career) in Montreal during the early sixties. At his speech for the 2011 Prince Asturias Award, Cohen recalls how deeply moved he was by a young man playing the flamenco guitar and how the man, after three days of instruction, never returned because he had taken his own life. Before he met this man, Cohen says in his story, “I had a voice but I did not have an instrument. I did not have a song.” He goes on to credit the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia, for giving him permission to locate “a voice; that is, to locate a self that is not fixed, a self that struggles for its own existence” and how he came to learn “never to lament casually. And if one is to express the great inevitable defeat that awaits us all, it must be done within the strict confines of dignity and beauty” (Cohen). The two Spanish men taught him about the relationship between poetry, song and voice.

Morrison, Cohen and Okot p'Bitek all share stories of such encounters with “strangers” that are deeply impact their writing. These hauntings not only demand attention but also the ability to reflect and change the way they do their work as artists.

For Morrison, it is the idea that the stranger is not of another; that estrangement can be enacted by a familiar. “There are only versions of ourselves [...] the stranger is not foreign; she is random; not alien but remembered; and it is the randomness of the encounter with ourselves already known [...] that summons a ripple of alarm” (*Origins of Others* 38). She heeds that image and language, “the godlings that feed and form experience” (36), can also be used to “own, govern, administrate the Other” or alienate her from her personhood (39).

Cohen reminds us that “Poetry comes from a place that no one commands and no one conquers” (Cohen), as Morrison cautions us about the need to want to own a familiar image (because we recognize ourselves in her), but we do this at the expense of her personhood.

For Okot p'Bitek, it is the ability to recognize that the imprisonment is not limited to jail but to all conditions of oppression. The prisoner can be linked to Lawino, the defender of Acholi tradition, as well as to all who align with Ocol, onward to his soldier, the fighter for his country. They are all prisoners of the socio-political conditions of their time. For Okot p'Bitek, there is no difference between the fact of the voice of the prisoner and the reality of Njoroge's experience. He is certain that he captured the prisoner's voice because he recognizes the prisoner everywhere.

#### 4.4 Return to Harmony: Forgiveness, Ritual and Memory

The idea of situating these poems in the context of the Acholi concept of return to harmony<sup>147</sup> comes from my interview with L in Gulu. I speak with L as a result of suggestions from other veterans who tell me that he had been involved in both the failed 1972 attempt to depose Idi Amin invasion as well as the 1979 Liberation War. I look forward to meeting him because I imagine that he will help me fill in the gaps in my information – dates, places, names, sequence of events, etc. But the conversation with L turns out to be far different from those that I had with other war veterans.

Along with providing many of the names, dates, places and sequence of events that I was hoping for, L presents the events as part of a longer narrative that should be understood as challenges for the people of Acholi as they deal with the legacies of colonialism, slavery and contemporary post-independence political strife. He teaches me to consider the sinking of the ship as a metaphor through which we could bring clarity to our colonial and post-independence experience. Engaging with this memory, he says, would be one way for the country to acknowledge the efforts of the past and come to a place of harmony

My cousin Patricia accompanied me to L's home in Gulu. He welcomed us warmly and we sat at the cool verandah of his home for our conversation. Like many of the other veterans, he also had a lifetime connection with a family member<sup>148</sup>. Unlike others however, he was

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<sup>147</sup> The phrase "return to harmony" refers to the end process of the reconciliation in Acholi which is not linear because the goal is guided and underscored by the deep belief in harmony as the space without conflict to which we can return.

<sup>148</sup> I learned that L had attended the same school as my mother decades ago, and remained friends

not comfortable with the interview being recorded, so both Patricia and I took notes but I needed to listen, too so we debriefed after our conversation later.

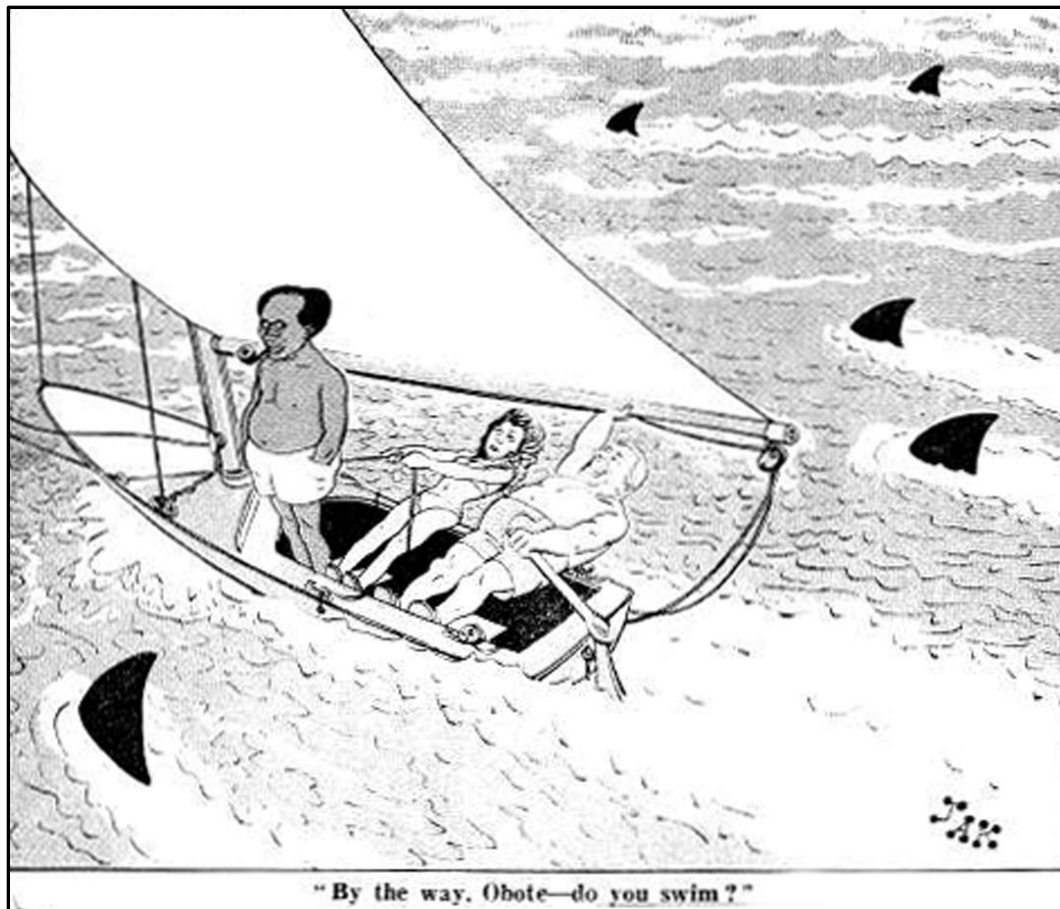
L told us about the first time that he saw Obote during the 1950s. “He was walking in town with 3 other men: Alex Ojera,<sup>149</sup> Justine Oteng and one other man whose name I cannot remember.” L chose to begin his recollection with the memory of the striking figures of four important political figures, men who would later impact his own life in a powerful way. He went on to tell me how his life was changed irrevocably when on January 19, 1971, just before the 25 January coup, *The Evening Standard*,<sup>150</sup> a British daily newspaper heavily supportive of British Conservative government, was available in Kampala, ran a cartoon featuring the British Prime Minister Edward Heath and President Obote. Even though this cartoon was run in the paper nearly a week before the coup, it filled L with dread and he resolved to do whatever he needed to do to in order to support Obote.

On the website where the cartoon is accessible, Obote is credited with stating that he “might not be able to contain violence against the Europeans (mainly British) community in his country if Britain decided to sell arms to [then apartheid] South Africa”

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<sup>149</sup> Alex Ojera would be killed in the 1972 attempted invasion of Uganda by Ugandan exiles.

<sup>150</sup> In his recollection, L remembered the newspaper as the *Daily Telegraph* of January 22, 1971, which indeed carried a Commonwealth Conference related cartoon, but it featured President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. In that cartoon, British Prime Minister Edward Heath holds up two papers, one titled “Commonwealth” and the other, “Arms for South Africa.” Heath is quoted saying “Britain alone must decide what’s in Britain’s interest. The preservation of British interest has long depended on sharing control with others....” L recalled that the cartoon that marked him featured “Sir Edward Heath saying will Obote sink or swim?” thus my conclusion that he actually recalled the *Evening Standard* cartoon of January 19, 1971.



**Figure 14. By the way, Obote—do you swim?**

Cartoon by Jak (Raymond Jackson)

*Evening Standard*, January 19, 1971.

The cartoon depicts Heath and Obote aboard a small yacht, Obote standing up without support while Heath (who was Britain's most eligible bachelor and an accomplished sailor) captains the yacht alongside Annie Hughes, daughter of the advisor to the Singaporean president. Singapore was the location of the Commonwealth of Nations (now Commonwealth) conference and it was where the Heath-Obote meeting took place.

The cartoon is a thinly veiled threat in the British press to Obote who is standing up nonchalantly while surrounded by sharks in a boat he is not in control of. Six days after the

appearance of this cartoon Obote would be overthrown by Idi Amin while he attended the Conference. When L saw the cartoon he decided then that Obote would swim and dedicated himself to making sure he would.

Towards the end of the interview, L asked if I really understood why the work I was doing was important. He went on to tell me that in Acholi, “things<sup>151</sup> are not kept in the heart” – *i Acholi, jami pe kiweko ii dano*. When I asked him to say more, he went on to talk about the cultural responsibility to return to harmony after conflict, or continue to live in chaos as a people. There are rituals to heal every kind of rift, he told me. There are rituals for discordance between individuals, community members, clans and even with other people, meaning people who are not Acholi.

In February 2006, the Justice and Reconciliation Project released the fieldnote “Alice’s Story: Cultural and Spiritual Dimensions of Reconciliation on Northern Uganda” to think about reconciliation in the context of the war between the government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda. I had read “the practice of Acholi justice is restorative seeking to rebuild relationships through a process of truth telling, compensation and ritual” (4) and I thought about peacemaking and peacebuilding limited to the experience of that war. For L, conflict, all conflict, internal and external, would have to be dealt with if there was to be a chance at peace, or a return to harmony. The most widely known reconciliation ritual is *mato oput*, quite literally, the drinking of *oput*, a bitter

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<sup>151</sup> By which he meant grievances. I have presented a literal translation because the word *jami* means things, but in the context of our conversation, *jami* means grievances.

concoction of herbs and *nyono tong gweno*.<sup>152</sup> They reminded me of a visit to Acholi as a teenager where we were made to step on eggs as we walked over an *opobo* branch and we had elders bless us with spit.

L provided us with examples of Acholi rituals to illustrate the deep embeddedness of peacemaking in the culture:

1. Within a homestead: *tumu kir*
2. Inter-clan conflict: *mato oput*
3. Intra-ethnic conflict: *nyono tong gweno*

There are other rituals to cleanse places where violence has occurred<sup>153</sup> and others to comfort victims of violence.<sup>154</sup> “Unresolved issues,” L said, “disorganize a society in which resolution is a hallmark and is embedded in the tradition”. I listened as he spoke. All of what I was trying to collect would not be useful if I didn’t understand these conflicts as needing resolution<sup>155</sup>. And in my mind since this was already the case – what am I supposed to do? He said: “forgiveness as resolution may be the way to return to harmony”. In that brief phrase, now is defined as a place of chaos; now requires intent, and now is a

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<sup>152</sup> Translates as “stepping on eggs.”

<sup>153</sup> *Moyo piny* (cleansing a specific area) and *ryemo gemo* (chasing spirits from a wide area) are possible rituals that have taken place where the 1972 Lokung massacre took place. This possibly explains the peaceful nature of the area.

<sup>154</sup> *Lwoko pig wang* (washing away tears) and *moyo tipu* (cleansing the spirit) are rituals concerned with laying spirits to rest and offering comfort to both the surviving families and the dead. For more on this, please read *Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi: Cultural Provisions for Reconciliation and Healing from War* by Thomas Harlacher and Caritas Gulu. I’m grateful to Acholi Prime Minister Ambrose Oola for this reference.

<sup>155</sup> Which up until then, I understood as the curse of being an Acholi person in Uganda. I am grateful to L for making the connection between contemporary challenges in my homeland with the distances that have been formed from traditional Acholi practices through colonialism and war.



moment in time that still carries within it a way out. These rituals, he told me, begin with truth telling, sharing and trust<sup>156</sup>.

These poems present the space from which truth telling can be shared and discussed, in the hope that as a shared document, they will help enable a return to harmony. Similar to the approach *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*, wherein Simpson writes “my Creation Story tells me that collectively we have the intellect and creative power to regenerate our cultures, languages and nations” (42), I believe that the creative impulse and practice will allow for communal healing and cultural knowledge. Even though Simpson writes in the colonial context of Canada where Indigenous knowledges is in resurgence, I recognize the connection between creative work and re-turn between Indigenous peoples in Canada as connected to mine in Acholi as a way to reconcile a terrible history and imagine a future that is not bound<sup>157</sup> by it.

Finally, L offers the connection between forgiveness and resolution after conflict, even after death.<sup>158</sup> He notes my confusion and delineates between the Christian concept of forgiveness that places the burden of forgiveness on the victim. All resolutions must be resolved in Acholi, according to L, and therefore the burden of forgiveness is the responsibility of the community to seek a return to the harmony that existed before the dispute or conflict. The question remains: what happens when the conflicts include

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<sup>156</sup> I'm grateful to Acholi Prime Minister Ambrose Oola who lectured on the relationship between Acholi philosophy and the need for reconciliation.

<sup>157</sup> Different from Black Futurism which imagines a Black future beyond the legacy of slavery, Acholi philosophy and tradition has already embedded in it the possibility to return to a space unyoked from the difficult present and past.

<sup>158</sup> Guru Iyel – funeral rites. This is the space where reconciliation takes place between the dead and the surviving community.

external factors over a long time, like slavery, colonialism and post-independence conflicts? I discover from speaking with L that this research project cannot be an accounting for what happened but a contribution to the process of resolution.

#### **4.5 The Role of the Poet and the Work of Poetry in Songs of Soldiers**

I stake the claim to poetry as the daughter of a poet and the grand-daughter of a poet through my patrilineal lineage. I have been writing poetry for almost four decades. In this collection, I have listened deeply to, and transcribed voices of the mothers of the dead, and the dead, in particular, my brother, Keny. I have also used testimonies and recollections from the veterans I have spoken with. It is important to me that I have anonymized them because the experiences of one is/was often the experiences of many other people.

As truth telling, these poems speak to what happened and they carry the emotional register of the events, they are not limited to the facts. The poems speak to the tradition of the poet as historian in Acholi as discussed in Okot p'Bitek's *The Horn of My Love* (156-72), and they are songs, sometimes also described as the books of Acholi because Acholi people recorded their experiences in songs; these songs provide the context from which the questions around historical events can be studied and discussed (156). "It is the creative works of the artist that constitute the mental pictures which guide men's lives, which makes them human" (Okot p'Bitek *Artist, the Ruler* 40). This collection of poems recalls the voices of those who remember the Liberation War of 1979 with an emotional depth that allows space for all readers to connect.

Alongside each poem, on the right-hand side of each page, I incorporate ghost panels containing the names of some of the veterans from the 1979 Liberation War including some of those who fought under the banners of Kikosi Maalum and the Save Uganda Movement. I am told by G that there had been one hundred and eleven names on a list which he handed to President Obote. Sadly, he also tells me that he does not have a copy of that list. He also tells me that the Uganda army archives before 1985 were all destroyed in a fire. This list is therefore a compilation of names that I collected through my fieldwork either verbally or handwritten<sup>159</sup>. Some of the names are those of people still alive at this time, some are not.

The list is an inconclusive and incomplete and it is presented in a random order, an ordinary soldier's names may appear next to that of a General or a Chief. Regrettably, some names may not be complete, because memories fade and others may be misspelled or duplicated but it is all I have to use as a textual memorial, a running tally of those who fought and died for Uganda in that time. The lettering has been deliberately lightened and printed grey to reflect impermanence and the uncertainty about how many died or may not have been listed. This memorialization is in solidarity with, and a reflection of a similar act by Claudia Rankine who memorializes the names of Black people who died under police violence. In her work, Rankine greys out the text "In Memory Of" (134) to include the dead whose names are not on the page.

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<sup>159</sup> I have not been able to verify the names and so they function as a space for memorialization. Some of the people named on this list are still alive. I have removed the ranks from the names but have otherwise retained them as I got them. Some names are incomplete, but I have included them to represent all the those whose names never made the list.

If the product of contemporary history, and colonialism in particular, is of the “anxious man” whom Fanon describes as unable to escape his body (*Black Skin, White Masks* 65), then these poems offer a place to connect, through ritual, through poetry, through articulation, to community and to the self. *Wer* is where we can go to look for the presence of our dead. *Wer* is therefore is a decolonizing project that connects, instead of the alienating narrative that disconnects the soldiers from the wider communal and national spaces where they can be with others.

The first poem in “Songs of Soldiers” identifies the lost soldier as one who is stuck in history; it marks how alienation that comes from association with military practices, exile and death, distances the soldier from the communities where they might have sought or felt belonging.

Here are the poems as they feature thematically:

1. Poems featuring the brother and sister voices are mostly about the intersection of time, the experience of a landscape or of being inside a song. These are: 4, 16, 24, 26,<sup>160</sup> 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40.<sup>161</sup>
2. Poems featuring the curse of a mother who has lost a son are intended as a way to

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<sup>160</sup> In recalling my brother, a war veteran tells me that he remembers how Keny took care of him as a new recruit. A tender moment like this doesn’t often appear in accounts of soldiering life and I’m grateful for this memory.

<sup>161</sup> After spending time in Tarime, where soldiers assembled for the last time before being bussed away to get on to the ships, I thought I had missed the last bus to Musoma, where I could catch another one to Mwanza. As I sat dejectedly on a bench in front of a store, a man approached me and asked if he could help. I told him I thought I’d missed the last bus and he told me he would find out if there was an alternative. After a few minutes, he returned with much excitement and asked me to follow him. I got on to a bus, the last last last bus of the day and as soon as I sat down, my brother’s favourite song came on. “*Sina Makosa*” by Les Wanyika. The lyrics go: “I am blameless (I have no sin). You want to kill me for nothing.” Even though this is a love song, those words make me think about the blameless dead and the losses from slavery, colonialism and post-independence.

think about the function of alienation in the colonial narrative. These are: 5, 6, 20, 44, 45, 48. .

3. Poems that outline sorrow, the universal aspect of mourning and regret: 12, 14, 30, 42, 43, 46.
4. Poems are about prophecy and hope: 6, 8, 13, 24, 28.
5. Poems that make note of historical events are 5, 12, 13, 22, 38.
6. Poems featuring the enigmatic and opportunistic historical figure of Emin Pasha, a German imperialist and British administrator, died in what is today the DRC and has a number of burial markers in different locations ranging from Northern Uganda to the Tanzania shores of Lake Victoria. Pasha represents the completely alienated man. The line: "his bones have probably settled into the soil" may seem to suggest that he was buried in a particular place, but works to connect his displaced body with the bodies of those who drowned in Lake Victoria. Poems are: 22, 32.
7. Poems that are close reproductions of stories of the veterans that were shared with me include: 7, 11, 12, 13, 34.
8. Poems that arise from the landscape: 8, 21, 22, 28, 40, 43.
9. Poems that call for justice and witness bearing: 2, 14, 15, 18, 20, 30, 44, 45, 47.
10. Poems that mark the intertextual relationships between written texts/songs and the testimonies I heard which now appear in text: 8, 18, 40.

11. Poems with direct lines from the original “Song of Soldier” or reference to one of the Songs of Okot p’Bitek: 3, 17, 24.

These are also poems of mourning, regret, anger, exile and home, but they are all bound in truth telling, a necessary aspect of truth telling towards reconciliation.

The ghost poems of Chapter 3 featuring superscripts are all lines from Okot p’Bitek’s “Song of Soldier”.

## 4.6 The Songs

### 1.

& so it begins	Alex Ojera
rainfall like the sky has an exit plan	Ocero Nagai
rain like revenge	Andrea Ogena
rain like it has never rained before	Okumu Yolamu
or will ever	Obwo Anyei
rain washing soil over	Paulu Odida
rain angry	Komakech Akena
rain powerful	Adoko Matin
rain against death	Okumu Pabit
rain hand-in-hand with death	Onyango Maurensio
buried us buried us	Ocaka Galdino
we up-ended it	
didn't we	
we were the lost soldier	
the forgotten one	
the silent one	
the unknown one	
the one that got stuck <sup>162</sup>	
in the murkiness of history	

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<sup>162</sup> As recently as 2014, there have been some effort to recognize Kikosi Maalum as an integral force in the 1979 liberation of Uganda. In 2014, an attempt was made to collect the war dead and the names of the living veterans of KM so they could be "compensated" but they have never been received a veteran's pension or even nationally recognized as liberators. When I approached one of the organizers of this collection effort, he admitted that they had forgotten to include the dead of the ship. There is also no list of the dead of the 1971 Lokung massacre.

## 2.

No no that's not really what happened<sup>163</sup>  
 no no that's far from the truth  
 no no what do I even remember  
 no no what's the point  
 what's the point of remembering  
 recollection  
 if not to set the story straight

Olal Aliphonso

Bitorio

Okema Luwa James

Oringa Modesto

Oywelo George

& so it begins  
 on a night like this  
 the skies open up  
 the thunder is terrible  
 & the waves are high

Lony Tony

Labeja John Kennedy

Tanga Odur

let me tell you a story  
 about spirits that clamour for attention<sup>164</sup>  
 let me tell you a story about spirits  
 with silent voices soft voices  
 nightmarish whispers  
 & curses of mothers<sup>165</sup> & fathers<sup>166</sup>

Julius Oketta

Otenya Abile

Otit Wilson

Albino Atube

on a night like this  
 when the thunder makes us  
 huddle in closer together  
 let me remind you  
 no no let me show you  
 what the old explosives did to us  
 what the explosives did  
 what the explosives did to all of us

Lino Okuya

Ocan Yosepu

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<sup>163</sup> What really happened was that there was a deep hole that was dug at Corner Ogwech. What happened was that the hole had to be wide enough to hold over four hundred bodies. What also happened was that they were lined up and shot, line after line, lorry full after lorry full, three days' worth of digging and shooting. This is also how to measure time.

<sup>164</sup> Along with the 1979 sinking of the naval ship on Lake Victoria, the dead of the 1971 Lokung massacre and the 1970 assassination of Brigadier Okoya have demanded a place in the project.

<sup>165</sup> The curse of Brigadier Okoya's mother at his funeral comes up again and again during interviews as they do in these poems.

<sup>166</sup> The bitterness contained in the few pages of Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier" is apropos in the context of his own son having participated in the 1979 liberation war. My father couldn't have known that, none of us in the family did. Were these soldiers the sons of anyone? How would they/could they be remembered?



## 3.

We were	Muzee Nyoka
a soldier	
a volunteer	Ocan Paul
an exile	Obele
Ugandan citizens	
in & out of borders	Ochan
in & out of borders	Labongo Daktar
sometimes we were Acholi	
sometimes we were not	Ben Ocan
	Dwoka Kosantino
we were not free	
we were not happy	Okot Wilson
we were	Oywelo Gaudensio
killed	
maimed	Nyero
massacred	
assassinated	Oryem Cuc
slaughtered	Ocaya Genesio
& then we were free	
to loot	Agustino Lakony
to kill	
to maim	Otim Fred
to massacre	Balam Ongom
to slaughter <sup>167</sup>	Opio Macari
we were free to be happy	
we were free to be happy	Odyek Stephen Ojuku
what were we a soldier for?	
to march?	
to be happy?	

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<sup>167</sup> Isn't that the simple story?

## 4.

That way my little sister  
 that way  
 where it's murky  
 where it cannot make sense  
 it cannot make sense  
 that freedom looks like this  
 that freedom tastes like this

the old man writes<sup>168</sup> about bloody rocks  
 & bloody epitaphs  
 as if the government he loathed to defend with his blood  
 would care to secure his own son's memory

Odida Moses

Agustino Amone

Obok Yoweri

Onen Apala

Oyet Luto

Oboma Justino

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<sup>168</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

On a rock  
 Written in blood  
 The Epitaph reads:  
 REBEL  
 Executed for treason.  
 Loyalty to a Government  
 He loathed to defend  
 With his  
 blood.

## 5.

At the funeral<sup>169</sup> of Okoya  
 his mother cursed us  
 for letting his death go unquestioned

Obwoya

Ojwiya Eusabio

that the death of her son  
 would not end with him

Obonyo Palot

Opira Galdino

Ocan Eugenio

---

<sup>169</sup> The painful way in which Okoya was killed along with his wife Anna Akello continues to be a haunting as seen in the frequency with which it appears in several interviews. President Obote did not attend the funeral and the investigation for these deaths were removed from police and transferred to the office of the President. One veteran speaks of Inspector of Police Erinayo Oryema protesting the removal of that file from police investigation. The date of Brigadier Okoya's death January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1970 was also the date that Obote was overthrown the next year in 1971. The year before that, on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1969, was the date of the consecration of Bishop Janani Luwum.

At the funeral, Brigadier Okoya's mother is purported to have blamed the Acholi from Gulu for having collaborated with the killers of her son and his wife. That it was impossible that her son and his wife could have been killed without the intelligence of someone with intimate knowledge. That he was killed in his Gulu home taints the Acholi of Gulu. Another veteran notes that the leaders of the rebel movements Holy Spirit Movement, Holy Spirit Movement II and the Lord's Resistance Army of Alice Lakwena, Severino Lukoya and Joseph Kony are all from Odek which is part of Gulu District.

## 6.

At Lokung  
we wrote our names on the wall of the primary school  
remember?

it took three days  
then we were massacred  
& already forgotten

to think that the proper killings<sup>170</sup> hadn't even started  
perhaps that was the start of a mother's curse<sup>171</sup>

Ayeng Kosantino

Olum Sude

Onek Lukwiya

Oketa Alberiko

Okot Nan

Okwong Kolonerio

---

<sup>170</sup> The 1997 Lokung Massacre by the LRA occurs in the same vicinity of the 1971 massacre creating a palimpsest of massacres. What are the functions of layered memory?

<sup>171</sup> President Obote was invited by the Palaro clan for the last funeral rites for the late Brigadier Okoya which was scheduled in 1985. His office did not respond even after a reminder was sent, echoing the failure of the president to attend Okoya's funeral almost a decade and a half earlier. The date was set for 27 July, 1985. That was also the day that President Obote was overthrown the second time.

7.

A hundred elephants<sup>172</sup> had been killed  
 a hundred elephants they told us  
 had been killed at Owiny ki Bul

Olango Anjelo

Odong Fidele

Oboma

that is how they lured us  
 that is how they got us to leave in droves  
 a hundred elephants would need to be skinned soon  
 now

Owiny Omoga

Koi Ajalia

& when we got there  
 there were no elephants

Otoo Lapyem

Obangting

they told us clearly:

Lubayi Nacanori

we're preparing for guerrilla war

send back the women

Lacere Anwece

send them back home

& so we sent them with their saucepans  
 & told them to go back home

Jakamino

---

<sup>172</sup> The skinning of the elephants was code for the resistance. It was a cover for any group of young men who could claim that they were going to assist in skinning an elephant. Those who knew, knew.

## 8.

& we headed off via Lokung  
like ants on a mission  
wordlessly busily

Akena Alex

Bata Moral

Obutu Enyasio

at Lokung we were split again<sup>173</sup>  
those that survived survived  
those that didn't didn't  
but the names remained on the wall  
of the primary school<sup>174</sup> we left there

Cinga

Akena Dickson

Amule

as did our blood  
as did our pledges  
as did our cries  
as did our nightmares  
for God and country

Ociti Calvino

Paito Jekeri

Alibo Marko

---

<sup>173</sup> Most of the recruiting missions through the northern border of Acholi were successful. This one was unfortunate in that the men came across the SSLM who charmed them into believing that they were allies. Instead of taking the new recruits across the Kenyan border where they would find their way to Sudan, they piled the men into trucks and took them back to Lokung and imprisoned them at Ngom Lac Primary School near Corner Ogwech.

<sup>174</sup> During the 1971 Lokung massacre, Ngom Lac Primary School was the location in which over four hundred men were held before being shot at Corner Ogwech. The classrooms have since been demolished and replaced. The blood spattered walls and desperate scrawls of the prisoners were never preserved.

## 9.

At home  
 in January & February  
 red dust coats  
 carries us home as it always has

obscures  
 softens  
 creates other-worldly silhouettes  
 figures off the in distance come closer  
 or move away

we're ghosts over here<sup>175</sup>

& also over there  
 we're soft  
 otherworldly  
 silhouettes  
 we hover & skim over the lake

we're ghosts now  
 we're never going back home

Ocola John

Okwilo Kusantino

Oluu

Onyai Lamola

Obwoc Nok D Alayi

Oola Latulal Nok D Alayi

Alfonsio Nok D Olango

Atoya

Otoo Laporo

Okumu Valeriano

Oywelo Valente

Cota Andrew

Agol Valariano

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<sup>175</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 A dark whirlwind engulfs the land,  
 Gripping her tightly  
 Like a python  
 Strangulating a waterbuck  
 Like the killer  
 Throttling his victim.

## 10.

They told us as they told you  
     this is where we were born  
     this is our home  
 what's home without the knowledge<sup>176</sup> of it?  
     you were born here  
     this is your birthright  
     this is your country  
     this is your home  
     this is the land of your ancestors  
     this is the definition of you  
     this is your land  
     this is your welfare  
     this is where your children should be born  
     should've been born  
     will never be born  
     where they bury you  
 they don't tell you  
 they won't they can't  
 & sometimes they won't  
 you wouldn't know it anyway

Kitara Nok. p'Matia  
 Abwoch p'Abola  
 Omoya p'Okwero Lwak  
 Okumu Otoboyi p'Dici  
 Alana Julious  
 Odoki Tuliyo  
 Kidega Toc p'Alana  
 Otoo Alata  
 Opige Latwe-yen  
 Owezi Bazilio  
 Lutong

---

<sup>176</sup> What is the impact of a forgotten narrative?



## 11.

Some of us  
were collected in six buses  
& taken to Mutukula

Obwoya Apodo

Ocuke

Otoo Ensio

then we were all slaughtered  
all except for twenty five of us  
there were some sympathetic guards  
at the door Teso guards

Vali Ogwilo p'Laguny

Ojul Latoli

but the others would pick us  
ten by ten by ten  
until they killed all the three buses  
full of us

Apolonorio Opoka

Lenga p'Ocamo

Dera p'Taci

we were all slaughtered except for twenty three<sup>177</sup>  
when I joined the twenty three  
they told me how they escaped  
that was 1972

Atyang

---

<sup>177</sup> There are inconsistent numbers of survivors from interview accounts. One account states 25 and yet another 30. Fanon reminds us that beyond the factual detail, the insistence of a story expresses “the spirit of the group” that needs to survive (*Black Skin White Mask* 64).

## 12.

The soil of Mutukula would yield again & again  
 in 1972 we were hundreds massacred  
 in 1979 we massacred hundreds  
 they lured us with lies of safety  
 & we killed them with *arege*<sup>178</sup>-infused blood

you can't be killing women & children just like that  
 you can't be killing women & children sober  
 in guerrilla war no life matters you know that  
 you can't be killing women & children without a drink  
 without many drinks  
 many many small bottles of *arege*  
 to coat your eyes

but if you let me  
 if you have time  
 I will take you where our bones stick out of the soil  
 I will take you where children play  
 on the rusted remains of a tank  
 where the people dig their gardens  
 around our bones

Nyero Galdino

Omal Agustino

Opok

Okot Charles

Acaye Faracakino

Tito Apodo

Lony Antonio

Otoo Eugenio

Oketa Massimino

Otoo Ocheng

Adana



Figure 15. Where children play on a rusted tank and people dig their gardens

<sup>178</sup> *Arege* is colloquial for Uganda Waragi, a type of gin

## 13.

In 1978	Onyango
Obwona <sup>179</sup> presented his Nyerere-approved plan	
& just like that we were	Nyero Too
Kikosi Maalum	
& just like that we existed	Apoloni
we were free to fight	Okech Goma
we were given swords	
— guns training	Odero Rodent
strength plans ideas	
a dream of return of return	Opilo John
far away from this place home <sup>180</sup>	

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<sup>179</sup> Obwona worked together with Mwaka and John Odong Onyango who are believed to have been the master planners of the 1972 attack. Bazilio Okello was made the camp commandant and along with George Nyero, they went formed the training camp in Kigwa. Some accounts indicate that Obote went to Kigwa with Nyero and Peter Oola, but others discount that as a fact, with bitterness against the Dar-es Salaam factions who lived in relative comfort in comparison to their compatriots in Kigwa who lived off the land. Others also claim that any refugee support never reached Kigwa but stopped in Dar-es Salaam. Obote himself claims that he visited Kigwa and organized support. (See Appendix B).

For others still, it was important for them to note that the Kigwa camp consisted mostly of Acholi exiles while the Dar-es Salaam camp was mostly Lango exiles. There were Ugandans in exile from across the country having fled the dictatorship of Idi Amin and this is reflected in the Ugandan place names used in Kigwa. The vast majority of exiles in Tanzania are known to have been from Acholi and Lango.

<sup>180</sup> Several interviewees stress the difference of intent between exiles that wanted to return home versus those who wanted to return Obote to power. Rather than the easy Acholi/Lango divide that has often been presented, the anti-/pro-Obote offers a more nuanced consideration that includes Ugandans for and against using the war as Obote's return to presidency.

14.

What songs do we sing by the graveside<sup>181</sup>  
 outside the songs we already know?  
 what poetry emerges from the grave site  
 what soil whitened by bones  
 what dust stained with blood  
 what witness can we bear?  
 what witness can we bear?

Loum Ayom

Ocheng Anthony

Okwera Basil

Okwan Maurencio

Apire Rakas

Okwan Olak



**Figure 16. Skies above the Obonyo gravesite**

---

<sup>181</sup> On January 2, 2016, Dr. Henry Benjamin Obonyo, his wife Kevina and daughters Eliza and Marjorie were killed in a horrific accident. Dr. Obonyo and his family had lived in exile for forty years (in Kenya and Tanzania during the Amin years, and in the UK during the Museveni years). Dr. Obonyo was a retired professor of medicine and physician. In 1972, he was one of the earliest supporters of the Ugandan exiles in Tanzania. Along with financial support, he provided medical and psycho-social support to the exiled Ugandans who dreamed and plotted ways to return to Uganda. He was a respected historian and Acholi community leader. Soft-spoken and gentle, Dr. Obonyo was much loved and worked with people across the political divide. He was the Minister of Industry during the brief Tito Lutwa regime in 1985 and a Member of Parliament during Obote II, representing the Democratic Party of Uganda. When I asked him in London, why he got involved in the war effort, he said that he could not bear to see people suffer and that he felt that he had to do something about it.

## 15.

What witness can we bear?  
 What can witness bare<sup>182</sup>?

Odee Kosantino

Ocaya Saverio

Olodi Labud Gung

Oneka

Okema Enesto

Okot Lakiligi

---

<sup>182</sup> What expressive qualities are witnesses imbued with to do the work of witnessing?

What is the work of the witness?

In *Arts of engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, David Gaertner discusses the role of bearing and baring witness (145-150). He quotes David Garneau's conception of witnessing as the expression of a "scopophilic desire" (144), for a consumptive audience.

Baring witness does extend the role/responsibility of the witness, but in my view, agency, choice or emptiness are also possible effects of witnessing.

## 16.

Look, little sister	Odok Yoweri
you can't see	Santo Obwona
you can't see can you?	Odongo Latek
State House Dar es Salaam <sup>183</sup>	Tony Otoo
stately house white startling	Alfred Apecu
stately house white startling	Peter Oruk
me walking in & out	Ray Okwir
& through	
stately house me	
stately house me	
you can't see me	Benjamin Ojok
you really can't	Okecho Ojukwu
but you feel everything	
don't you	Vincent Ocai

---

<sup>183</sup> Several young men were recruited from Nairobi to join the exiles in Tanzania during the late 70s. Keny was among the men who was recruited as most of the rest of the family went to Nigeria when our father received a teaching appointment at Ile-Ife University (now Awolowo University). At the intimate level, this poem illustrates that the national narrative cannot be separated from the family story. More than Benedict Anderson's "imagined political communities" (*Imagined Communities* 15), it is everyday people connected to and related to other ordinary people, who make the nation. The nation can be imagined as an ordinary space of ordinary people.

## 17.

Father	Bernard Onen
sometimes there were no epitaphs — you know that	John Okumu Samora
Father	Moses Musaka
there was always blood	Robert Ntege Nsubuga
no always epitaphs but always blood	Deo Magara Patel
they marched us through the bushes	Volman
sixteen at a time	Ogoli
they marched us through bushes that were taller than we were	Abago
near the foot of a tree whose trunk forks from the bottom	Aramo
there was a hole	Obel Raphael
a big hole that swallowed us	Oracho Stefparo
sixteen at a time	Oloya Ayiba
we were shot from seven in the evening	Okeny Dican
tut tut tut tut tut tut tut tut	Okwera Moses
tut tut tut tut tut tut tut tut	Oryema Okello
tut tut tut tut tut tut tut tut	Kamuntu
tut tut tut tut tut tut tut tut	Ejalu Ateker
until the next morning at nine	Akena p'Ojok
we were shot	Paul Opobo
one by one by one	John Lacere
lined up & shot	
lined up & shot	
all night long till morning <sup>184</sup>	
there wasn't an epitaph until years & years later	
& even then the bush had claimed us	
& subsumed us into the soil	
& silence except for the crickets	
& the birds that will not relent	

---

<sup>184</sup> tut tut tut tut tut tut tut tut

After the massacre at Lokung, there was no proper burial. The bodies of the more than four hundred men were left to rot. Nature took its course as rain washed soil and debris over the dead in its own perfect funeral ritual. The site is now overgrown with bush, wild grasses and beautiful flowers. Uganda's history of violence includes countless stories of unburied bodies and bones that write the landscape which has yet to be read.

## 18.

Father father	Fred Otim
listen	
you cannot write yourself out of this one	Alfred Banyar
you really can't	Okot Mathia
Father	Oryem Marino
the children studied <i>Lak Tar</i> <sup>185</sup> in the classrooms	
they studied <i>Lak Tar</i>	Obol Beng
in rooms whose walls	Ociti Victor
where we wrote our own poems	
& our own blood songs	Oceng Ladi
Father listen	Ocaka Kasule
we scrawled our names in blood	
because we were already dying	Akena Pilise
my name is	Onyeri Okot
<i>an nyinga</i>	
I am dying for god and country	Oyugi Matteo
save our souls	
& the children read <i>Lak Tar</i> in P6	Odoki Tul
surrounded with blood spatter	
now dull markings	Kolo Euzenio
now browned by time and dirt	
scrawls on the wall	Otto Quinto
<i>an nyinga Okecha</i> <sup>186</sup> <i>Ladwong</i>	Onek Topiny
<i>an nyinga Okello</i>	
<i>an nyinga Todwong</i>	Oceng Aruna
my name is my name is my name is	
<i>nina itwa nina itwa nina itwa</i>	Okello Elozeo
<i>an nyinga an nyinga ni an nyinga</i>	Owang Etüre

<sup>185</sup> *Lak Tar* is Okot p'Bitek's first and only novel. Published in 1953, it was later translated into *White Teeth* by the author.

<sup>186</sup> From *White Teeth*, the Acholi translation of *Lak Tar*. In this novel, Okecha Ladwong sings his *mwoc*, a praise song, a personal poem with which one presents one's self, say for instance, at a dance. It is said that the dead of Corner Ogwech are probably recruits from Palaro in Acholi, where there was a huge recruitment drive. It is also believed that the dead probably include Ugandans from Teso, Lango and Bugishu, making this truly a national tragedy. *Lak Tar*, Bitek's first novel, is also his most loved book in Acholi. This poem is for Ugandans whose praise songs, like the fictional Okecha Ladwong, might only ever be heard at the moment of its declaration.



## 19.

The cock that crowd all night long  
was slaughtered in the morning

Ogenga Jacob

it might been announcing  
that day wouldn't come<sup>187</sup>  
its own death song stuck in its throat

Lukwiya Ben

Aginya Maurencio

Okech Janani

what were the signs

Odong Justino Latek

none of us slept easy  
some of us not at all  
we heard the barking dogs  
we heard the Muslim call for prayer  
& still & all night the cock crowed

Oola Yacobo

Odong Alfonse

Okello John Onyango-

nyong

we got up uncertain but we didn't know of what  
because fight we would  
& go home we would also

Otto Martin

Lakwonyero Donasiano

---

<sup>187</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

The birds stop singing  
The bulls stop roaring  
Cows gaze with their bleary eyes  
Goats huddle together  
Sheep lower their heads to the ground  
Cocks stop crowing  
And chicks hide under  
Their mother's wings.  
All the animals and birds  
In the village look lost.

## 20.

What other signs were there  
what other signs did we need

Santo Obwoya

Otto Charles

there's nothing more powerful than a mother's curse<sup>188</sup>

Ocana George Adoko

there's nothing more powerful than a mother's curse<sup>189</sup>

Okot Bosco

there's nothing more powerful than a mother's curse<sup>190</sup>

Lokwiya Omony

Bernard

---

<sup>188</sup> The death of my son will not end with him.

<sup>189</sup> In Acholi tradition, a most portent curse is the one in which a mother would lift her breast and point it at a child who has deeply disappointed her.

<sup>190</sup> On April 1, 2015 some old women in Amuru district are said to have unleashed a powerful curse on the people who were involved in land grabbing in Amuru District by stripping off their clothes in a public show of nakedness (Morris Komakech, *The Independent*, Kampala, May 3, 2015)

## 21.

In Arusha  
 Mount Meru hides its shy face in the clouds  
 in Arusha  
 the priest intones  
 & after church  
 a story  
     there was a man<sup>191</sup>  
     who used to come to our workplace  
     & tell us stories about the Kagera war  
  
     in the hot afternoon when we were all sleepy  
     he would come & say  
     you know you could be my daughter  
     do you know how many children we left in Uganda

Opio Wilson  
 Kikuyu Ouma  
 Ojok Kwirino  
 Obol Celsio  
 Okwera Moses Nok  
 Obita Acelam  
 Odur Dula  
 Lebi Opwonya  
 Okello Aliophonsio

---

<sup>191</sup> The story was told at an after-church conversation in Arusha about a former member of the congregation who has since moved away. Memories about the 1979 Liberation War continue unbound. Memory is a seed, planted and watered.

## 22.

In Bukoba  
 Emin Pasha looks to the lake  
 from yet another permanent resting ground<sup>192</sup>

in Bukoba  
 the landscape bears scars

this is the thicket where German soldiers were buried

this is where Amin bombed & missed the hospital  
 now reclaimed by banana trees and a trickling stream

this is where the Kagera bridge was blown up

this is where green mambas will kill you in three minutes

this is a war memorial  
 an askari holding his gun towards Uganda  
 with a promise that no one  
 no one will ever threaten the lives  
 & livelihoods of the Tanzanian people again

where are we where are we

Oyo

John Adui

Cota Tokwiny

Obwona Yafasi

Otim Oryem

Tom Lalobo

George Nyero

Okello Tito

Loum Robson

Apire Anthony

Odera Alfred

Odur Matino

Okello Basil

Okeny Alberiko

---

<sup>192</sup> There is another Emin Pasha gravestone in northern Uganda. The landscape is marked by reminders of a colonial past that is never past.

## 23.

Two nights before we left<sup>193</sup>  
 three nights four  
 a crying dog  
 a crying dog  
 a crying dog all night long

how long did that dog cry  
 for how long could it cry

Oloya Itila

Obali Alfred

Acuka Sarafino

Ocora Benson

Ogung Angelo

Orach Agustino

---

<sup>193</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

I hear a great rumbling  
 On the horizon  
 It is like thunder  
 Like an earthquake  
 I see a cloud of dust  
 Raised by the marching men  
 One hundred thousand of them  
 Ready to crush to destroy  
 To conquer the land.

24.

Brother  
 in Bukoba a dog whelps  
 all night  
 inside a dripping tap tap tap tap tap  
 I can't hear you

Olum Saverio

Agora

Julio Abwoch

Odero Vincent

Brother  
 they studied the song as war broke out in '78  
 did you ever sing

Olim Mayoni

Malinga

Brother  
 much has been made about marching  
 & the singing of *bunduki* songs

Lombe

David Kitara

much has been made about songs of war  
 about the requirement for young blood of country

Charles Oburu

Ekweru Ten Two

Brother  
 in the smallest of hours there are no more dogs  
 they said your mates were on that ship  
 how could you sing after that  
 how could you even sing

Yoventus Opeta Apiriga

Jenaro Ouma

Hitler Eregu

Esenyo

## 25.

Attention  
Forwaaaaard march

*twende safari*  
*twende safari*  
*twende safari*  
*twende safari*

get onto the ship  
get off get on  
get off get on  
get off get on

ah *bwana*  
we were not meant to think

no matter how we looked  
no matter that not all of us wore uniform  
our shoes were polished

no matter how we looked  
we stood straight  
we looked ahead  
we looked ahead  
we looked towards the final safari to Pagak<sup>194</sup>.

Thomas Gidudu

Olobo Telaviv

Epechu

Kasuwa

Okiya Lawrence

Lukala

Okulu Achampong

Mukoce

Otim Onen Gasporo

Okwonga Geofery

Obelia

Policap Tokwiny

Okulu Robert

Janani Long

Olanya Daktar

Otim Lonyo

---

<sup>194</sup> From Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (149): "Pagak" is the place of no return. Death's homestead.

## 26.

Brother if you won't return  
this you must know

a story of you<sup>195</sup>  
on one knee  
tying the shoelace of a new recruit  
who still remembers

Okot Albert

Onek Peter

Kula Kitara

Owit Julio

Aita Agustino

Okumu Charles

---

<sup>195</sup> Memory of a veteran who remembered Keny tying his shoe laces for him so he would not get in trouble at inspection.



## 27.

On this side they forgot about us

Ociti Awira Nelson

on that side they forgot about us

Ocol Jakari

border places expand like jaws

Okec Santo

to swallow the young

Okello Luka

at Lokung nothing but wilderness

on Lake Victoria nothing but sky & cloud

Ogengo Jacob

glorious sunsets everyday

Oywiya Alex

everywhere spirits clamouring for space

clamouring for peace<sup>196</sup>

Cwa Mag

spirits like dying dogs

Onyuta John

---

<sup>196</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

Peace! Peace!

A lone widow sang

When shall we have Peace?

## 28.

Two ghosts in Arusha  
 sit on a ledge  
 look at Mount Meru  
 whose shyness is hidden in the clouds

there's no time<sup>197</sup>  
 says one to another  
 there's no time<sup>198</sup>  
 there's no time<sup>199</sup>  
 there's no time<sup>200</sup>  
 no time

Olum Festo

Olango Lacania

Obur George

Obwoya Simon

Latigo Geofery

Ocaya John

Lolia Emmanuel

---

<sup>197</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 Churches filled with  
 Widows and orphans  
 And old men and women  
 Bent like bows  
 Singing empty hymns  
 To a deaf god...

<sup>198</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 Young widows mumbled  
 Their broken dirges

<sup>199</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 New orphans swarm the countryside  
 Like adwek, the hopping young locusts  
 Their tears cover the land  
 Like dew on the lush April grass.

<sup>200</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 Institutions snap  
 Like the brittle legs  
 Of the mosquito

## 29.

Today everyone's sister is a nurse

Ojara Severino

everyone's sister is a teacher

Bwolo Paskali

we mind the sick

& teach to the curriculum

Oryang Anthony

what else is there

Lapat Albert

when there are no stories to live by

where there are no stories to be had<sup>201</sup>

Lokala

---

<sup>201</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

I close my eyelids tight

But boiling tears burst through

And tumble down my chest

Like water at Wang-kwar Falls

## 30.

In the morning they told us  
 that the dog that was crying all night  
 was mourning the pups  
 that had been taken away from her  
 during the day

what is the sound  
 of four hundred & seventeen mothers  
 mourning the deaths of their sons at Lokung

what is the sound of  
 mothers mourning the deaths  
 of sons that will never die  
 but will never return

what is the sound of perpetual loss<sup>202</sup>

if the mothers mourn  
 they mourn a knowing  
 not a fact  
 if they mourn  
 it's not from the fact of being told

Apau Otana

Atau Okidi Oryang

Gipir Fernandino

Okumu Kolonerio

Okee Joseph

Ocaya Kerobino

Ojara Robert

Paulo Oboma

Eric Oryang

Lopoto Wilson

Otto Agana

Okeny p'Layub

Lagwe Paul

---

<sup>202</sup> The dog stopped mourning for a little while that night. I thought perhaps she'd lost her voice, or perhaps that she'd died of sadness. But there was no depth to her sadness. After the briefest of interludes, the dog found her voice again. She didn't howl. The dog cried and cried and cried.

31.

Yesterday the clouds descended  
 & brought with it a deep cold  
 a bone cold

today it's very warm

the dead of Lake Victoria must be cold all the time  
 & the dead of Lokung  
 must be baking  
 in the relentless heat of the dry season  
 in northern Uganda  
 except when it's not that hot  
 except also  
 that it never gets bone cold

Otim Joseph

Oryem Peter

Otong Isarael

Alana Logotio

Oloya Opige

Odinga Mala

Oceng Donasiano

Oloya Ombil



**Figure 17. Water, clouds and sky merge at Lake Victoria**

## 32.

Emin Pasha is never going back home  
 like you  
 my brothers  
 he's never going back home  
 like you my brothers  
 his bones have settled into the soil  
 like you my brothers  
 he had a sense that the country he was dying for  
 was worth the effort<sup>203</sup>  
 & like you  
 many might have died in your hands  
 but unlike him  
 some of you hadn't even started to fight

Akena Santo  
 Ociti Paul  
 Obwolo Paito  
 Owor Yusuf  
 Onek Okango  
 Okot Lunga  
 Obur Albert  
 Oturu Marcelino  
 Oloya Owot

---

<sup>203</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

Freedom!  
 He shouted  
 Freedom!

## 33.

Little sister  
 it rained in Musoma last night  
 & the roads are muddy & thick  
 how will you walk about  
 little sister

Your green sandals have no place here  
 you should have come with gumboots  
 you should have worn a uniform<sup>204</sup>  
 at least you should have worn the guise of a soldier  
 looking to go home

Ociti Kalvin

Odero Valeriano

Bongomin Giligorio

Odongo Fidele

Onono Lamson

Obur John

---

<sup>204</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

He coughs:  
 The songs of machine guns  
 Fills the air  
 Mad jets tear the sky in fury  
 Scattering death across the land

## 34.

Some of us became fishermen in Musoma  
 we cast nets & later hired others to cast nets  
 I had seven men casting for me  
 & when the news arrived<sup>205</sup>  
 that there was something at Mutukula  
 I said  
     here now it's time  
     it's time to go

Ojwiya Copper

Ongany Julio

Kidega Toc

Ongee Santo

Ocan William

Lokwiya Romano

---

<sup>205</sup> The news was that Amin had attacked the Kagera Salient and Nyerere was going to push them back.



## 35.

Little sister  
 it rained last night in Musoma  
 it rained & the mists over the lake  
 has clouded everything you might have seen  
 & heard

Who holds the memory of a sunken ship<sup>206</sup>  
 just us little sister  
 just us

it's muddy out  
 little sister  
 it's muddy inside as well  
     nobody remembers what they don't know  
     nobody remembers what they can't know

Okumu William

Lotom Julious

Oringa John

Okello Rufino

Odera John

Opobo Oryema Paul

Omona Simon

Oringa Thomas

Okello Santo Atata

---

<sup>206</sup> It's not surprising that the general population should not know about the sinking of a ship carrying arms and foreign citizens in Tanzania. Nobody seemed to have heard or know anything about it but those who know, know.

36.

Brother  
 the landscape hasn't changed  
 sculpted hilltops  
 sometimes rocky  
 sometimes softened with round headed trees

brother  
 I still collect rocks  
 you never did  
 did you  
 I'd know which rocks you looked at  
 I'd know which ones made you sigh

I look around this place this lake country &  
 I know that you wandered here too

Orach Donasiano

Ijaia Okumu

Okello Lawino

Ocaya George

Otto Dabniano

Okot Nyasi

Obet

Lakara

Apacu Nyero

37.

Brother  
 you couldn't have been in Tarime  
 not in those days  
 there are no accounts of time stopping  
 nobody mentions that  
 nobody mentions anything  
 nobody knows

Obur Gaudensio

Kidega Bitek

Munume

Ojok Oyite

Julius F Oketta

you couldn't have been in Tarime  
 not in those days  
 when time *harakisha-ed*<sup>207</sup>  
 rush rush rush  
 but the mountains remained still  
     march march march  
     march march march

Bazilio Olara Okello

Maruru Zed

Okwera

Omaria

Opon Acak

you couldn't have been in Tarime  
 you couldn't have been witness  
 to the death march of your mates

Tito Opwode

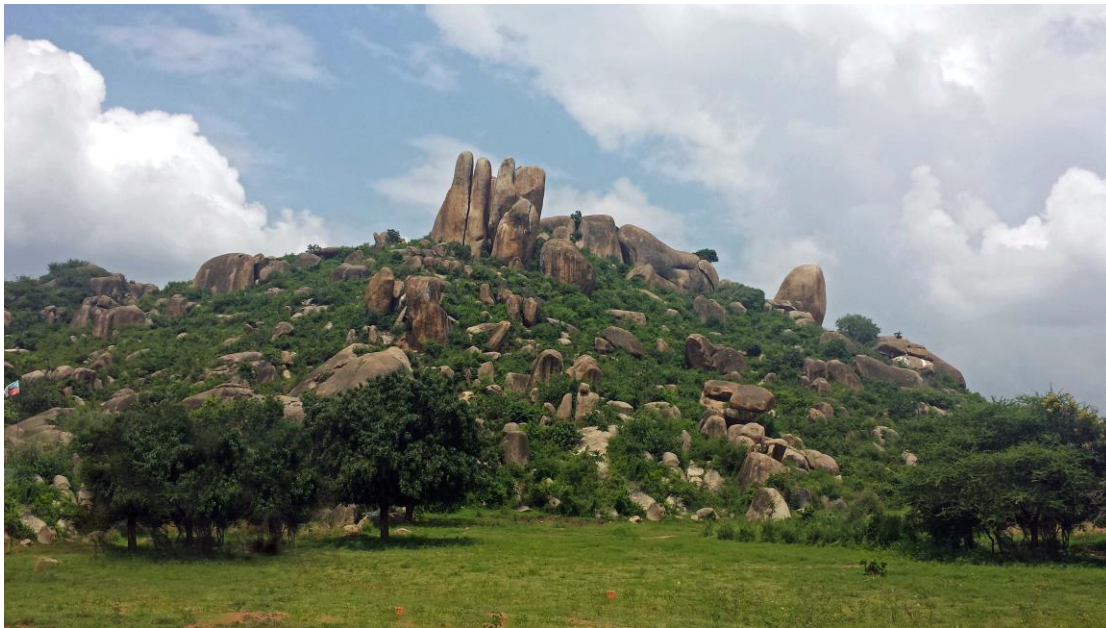


Figure 18. Landscape near Lake Victoria.

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<sup>207</sup> *harakisha-ed*: rushed, went by fast, from the Swahili – Kuharakisha

## 38.

So what did they tell you brother<sup>208</sup>  
 how did they begin  
 come fight with us  
 come join that war  
 come die  
 come see what you can do for your country  
 come join us who are at least doing something

Langoya Zacharia

Francis Agwa

Acunge

Joseph Obonyo

Ocaya

did they come to watch your basketball games  
 did they scope out girls with you  
 did you laugh a lot with them  
 did everything go quiet when they described  
 the killing of the archbishop  
 did you then get up slowly and say  
     where do I sign

Otoa

Bajalaki

Opoo

Odonga Oduka

did you sign?

Obel Oyalo

---

<sup>208</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

He arrives soon after midnight;  
 The sky is overcast, weeping!  
 His torchlight lights up the horizon  
 Like the rising sun.  
 His black face  
 Hidden under the bush hat,  
 His eagle eyes burnt fiercely  
 Like molten iron.  
 He caressed the butt of his gun  
 As the lover fondles the full breasts  
 Of his young woman.

## 39.

They didn't take you  
 you went  
 you went along  
 you were very young  
 you were young like a sapling<sup>209</sup>

Apicu  
 they called you Apicu  
 Apicu because you were young  
 Apicu because you reminded them of the original  
 Apicu because that was code  
 code for the son of the poet

you were specially packaged  
 brother  
 you were precious  
 you were the son of a poet

what were you looking for  
 happiness?

Illamu

Banya

Abili

Ocan Lakulaga

Duli

Amwatu

Oyoo Tom

Ongom Okidi

Odur

Kibwota Nick

Namiti

Lucaa

---

<sup>209</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"  
 The crocodiles, hippos, fishes, snakes  
 Waiting below  
 Snorted, creaked, bellowed and hissed  
 Their thanks  
 Shouted three cheers  
 And feasted.

## 40.

Where will I find you  
brother

Peter Oola

Kamara

at the bus stop in Mwanza  
men and women hawk wares  
there's colour everywhere  
traffic police in white  
keep the order  
keep the order  
did you come by here

Odongkara

Okot Azillo

Wakoli

Mark Adoko

I'm looking for you  
brother  
a woman waits to cross the street  
goats & cows at pasture  
a man pushes a cart  
another one carries a briefcase  
another on his cell phone  
a woman laughing with her child

Ojera Genesisio

Justine Bright Odoki

Olwoc

Opia Jimmy

Moses Aleng

why are you not alive Keny  
why are you not alive

Apia

I look for evidence of you  
on the bus  
your favourite song comes on  
Les Wanyika's "Sina Makosa"  
Indeed

Anthony Okette

Charles Ojera

Kenneth Odora

Okello Elong

you're blameless when you're dead  
but I still wish you were here

Oryem Labar

Ogwal Yuventino

## 41.

I forget what I wanted to say  
 I forget if I can  
 or how to say it

I forget becomes I don't know  
 I can't know  
 I can't not know  
 I can't nothing

it must not have happened  
 because I forget<sup>210</sup>

Jack Ojera

Oyugi

Obura

Abola Oloya

Charles Okecha

Atim

Lapobo A

---

<sup>210</sup> What is the nature of this aspiration?  
 What is memory if you don't know?

**42.**

Because once there was a woman  
who loved her son  
& he never came back

because once there was a woman  
who loved her sons  
& they never came back

because once there were many women  
who loved their sons  
& they never came back

Aron Owiny

Kimptom Karama

Odyek

Ogwal Elai

Agwar

Birungi

Peter Owili

Dabniano Oceng



## 43.

A person on the bench hunched over  
 legs crossed  
 head inside crossed arms  
 a woman  
 or a small man

a memory of a deep pit returns  
 three days dug  
 a wide pit  
 three days dug  
 a line of men shot  
 a line of men shot  
 a line of men shot  
 shot until morning  
 line by line by line  
 line by line by line  
 line by line of men fall into a pit dug  
 three days deep

all night long  
 they fall open bodied  
 arms splayed  
 or straight in  
 face in or face out  
 none holding on to their bodies  
 none holding on to themselves

a person on the bench  
 holds the self in tightly  
 alive  
 no less  
 alive  
 alive

Kato

Tony Brent Okwera

Ogwai Oyet

Onen Cee

Kerobino Onen

Alii Lalobo

Martin Lalobo

Andrew Olanya

Agetta

Safi Opio

Pyerino Laker

Ocan Joseph

Muhammed Abudala

Mwa

Opoka Matthew

Ogaba Vincent

Kilara Ben

Aron Maxwell

Oryem Alany

44.

He was my son  
 as sons are of mothers  
 & today I bury him

so let the sun set as it will  
 & if it should rise tomorrow  
 to keen the sense of life that everything claims  
 let it rise as betrayal  
 let it rise everyday like the rhythm of betrayal  
 let sunrise always be connected to this moment

Ojera Andrew

Owot S

Muzee Kabiri

Oyoo Odinga

Lapat Geofery

Johnson Odwong

Orumu Eture

45.

If the moon should wax again  
as it will  
let its edges be sharpened by the memory of this moment  
  
you might forget  
you will forget  
but let this moment be marked by moon  
that same moon that we women know  
that same moon that we women mark ourselves by  
let the moon be a marker for the moment of my son's death

Lakwo Donasiano

Olinga James

Onyang Manensio

Ocaka Denis

Okema John

Opiyo Oluka

Otto Agustino

46.

We each in formation  
 followed the weighted heads of those before us  
 our mouths full of hair  
 our feet heavy with lies

each of us nodding in tandem  
 our faces locked to the sky  
 eyes left then eyes right  
 eyes left the eyes right  
 marching marching  
 each wanting to stamp out  
 the nightmares  
 that awaited us

each prophecy written on our own foreheads  
 how could we know  
 we only knew that the weighted heads before us  
 led to an endless grey-blue

Ocan Kidega

Nyeko Jack

Olanya Lamson

Akim Temonia

Kinyera Lanywar

Otto Magiri

Alele Stephen

Opoka

Oneka Izaia

Oneka Donasiano

Owini

47.

Everything keens to this point in my heart  
 & begins  
 & begins again

I am sinking  
 I am sinking  
 I am sinking

I am sinking  
 & my son must be lowered<sup>211</sup> into the ground

Olango Christopher

Amone Omile

Nono Labson

Okoya Edward

Obwoya Silaka

Ochola Everesto

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<sup>211</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

They shot him  
 The corpse fell

## 48.

So all you witnesses                      hear me  
 all you who are here                      hear me  
 all you who refuse to be here              hear me  
 all you who cannot be here                here me  
 all you who came before us                hear me  
 all you who are yet to come                here me  
 all you who can still laugh                hear me  
 all you who cry                              hear me  
 all you who are my kin                      here me

all you who walk the same road  
 to & from the market  
 to & from the well  
 & church & school & the bus park  
 you who laugh at me                      hear me also  
 even you  
 who has no space for this kind of grief  
 listen<sup>212</sup>

there is no call from Kampala  
 that can determine this moment

Komakech Biasco

Oywiya Alex

Omona S

Olum Festo

Odong S

Okello Sato

Olweny

Nyeko

Lamm

Justino Okot

Akeru

Otwoni Charles

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<sup>212</sup> This is my song. This is my case. Listen.

## 49.

This death  
 this thing  
 this calamity  
 this body  
 this extinguishment  
 this labour  
 this stop  
 this day  
 this moment

hear me

this does not stop in my house alone  
 I bury my son  
 may others also bury theirs<sup>213</sup>

Odong Palo

Pelle

Gaitano Lak

Orach Acholi

Onek

Amodarokwa

Otiwet

Ali Maza

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<sup>213</sup> From: Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Soldier"

On a rock  
 written in blood  
 on a rock  
 written in blood  
 on a rock  
 written in blood  
 on a rock  
 written in blood  
 on a rock  
 written in blood

50.

Mothers & sons  
poets & daughters  
tell me this

what is the life beyond  
the circumference of a curse?

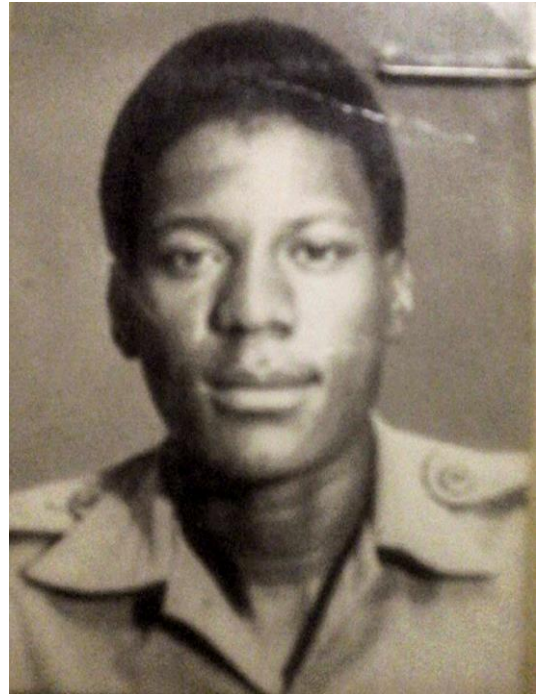


Figure 19. 2nd Lieutenant Keny Koropil Kidega Bitek

1955-1984

My brother enlisted as Kidega Bitek

Undated Family archives



## Chapter 5: Decolonization Beyond the Metaphor: Or the Journey to Becoming *La-wer*, an Acholi Poet

how do you exit a poem ?/you do/n't, you/may walk out of it unsung, outsung,/

null, w./rung in vex perpetua, but soon/you/return/

(Petero Kalulé, *Kalimba* 68)

### 5.1 Decolonization, the Seed

I used to send letters to my father at his work, as children do. I remember him once coming back home, upset about how I had written the address on the envelope. I return to this memory to think about what it might have meant to him for me to write to him at the Department of Literature in English or the Department of English in Literature. I couldn't understand the distinction or why he was upset about my mistake, but I made it a point to write the correct address from then on, the one he wanted me to write, the one that said Department of Literature in English<sup>214</sup>. As a child, to me English was grammar and stories, and it seemed that literature was stories, so what was the fuss?

It was only as a graduate student, encountering the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind: Politics of Language in English Literature*, that I began to understand what the fuss was all about. In graduate school, at the Department of English at the University of British Columbia, I learned about the concept of decolonization, and how closely that term was linked to the department that I had mis-named.

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<sup>214</sup> I had written to him at the Department of English Literature when he was working in the Department of Literatures in English at the University of Nairobi.

In the late-1960s Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Owuor Anyumba and Taban lo Liyong, all lecturers at the University of Nairobi, had replied to a proposal that the Department of English, as it was then, should have less of a focus on British literature and culture and the long tradition of European literature, as there was now a need for comparative literature between other peoples (*Decolonising* 89). In their response, the three lecturers proposed that African literature be central, with a focus on orature instead of the written text (94-95) and this led to a fierce debate that ended with the abolishing of the English Department and the establishment of the Department of Literatures in English at Nairobi University. No wonder my father had been so upset about my address! I came to understand decolonization as more than a theory or an interesting idea whose time has come.

Decolonization got me in trouble as a child and now as I make the claim for a decolonizing project, it is my duty to ensure that I am as clear as I can be. To conclude this dissertation, I outline how the search for the memory of a sunken ship led me to *wer* – to my place in it as *la-wer*, singer, and as a collaborator with the dead and the living – to sing as a decolonizing project. In this work, I have been guided principally by the powerful minds of Black and Indigenous scholars and artists who continue to extend our thinking on the work of memory, the weather, belonging and the future.

## 5.2 From Poet to *La-wer*

In Gulu I was disturbed by the audacity of the pastor who asked me whether I understood who I was. I didn't see his point; I didn't understand the question but I took note of the moment and carried the discomfort with me. I have been introducing myself as a poet, sometimes almost in jest or out of deference, because for the most part, there is not much of a follow-up question,

except perhaps: have you written anything I might read? And then, predictably, when they hear that my *100 Days* is a collection of poetry that reflects on how to think of a genocide two decades after it has happened, they generally leave me alone, which is what I like. Through this dissertation and in the company of brilliant minds, I have come to a better appreciation of the very central role of the poet, the singer, *la-wer*, and to take on the responsibility for the work that I'd already started. It is not enough to claim to be a poet. I am an Acholi poet, *la-wer*. I also take this as the pastor's gift – perhaps he recognized that the labour of listening to the stories of the ship from the veterans is also the work involved in creating a space where we can sing.

*100 Days* was not my first foray into thinking with the voices I had not read very much about. I have worked with Erin Baines,<sup>215</sup> the Justice and Reconciliation Project and the women from WAN in Uganda to write their stories, sometimes in poetry but also in prose, but still within the guidelines of *wer* – to state a case and speak from spaces of agency. “My Son is a Story,”<sup>216</sup> published by Africa Online considers one of the stories from Grace Acan, a women's rights advocate, graduate from Gulu University and author of *Not Yet Sunset* (African Book Collective 2018). Grace was abducted from her high school in October 1996 by the Lord's Resistance Army and spent several years in captivity. When I wrote “My Son is a Story”, I was thinking about

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<sup>215</sup> Several projects from life stories, documentaries, presentations, and books have emerged from the work of Erin Baines, WAN and the JRP. By example, *I am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming My Life from the Lord's Resistance Army* by Evelyn Amony begins several sections with the statement “I Am Evelyn Amony,” stating her presence and personhood outright so that the listener/reader must remember that she is the teller and that the story is not the totality of who she is. She is Evelyn Amony and what follows is what happens to Evelyn Amony. *Buried in the Heart: Women, Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda* by Erin Baines is the encapsulation of the years of collaboration between Baines and the women at WAN. It is clear that Baines can see the women and they see her – they are people who have come through complex experiences but are people with political agency; they may be ugly, as Danticat teaches, but they are here and their stories, as Baines writes, are spaces from which we can learn to remake community, how we can return to harmony after mass violence.

<sup>216</sup> “My Son is a Story” is a chapter from *Stories from the Dry Season*, a book manuscript that I wrote in collaboration with the women from WAN. It remains unpublished, but chapters and poems from it have found homes elsewhere.

media reports that the Ugandan army (Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces) counted all the dead after battle as rebels<sup>217</sup>.

I was propelled by the tragic story of Grace losing her son in battle, after having been abducted and then having to return to a life (initially) of deep stigma from the association with the LRA. The first person account of "My Son is a Story" presents a case to consider (for those of us who were not there) the experience of being a mother in captivity to a reading/listening audience that might not understand or know what that was like. It also asks what it means to present the fact of the dead on the battlefield with the lie of who was a soldier in that war/fighting. "My Son is a Story" is *wer*. It comes from a voice from the experience of being in captivity and employs Morrison's godlings, language and image, to make the case of who is familiar, whose story can be owned, and how our humanity is bound with the telling of stories or songs.

Like Sara's story from Chapter 3, "My Son is a Story" and *100 Days* all grapple with what it means to articulate our stories in a social context where all definitions have already been established to dismiss us as lesser (sometimes), or as incapable (mostly) and as needing to be voiced by another (usually). Arundhati Roy reminds us, in her 2004 Sidney Prize Peace Lecture, that there are "never any voiceless, only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard" (Roy). *Wer* don't need to compete to be heard; they are already part of a tradition that offers space for reflection and debate and recognition. After all that, as Edwidge Danticat writes *Nou lèd, nou la* in an essay of the same title: "We Are ugly, But We Are Here," which is to say that

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<sup>217</sup> Such as that by Callum Macrae in his April 8, 2004 online BBC report *Uganda's Fallen Child Rebels* (accessed July 2, 2018): [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3608003.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3608003.stm)

“the essence of life lies in survival”: we’re still here and we sing, debate, celebrate, think and sing (Danticat np).

### 5.3 With Whose Mouth to Tell

Beatrice Lamwaka, Harriet Anena, Judith Adong and Monica Arac de Nyeko are four Acholi contemporary women writers whose works primarily focus on the war and its aftermath in northern Uganda and whose works have attracted international acclaim. In Lamwaka’s short story “Butterfly Dreams,” which was shortlisted for the 2003 Caine Prize for African Literature, the protagonist, Lamunu, presented in second person, is the you. Lamwaka’s use of the second person pronoun to address Lamunu (who is a formerly abducted person and family member of the teller) also implicates the reader who has to work to separate their self from the story, or become enveloped in the experience of Lamunu and her family. The story, about a family whose child returns from captivity, is also about how stories need to be told to restore order. How to tell Lamunu that her father died while she was in captivity? “We don’t know with whose mouth to tell you,” the speaker says (31), and goes on to give the details of the father’s death. Who are the tellers of terrible stories and how can they be told, seeing as they must be told? I return to M. NourbeSe Philip: “... it cannot be told yet must be told; but only through its un-telling” (*Zong!* 207). As Lamwaka writes: “Every day we pray that we get the strength to tell you. And one day when the war ends, you will tell us your story. And we will tell you our stories” (31). Stories offer the space for possibility for another future space to tell a story. As Nansubuga Makumbi reminds us, in order to avoid the experience of being *kiwuduwudu*, we must tell this story properly (Granta np).

Of the four Acholi women writers, Judith Adong is the only playwright. She teaches at Makerere University in Kampala, was a Fulbright scholar at Templeton University and recently the first Ugandan to be recognized for her work at the 2018 Prince Klaus Awards in the Netherlands. Adong, who grew up in Acholi during the war, is most interested in finding a space where issues can be discussed. She admits, in the CNN documentary *African Voices*, that her goal is in “finding a middle ground” where people from polar positions can articulate themselves in order to get to “every body’s truths” (Quoted in *African Voices*). Her play *Silent Voices* was produced at the National Theatre in Kampala to much critical acclaim.

“Jambula Tree” by Monica Arac de Nyeko, is a story about a budding lesbian relationship between two Ugandan girls in Kampala. It won the 2007 Caine Prize for African Literature and inspired *Rafiki*, a Kenyan movie that was an official selection for the 2018 Cannes Film Festival. “Jambula Tree,” like Lamwaka’s “Butterfly Dreams,” is written in second person. Anyango addresses Sanyu in a reflective voice, recalling their relationship and wondering about the possibility for a future relationship. Unlike Lamwaka’s use of the second person to possibly bind the reader to the story, de Nyeko’s “Jambula Tree” is directed at Sanyu and we, the readers, are voyeurs. Appropriately, this is the familiar space of lovers; Sanyu and Anyango are not strangers. From their names, Sanyu, which translates as joy and is a name from southern Uganda, and Anyango, which is the name given to a girl born in the mid-morning, is related to sun, and is a name from northern Uganda. The subtext of this story, even though it was widely read as a story about homosexuality, is also one that imagines a possible love between Ugandans from the north and from the south, given Uganda’s painful history.

Harriet Anena, like me, is a poet. Her *A Nation in Labour* was a joint winner of the 2018 Wole Soyinka Prize. When *A Nation in Labour* was published in 2015, I was in Uganda and was invited to the offices of FEMRITE (Uganda Women Writers Association) in Kampala, to have a discussion with other writers in celebration of Anena's book. Like the other three Acholi women writers, Anena grew up in northern Uganda during the war and her book is described on its Amazon page as "a collection of social conscience poetry." So when an audience member asked me whether I thought that Anena was writing in the tradition of Okot p'Bitek, I found myself having to quickly think about what it would mean to say yes, she was, or no she was not. Anena, who has been admitted to the writing program at Columbia University for the 2019 school year, has been fundraising through social media and poetry productions in Uganda. The poetry of Anena and *A Nation in Labour* was recently featured in *The Daily Monitor* in an opinion piece by retired professor Timothy Wangusa, who made it a point to say: "A most potent poetic voice from Acholi, Anena was born almost 50 years after Okot p'Bitek; and about 50 years separate the publication of *Song of Lawino* and *A Nation in Labour*" (Wangusa). He goes on to say: "But Anena is no outgrowth of the 'Okotian Song School', as characterized by the prolonged dramatic monologue of the protagonist of a given 'song' or long poem" (Wangusa). Wangusa, like lo Liyong and others, restrict the Song style to the technical form – a single protagonist, a long poem. *Wer* is far more than that if we listen to how Okot p'Bitek speaks about his work and the intentions for his songs. If the Okotian Song School is to be limited to the fact of the meter and the voice, then indeed, Anena does not write in the Okotian style. But given, as I've shown, that the work of all four Acholi writers are steeped in the landscape and write from the voices around them to a familiar audience, then it must be true that all of them are *lu-wer*, singers.

I answered the question at FEMRITE in the most honest way I could. I knew that this was a moment for Anena to be seen as doing her own work, which she is, but I also recognize that both Anena and Okot p'Bitek write to, from and are of Acholi – they are heirs of the same tradition. The Okotian Song School may be a convenient name for the scholars who need to categorize and give acknowledgements, but it is also important that we take note, as Okot p'Bitek did, that the Acholi, like other Indigenous people, look to the artists for direction and space to think, celebrate and articulate themselves. All these four Acholi women writers offer space in their work for us to reflect on what happened and how we got here.

#### **5.4 A Sunken Ship, A Quiet Story in a Quotidian Space**

For a while, it bothered me a great deal that my search for what happened to those who were in the ship that sank in Lake Victoria in 1979 remained elusive – that all I had were the merest traces of their steps and the memories of war veterans who shared their story with me. Tina Campt reminds me that “[q]uiet is a modality that surrounds and infuses sound with impact and affect, which creates the possibility for it to register as meaningful” (4). Quiet is not less; it clamours for attention; it is a register for presence that does not take much room. To think alongside Campt about the memory of the ship that sank on Lake Victoria is to appreciate how far this quiet memory has taken me. From speaking with veterans, traversing Tanzania, and Uganda, mining my own memories and searching through interviews and other writings with my father, I have come to appreciate the impact of this modality of quiet because it led me to Glissant’s claim to opacity and how I could not just accept that there should be a right way to it – that I had to show how this can be done in the context of research. Instead, the ghost poems enable me to illustrate Glissant’s opacity while fulfilling the requirement to outline how I did the work. These ghost poems are not “sites of social reproduction but instances of rupture and



refusal” (Campt 5), and being part of a methodology chapter, they are of the “master’s tools,” but in form and content they are ways of “building our own house,” bringing together the scholarship of Audre Lorde, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang and others to think about decolonizing as a verb<sup>218</sup>. The ghosts maintain their presence as quiet, but also as another audience to whom this work is directed.

Decolonization, a long and awkward word, is also a term that has not settled universally since the Nairobi Literature Debates of the early 70s. I live in a settler colonial country; I come from a formerly colonized country; and I teach in the English Department at Capilano University. The debate on decolonization is familiar and intimate even though the terms are new again/old again. The aspiration remains to know ourselves beyond the colonial narratives and power, to go home, claim home, speak in our languages and be at home in the world. Or, as Simpson and Lorde do, to think about decolonization as an action that can be followed through by individuals. Taking the lead from the Nairobi Literature Debates, and from scholars like Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang who can see beyond the performance of the term, decolonization is a practice that centralizes the formerly colonized, with the aim to return not to a romantic past but to a place of power and agency. The ability to tell our own stories with whatever tools we have – be they like Gloria Anzaldúa’s serpent tongues<sup>219</sup> or sliced, dub, dumb tongues, as in work by M. NourbeSe Philip, taped mouths like Rebecca Belmore’s, without a reliable paper map like Dionne Brand, or with the full claim to opacity like Eduardo Glissant – decolonization is the set of tools that we

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<sup>218</sup> From Tuck & Yang: “decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot be easily grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks”, (“Decolonization is not a Metaphor” 3)

<sup>219</sup> From *Borderlands: La Frontera*. “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (59)

can and should use to set ourselves free, but one that also resists the notion of a full accounting because decolonization always asks: for whose benefit?

For Wahbie Long, in his essay “Postcolonial Theory and the Strong Arm of Identity,” on the *Africa is a Country* website, decolonization is an “empty signifier” and “a radical chic term” and “always at the risk of being co-opted by hegemonic political formations” (Long). He further critiques decolonization as a materialist venture concerned with “bourgeois concerns” lacking in empathy and disinterested in disciplines, even those such as psychology, from which Fanon wrote down his thoughts on the alienating effects of colonialism and the need for decolonization (Long). Most importantly, for Long, decolonization has become absurd in the claims for voice and agency – who speaks for whom, when and why?

For the African lecturers at the University of Nairobi, half a century ago, decolonization was a valid claim, seen as a way to counter the effects of colonialism, first by centering and telling their own stories and then by recognizing the powerful place of English language and literature in the dissemination of culture, social identity and place in the world. Today, here, decolonization is a buzz word: how to decolonize the academy,<sup>220</sup> the syllabus,<sup>221</sup> the city.<sup>222</sup> “Decolonization” is a shapeshifting term. It depends on who is using it and for whose benefit it appears. To be seen as decolonizing is a good thing, but what it appears as, for Indigenous

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<sup>220</sup> I include a screenshot for a Google search on decolonizing UBC, the university from which I have received most of my post-secondary education. See Appendix E

<sup>221</sup> At a job interview, I was asked how I would define decolonization. I wondered, when I left, if I would be disqualified from getting the job if I didn’t have the appropriate answer. I got the job.

<sup>222</sup> In 2014, Vancouver, the city I live and write from, was declared a “City of Reconciliation”<sup>222</sup> following the announcement that 2014 was also the Year of Reconciliation in this city. The goal and the mission of City Hall was to foster and maintain good relationships with the Indigenous people on whose lands the city lies. Initiatives that the city has taken include reclaiming and renaming spaces using Indigenous names. The City website includes a pronunciation guide for the Indigenous place names.

scholars like Eve Tuck, is as a metaphor. As Tuck points out in her essay “A Glossary of Haunting,” decolonization is “a (dearly) departed form of social justice” that “out[s], provides relief for a presumed victim [...] repairs a wholeness [...] or ushers in an improved social awareness that leads to” outing and repair (647). Tuck writes about her frustration, about the wish to give out chits with “decolonization is not a metaphor,” because, for her, it is much bigger than performing restitution. For Tuck, “we’re eventually going to have to talk about returning stolen land” (647). Decolonization is a haunting to be reckoned with, she argues, a spectre from the past, in the present and alongside us into the future. It is ongoing work that is serious and deep and demands much. Ultimately, it is about upending a power structure that is firm in itself. The ultimate decolonization of the academy is its own demise. Decolonizing the syllabus is part of a small beginning to expose students to the work of Indigenous people, but how much of the faculty is Indigenous and how much involvement is there with Indigenous people in determining what an Indigenized syllabus looks like?

## 5.5 The Unwritten Page as a Decolonizing Text

Given all of the above, a decolonizing project can still contribute to knowledge and still reject the notion of an imperialist proof. Dionne Brand, in *The Blue Clerk*, imagines the written page as proof of several unwritten pages, and each unwritten page, having their own sets of unwritten pages (3). The ghost poems withhold pages and also insist on the body of the text as the unwritten<sup>223</sup> to directly challenge the need for text in the body of the essay.

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<sup>223</sup> Or at least inaccessible.

To write, therefore, is to withhold (*The Blue Clerk* 3). To write with ghosts is to translate and sometimes to mishear, to miss, or under-translate. A different set of optics is at play from Brand's left-hand pages, but the idea remains that a decolonizing project will not look like, feel like or be a standard text. It is a haunted text, one written by a future ghost (Tuck and Yang 643), a position from which Christina Sharpe's aspiration moves from breath in the body to hope beyond the now living. I write for and with our future selves, and for the ghosted and ghostly communities with us.

This decolonizing text turns and re-turns in consultation with the artists and scholars that live on this land and are concerned with the politics of decolonization. I seek direction and orientation on how to be on these lands from those who live the *long durée* of slavery and colonialism (Sharpe 128), knowing full well that I write and think about our self as those who also are in the *long durée* of slavery and colonialism, and that we're still here. There's a long standing injustice that separates the effects of slavery and colonialism from the present and yet still insists on containing us in nation-making projects that don't fully see us. This research project claims solidarity between Indigenous and Black people living and dead, from the past and into a future, by attending to ghosts and to the dead and acknowledging colonialism along with the persistent voices and songs that survive.

This decolonizing text avoids the scopophilic gaze (Garneau quoted in Gaertner 144) that seeks to own and desires to capture when we bear witness and what we bear witness to, and so we make choices in the bearing and baring that are agentic. We examine our own centres (Morrison *The Source of Self-Regard* 170) and claim the right to tell, to determine how much to share, to reveal, if anything at all (Glissant 191). This decolonizing text rejects the Eurocentric

foundations of knowledge by turning to and listening to the veterans as the source of knowledge of how to be in the world, rather than think of them as proofs or as fodder for argument.

This decolonizing text does not depend on memory that was extracted through repeat or an insistence that folks remember and remember so. A colonial text might depend on the notion of making sure, of returning to the veterans to clarify, to reiterate or to consider re-stating. I went with a first pass. I wanted to see what the memory offered up unattenuated by repeat visits to talk about the same thing. In this way, I had a truer experience of the moment that was created in the context of everything around us, not only the stories that were being told in the moment.

Finally, this decolonizing text acknowledges and honours intimate relationships before, during and beyond research. Having come from a tradition where relationships were made and cemented before I got there, it was always going to be disingenuous for me to claim that I made contact, created relations or even successfully made gains from the ethics training that I received from the university before I went into the field. All the reading about first-world power relations and economic advantages of the researcher versus the researched were turned on their heads when I got to doing the actual work. Much of the time, the relationships that had already existed within my community opened the doors for me to do my work. I am grateful for those who did the work and those who continue to prop doors for others that might want to come through. I am also grateful for the teachings that I received, that I was able to navigate myself with relative grace, and that the veterans I spoke to were always generous with their stories. I learned much about my family, about how memory functions, how portals offer entry into stories even when we're not aware of being inside that memory frame. I learned that people come together to make memory – in their bodies through dance and song and food. I learned that haptic resonances

provide access to memory in ways that is restricted through the focus on the ears and eyes. I share my experience in the field so that the text is more complete with the memories of how I traversed the land.

This is a decolonizing text because it is interdisciplinary and it illustrates how to write with ghosts – it imagines a readership beyond the living. I take from literary, political and historical texts, but also from a crying dog who taught me how to enter the experiences of those who lived through the 1979 Liberation War.

This is a collaboration with the dead. It will not centralize the living. It acknowledges, as Tuck & Yang remind us, that we're all future ghosts (Tuck & Yang 643) and so we write, also, for our future selves.

## 5.6 Bird<sup>224</sup>, or How to Become an Acholi poet

Bird as ancestry as singer

by rope insistence devotion & song

Bird as augur as seer

by thrift & shift

Bird as music as freedom

by seed stories of savages

us what did I tell you they'd say

by trope stories of savages

us treachery just

by hunger stories of savages

us what did I tell you they'd mean

by uniform stories of savages

us trouble makers just

by metal stories of savages

us what did I tell you

by gun stories of savages

us what did I tell you

by bible stories of savages

us this was business is still business to them

by god stories of savages

us protectorate they said

by prayer stories of savages

us sovereign they said crown empire throne they said

---

<sup>224</sup> From Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize speech: It's quiet again when the children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into silence. "Finally" she says. "I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. look. How lovely it is, this thing that we have done—together". (*The Source of Self-Regard* 109)

Bird by prayer by luck by dint of ancestry

by theft also shaft especially & then shot this also happened to us by

sea begin to walk to be taken by truck by road by rail by ship through ports sudan how to mourn when menengitis broke out we buried six by sea

boat how to fishing at the lake waiting for the word for the message & every day for fish to bite so we could eat memory how they made us drink al

cohol before a battle to make us brave they told us sky how to fly a plane towards your own death & that of others & other tales of fun freedom plane

how to fly a plane towards your own death & that of others & other lies tarmac we crossed the border to sudan but we were waylaid & transported b

ack to lokung road lorry by lorry by lorry they held us at ngom lac primary school for three days then shot the lot of us rail from winky kibul we had t

o move because of politics they took us to ports sudan then by ship over indian ocean where we buried six by sea do you see how round around around th

is story goes there is no end

Bird as beauty as power bird by witness by story by day after day bird

by thirst we longed to be in the world from home bird

by cash we practiced subsistence grew crops made charcoal bird

by hunger we learned the difference between the gratitude from refugees & the privilege of exiles bird

by coin market stalls sales market stalls sales sales or sometimes barter for food bird

by flag what is to lead allegiance to a flag what else links us to land when state would rather us delinked unlinked not even ever imagined bird

by bullet the smell of gun powder the scattering of shells at our feet the heat & power of a gun shot wound the whizzing of bullets none of which you tell me

bird tell me sing me play me a song

Bird as voice as ours

by grey this is the work that is demanded of the poet

by yellow this is the throat of the bird that sings in the morning

by distance this is the thread of ancestor work the poet must sing

by tongue a song need not have a melody still the poet must sing

by fireside a song must arise in response because historians still seek the right lens

by pen a song written is a song sang because scholars will still collect data to sharpen the colonizer's knife

by throat & this song is a voice from the land

by dust & this song is our claim to our self & our home



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## **Appendix A**

### **Sam Olara Facebook posts**

#### **Facebook Post October 28, 2013**

It will be exactly 35 years this November when I watched as a young man in 1978, a heavy convoy of Leyland buses streaming into the remote refugee camp of Kigwa, situated in a Wanyamwezi village, East of Tabora Town. Their mission? To ferry into the battlefield over 800 Acholi former soldiers who had enjoyed a peaceful farm life for nearly 9 years in Tanzania, and were now undergoing military drill in preparation for war, Amin had invaded the Kagera region.

The camp commandant, Captain Bazilio Olara Okello (RIP) quickly organized his men with the assistance of other commanders including, Langoya Johnson Lupaka, Okwera Saverio (RIP), Okot Justo Locaa (RIP), Mzee Eliajali Oola, Tito Apodo (RIP), and Okwera (RIP). They soon set off towards their final destination, Dar-es-Salaam. The group which joined others was later to be named Kikosi Maalum – the special liberation force of Ugandan exiles, together with over 30 thousand Tanzanian Forces, finally overthrew the government of Idi Amin in 1979. Here over 300 men were loaded into two navy warships and annexed into the sea, their task, to capture Entebbe and other adjoining towns along the shores of Lake Victoria. But before they could make any significant intrusion into the sea, disaster struck, both ships mysteriously sunk killing all on board, except 2 Acholi soldiers and 8 Tanzanians, who had been on deck. These were men in their prime, the cream of the crop of the Kikosi Maluum, with their full lives ahead of them, most of them were from Kigwa camp and most of whom I personally knew and can still see their jovial faces as they left Kigwa on

their struggle to return home. This single incident nearly changed the course of the war and completely demoralized rank and file of the advancing army. Those who survived this disaster remained very bitter about its unexplained nature which remains unresolved to this day. Those from Kigwa camp felt very guilty of "surviving" the accident, since they were all under the same command and had endured a painful life in a refugee camp for nearly 9 years. They promised to get to the bottom of this disaster. But at every given opportunity, after the liberation war, their efforts were thwarted. The memory of these men soon faded away from the memories and consciousness of Uganda for even their comrades were soon to engage in other wars that befell Uganda and one by one, ended up in body bags. As result, opportunists - some of whom even never participated or made any significant contribution to that war - are today rewriting the history of that war. These poor departed souls have never featured in their narrative. To this day Uganda doesn't mention them in the annals of our history, their death and the sinking of their ships remain a mystery and has never been resolved. Tanzania has never fully explained the circumstances under which this ships sunk, it has neither commission an independent inquiry. How do we move forward as a nation if we can't accord such sons of the soil, a place in our history books. We are doing a disservice to their memory and will never bring closure to the gaping wounds of their loved ones. To some of us who were privileged enough to know you, I say unto you thank you for your dedication, commitment and service to Uganda and Acholi, you will never be forgotten and may your souls rest in eternal peace.

## Appendix B

### Obote Blog Posts

#### From President Obote's Blog Posts<sup>1</sup> "UPC Role on the Removal of Idi Amin"

The UPC army which withdrew from Masaka and Mbarara to Tanzania, was taken to an abandoned National Service Camp outside Tabora Town in Central Tanzania. The place was near a forest inhabited by lions and had no water. I visited the men at the Tabora camp. I based my address on my Legico election campaign in 1958 where my symbol, like that of William Nadiope in Busoga, was the open hand. The place looked arid and the men looked very poor and exhausted. My message to the men was that a poor person helps himself/herself by his/her hands. I urged them to build, as a beginning, grass thatched huts and promised to request the government of Tanzania to get them agricultural tools. The place was 10 miles by 10 miles square.

Over the next few months, Mama Miria and I made friends with a former Tanzanian Minister and his wife through whom we made contact with a lady head of Tanzania Red Cross. We requested donations of blankets and clothes by the Red Cross. The response was positive but as the men were refugees, I was asked to find a Government department or an NGO to deliver the goods to the men. My contact in Tanzania, even with the President was through the Intelligence officer attached to me. I therefore reported the donations to the officer who collected them from the Red Cross. When I next visited the camp, I found that

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<sup>1</sup> The first three posts are concerned with the arrival and settlement of the Ugandan exiles from Port Sudan into Tanzania and their eventual settlement. The next are concerning the 1979 war and Obote's version of events of the ship that sank on Lake Victoria.

the donations were never delivered at the camp. The good thing I saw on that occasion was that much land was under cultivation.

In 1973, the men began to feed themselves and throughout the years until they left the Tabora camp in January, 1979 to go to war, they fed themselves. In the same year 1973, while digging, a group struck underground water. A delegation was sent to Dar es Salaam to report on that God's blessing. Mama Miria went to the lady head of the Red Cross and arranged for the Red Cross to provide water pipes and motorised pump to take the water to different Companies. The men produced much food throughout the years and sold some in Tabora markets. They also attacked the forest and made charcoal which they sold and earned some money. I visited the camp regularly every year.

A visit to the Tabora camp was urgent, so I left for the camp on the evening of my second day in Dar es Salaam. The men knew that Tanzania had been invaded and saw my arrival at the camp as harbinger for their going to war. There was much jubilation. The camp looked different from what it was three months back when I was last there. The prosperity had not changed but what was different was that everyone appeared to have a bicycle. I spoke to the officers first and I enquired about the bicycles. I was told that when Amin's invasion was broadcast by Tanzania Radio, the men who had bicycles began to paint numbers on their bicycles and saying that when they go to war, they would leave their bicycles at the camp which will be sent to Uganda after the war. Thus the frenzy for bicycles grew with many men, within a week going daily to Tabora and even to Dar es Salaam by train to buy bicycles.

What the officers told me about the bicycles, made my address to the men rather difficult. I wanted very much to raise their moral but could not also tell them that they were going to



war immediately or in the near future. I compromised and told them that when Tanzania decides to drive Amin out, I would appeal to the Tanzanian President to include them in the drive.

When I returned to Dar es Salaam from Tabora, I found President Nyerere in a furious mood. The OAU was pressing him to negotiate peace with Amin at a time when Amin's army was in occupation of Tanzanian Territory.

The OAU Council of Ministers met to consider the situation. It was Uganda and not Tanzania which spoke the language of negotiations at the Meeting of Ministers.

In December, 1978 at a very lengthy meeting in my residence, President Nyerere gave me an over-view of the war preparations. His view was that depending on the resistance of Amin's army, TPDF could get to Kampala and to all parts of the Uganda within three months. He told me that in those circumstances, he would set up a Tanzanian Military Government for Uganda. I expressed opposition to that idea. I told the President that it would be most damaging to the Tanzanian image in Africa and in the world for Tanzania to expose herself to accusations that they had become a colonial Power and was ruling Uganda. President Nyerere responded that he could not leave the country in a vacuum, without a Government. I suggested to the President that from what he said of the possible overrunning of the whole of Uganda by the TPDF, within three months, there would appear to be two ways by which Tanzania could avoid to damage her image in Africa and in the world. I gave the first way as one of convening a Conference of Ugandans in exile in Masaka or Mbarara immediately after the fall of either Town to the TPDF. I gave the second way as convening a Conference in either Uganda or Tanzania after the entire country had fallen to

the TPDF. I proposed that at either Conference an Interim Government composed of Ugandan could be formed.

To my proposal of an interim Government, President Nyerere said that since the TPDF and police would still be in Uganda, such a Government would be seen as a puppet Government and Tanzania would still be accused of behaving as a Colonial power. I told the President that the real problem was how a Conference was composed and that a representative Conference of Uganda's political parties would deflect much of the criticism on Uganda having a puppet Government. President Nyerere shot that argument down when he said that Uganda had only two political parties, the UPC and the DP. My answer was that Amin actually banned nearly ten political Parties. President Nyerere was not aware of even the ban. We exchanged views at length on a Conference or Conferences. President Nyerere expressed the view that a Conference of exiles would be attended by too few people because it was his understanding that many Ugandans in exile were opposed to the Ujamaa policy. I disagreed and said that the opportunity to return home would make many to come to the Conference. At the end, the President asked me to write papers on various aspects of any of the Conferences I had proposed and said that he did not want some Ugandans who had insulted him for not recognising Amin to be in any Interim Government.

The Papers I wrote, were sent to President Nyerere through the Director of the Intelligence Service. The Director kept on coming to me to expand this or that theme in my Papers which I did. I worked on the papers almost day and night.

In January, 1979 the late Mzee Peter Oola and George William Nyero (now in the USA) rang me from Tabora Town. Their report was that a deputy Director of the Intelligence Service who, we regarded as unfriendly to us, had gone to the camp and went away with 300 men.

The deputy Director had said that the men were wanted for special training connected with the war. I asked the Director of Intelligence who was coming to my residence daily with requests for more and more expansions of my papers, about the training which the 300 of my men were going to undertake. He answered most surprisingly that he was no longer dealing with military matters. The answer made me to ask him to tell the President that I wanted a meeting with him.

Previously, whenever I sent any such request to the President, he would come to my residence either on the same day, next or within 3 days. This time, the President came after 10 days and as soon as he sat down, he said that he had a very bad news for me and that there had been an accident in which many men died. The President then gave me sheets of Paper on which the names of the dead were typed. 111 (one hundred and eleven) men were listed as dead. I asked to go the camp immediately and the President agreed. I left that evening by train for Tabora.

From Tabora Town I was taken not the Ugandan or UPC camp but to another where I found all the commanders of the UPC army, I had a meeting with the commanders who told me how the 300 men were taken from their camp. They confirmed in every detail what veteran Peter Oola who joined the UNC in 1952 had reported to me. My meeting with the four Commanders who had lost one hundred and eleven of their men, was like a funeral. All of them were crying throughout the meeting. The account they gave me on that day and in the following two days were so shocking that even now, I am unable to make it public. In my analysis of the account, I concluded that there was a conspiracy to hand over to some other people the army I and the UPC leaders had so painfully raised and provided for their welfare. I could not eat or sleep that first day and night.

## **Appendix C**

### **Written testimony of Okumu L. Abdon**

#### **Massacre of Corner Ogwec**

##### **Background**

In January 1971, when Idi Amin took over the government, the then President Apolo Milton Obote and some Ugandans fled to Tanzania in exile. The comrade Ugandans who took refuge in Tanzania decided to come back to drive Idi Amin from power.

The first attempt was made at Mutukula at the Uganda-Tanzania border. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. The second attempt was to conscript some patriotic Ugandans to secretly join comrade Ugandans in Tanzania moving through northern route to Sudan, Kenya and finally to Uganda as planned.

The secret move of the conscription was successfully done amidst Amin's intelligent network that made them reach Owiny ki Bul. The comrade Ugandans were warmly welcomed by Anyanya troops, Sudanese rebels led by Lagu Joseph.

It seems the comrade Ugandans explained their mission to Sudanese rebels hoping they would be helped to go to Kenya but on the other hand, Anyanya as they were in good terms with Amin's government informed Uganda government about the move.

In response, Amin's government sent troops to a small village of Latako, Dibilyec Parish Lokung Sub-county at Uganda-Sudan border east of Owiny ki Bul in order to intercept the move of the conscripted men who wanted to head for Tanzania.

On the other hand, the comrade about four hundred of them in a good term were deceived to be led to Kenya going eastward from Owiny ki Bul but the plan of the Anyanya was to lead them to Lakato where Amin's soldiers were waiting for them as they planned with the Uganda government.

When they reached Lakato unfortunately they were handed over to Amin's soldiers and were held as captives.

### **Essence of massacre**

On 16<sup>th</sup> April 1971 in the evening hit the people of Lokung with surprise to see army vehicles, four jeeps, four APCs, two big lorries arriving in Lokung Ngom Lac Primary School loaded with good number of people carrying inside the vehicles. They moved from border to school for more than ten times.

Amin's soldiers packed and threw the captives in the two classrooms. Three classrooms were made for their administrative purpose. Before midnight of the 16/4/1971 the captives were removed from the classrooms and were thrown like load in the four APC vehicles heading to Corner Ogwec and immediately series of gunshot were heard as they were shooting the captives. The movement of taking the captives to Corner Ogwec from Ngom Lac Primary School continued until nine o'clock of 17<sup>th</sup> April 1971 and the series of gunshots were still persisting at Corner Ogwec.

At about eleven o'clock am on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1971 the then Minister of Defence Oboth Ofumbi landed with helicopter in Lokung Ngom Lac Primary School. Twenty one remaining captives were seen taken from where they were packed in one of the classrooms used as

their office to meet the minister. After thirty minutes four captives were taken to board the helicopter and flew away with the minister Oboth Ofumbi.

The remaining seventeen captives were taken to Onang Langoya on the way to Ngomoromo and were killed there. Their remains were seen piled up in line without burying them.

Afterwards, it was learnt that the first group of captives taken to Corner Ogwec dug their own graves using the school hoes because those hoes were left at the graveyard. One of them managed to escape and was taken care of by the late Omoya Emmanuel who was also the source of information.

After the fall of Amin's government, during the second government of Obote, it was decided to honour those killed as the gallant men of Uganda who decided to liberate their country from tyranny. It was also regarded that their blood washed the way for the success of overthrowing Idi Amin's government. Therefore, on the 17<sup>th</sup> April every year was made to honour the day to commemorate them.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> October three of us namely Okumu L. Abdon, Ocen Macimino and Jekerani Pacoto were invited to give the testimony on the barbaric killing in the high court in Gulu with others who went there to testify the similar scorch of activities done during Amin's regime.

Attempt was made to find out the survivors who were organizing the move to liberate Ugandans from Idi Amin and those who were sent to Uganda from Tanzania to do the

secret mobilization. This could not continue due to the fall of the second Obote's government and Tito Lutwa [Okello]'s government respectively.

### **The impact**

The impact of the massacre was so great that it made the people of Lokung and other associated places traumatized because what happened was the first of its kind against humanity and culture in terms of killing and burial.

According to Acholi culture, burial in mass graves as had happened was not allowed. Even if a pregnant [woman] died, the foetus inside her womb was first taken and buried separately in another grave. Burial without removing hair of the deceased was prohibited according to the norms and culture of the place.

The bloodshed of that nature brought a lot of concern to the elders of the place for making rites of goats and sheep sacrifice to calm the spirits of those who were killed innocently and their burial badly managed.

Another worry and concern of the elders of the inhabitants of Lokung was what kind of ritual should be performed as those who died might have been from different parts of the country. Even in Acholi culture, the rituals are not completely the same. Some use sheep some use goats and chicken of stipulated colour for similar purpose.

The decision to make the ritual could not be done immediately due to the fear of Idi Amin's intelligent network. Movement through Corner Ogwech particularly at night remained difficult for a long period of time due to fear and trauma the people had developed in their

minds that the place was haunted. However, some elders whose gardens were near the mass grave later developed courage and managed to rebury some parts of the remains of those captives seen outside properly. The elders who picked courage among others were the late Semei Okaka, the late Valentino Okee and the late Lukoya Inywano.

The school where the captives were locked could not start easily because of great fear that the teachers, children and parents had in their minds. When the Education Officer in Gulu learnt this, without first sympathizing ordered the school to open immediately. After one week, the school started functioning. On the ground, we found that furniture was greatly damaged by the soldiers. Desks, benches and stools were split to make firewood for cooking. Lockable doors in the school buildings were broken and hoes were not seen in the store. The classrooms where those captives were locked had a lot of stains of blood on the walls and floor. The houses badly smelled and some associated compound were made very uncomfortable to live in it.

The teachers themselves swept those two classrooms where the captives were locked but other places were cleaned by the children under the supervision of the teachers.

The parents because of fear that the spirits of the dead could catch their children raised complaints that the ritual using sheep should be performed in the school. Since the foundation of the school belongs to the Church of Uganda who were Christians, they rejected the parent's suggestion for the rituals.

After when Idi Amin's government was overthrown, the collection of the remains of those seventeen from Onang Langoya were taken to Corner Ogwec mass grave for burial



The ritual using goats and sheep were performed; that was an attempt to reduce the fear and trauma traditionally as demanded by the elders. This was done in April 1984. The materials for the ritual was facilitated and funded by the Ministry of Defence in the second Milton Obote government.

There was suspicion among people that the barbaric killing and other atrocities done by Amin's army was due to spying and reporting by the Muslim community.

Therefore immediately when Idi Amin's government was overthrown and taken by Yusuf Lule, the people of Lokung and elsewhere thought of the relation to Muslim community living among them. That could not be done because the Muslim community smelt the rat and fled to Sudan under heavy escort. Their houses including mosque in Lokung and other properties were destroyed.

The reprisal destroyed the peaceful coexistence between Muslim community and Christians during Obote's second regime. However, this day, the foiled relationship between Christians and Moslem community is restored under NRM regime.

By

**OKUMU L. ABDON**

## Appendix D

### My Son is a Story

My son is a story that begins at my own beginning. Through him, I became a mother. I joined the throng of other mothers around the world. Ogenrwot was born in 1999. I was in captivity then. My son was the ultimate proof that beauty, life, hope, and everything else good is possible, even when there is desolation around you. My labour was not remarkable to anyone but me. The learning curve I had to overcome, learning to suckle a child, bathing him in steaming hot water; massaging his limbs so that his legs would grow straight, the way we have always done — all became possible when he chose me to be his mother. It was a choice. I believe it was a choice. His. He could have chosen anyone else. His father had many children with other women, but he chose to be my son and I learned to be a mother from him.

It was not as if I had no knowledge of how to mother children. Growing up, I'd had to carry my younger cousins on my back, feed them, lull them to sleep in Acholi when we lived in Gulu, or in Lango, my mother tongue. I carried the children of my co-wives, taking care of them as my own. They were all our children. Children don't ask to be born. They choose their mothers and then wait to make their entrance when the time is right. So the first time I sang Min Atin, it came from the back of my throat and quieted him as if he remembered it from before.

*Min atin do tedo dyewor*

*Min onyu nani tedo dyewor*

*Oeno dek oek*

*Kela gita gwok itura kore*

*Oeno dek numa numa*

*Dwok atin ka tuku tunu*

A child minder sings about the mother who does not have time for her own child until it is time for dinner. And if the food is not yet ready, the mother reminds the babysitter to go back and play with the child. I sang to my baby and my body healed. My belly reverted to its previous taut flatness. To look at me then, it was hard to know that I was anybody's mother, but my body was never the same after Ogenrwot came through me. As a baby, his head lay in the crook of my arm as if we were melded together. His baby breathing as he fell asleep after an exhausting hot bath and its accompanying full body massage made his belly rise and fall, rise and fall very fast. I'd turn him towards me so that our bellies touched and I could feel his quick breathing on me. Sometimes it felt as though he never ended and I never began.

I loved my son. I loved my son as mothers do, but I loved my son also because I only started to live after he came into my life. Not while I was expecting him. Not even when he started to kick about in my belly so lustily that I wondered just how many children were inside. When my body began to prepare itself for his coming, my belly would go tight, tight, like the embrace of strong invisible elastic tubing about me. Then I'd have to breathe through it. Breathe, someone told me. Breathe out slowly with your lips pursed. Your body needs to practice, too. So we prepared for my son's coming, my body and I. The bones in my lower back seemed to loosen as did my hip joints. I'd hold my back as I'd seen pregnant women

do, and finally understood why they did. I had cravings, morning sickness that seemed to last a lot longer than they said it would. My skin changed. My fingers and toes bloated like gloves filled with water. My nostrils whistled as I breathed. There was never quite enough air about. I wished to breathe in everything, breath out everything, so sometimes I breathed through my mouth, which was just enough for my baby and I. All these changes made me think that I was ready; that I had a clue about what to expect. Mothering. You suckled the child, you bathed the child, sang lullabies, groomed the child, disciplined the child, grew patient and waited for time to pass.

Nobody prepared me for the surge of feelings I had when he came. Nobody spoke to me about the irrevocable place I was in now that I was a mother. I was now responsible, not just for this other life, but for the first time, for my own life too. My son's life depended on my wellbeing. I mattered, not just to my family, who missed me terribly, I was sure; not just to my bush husband who tried his best to show me that he was capable of being anything but an old man, a rapist of young girls, a man with many other wives, several like me, old enough to be his granddaughters. I mattered also to my friends and schoolmates with whom we'd travelled all this distance together; to the people who might have heard of our plight and remembered us in their prayers; the ones that had gone before us and now hovered about, watching over us — but also to this little thing who reached out his small fist to my face, looking for a kiss. I was honoured and humbled.

More than ever, I had to live and I had to live well. I had to eat well, sleep well, not worry too much about things that were of no consequence. Everything affected the amount of milk that came through for him. If I worried, the milk would turn sour and my son would

close his mouth tight, turn his head and cry and cry and cry. If I was tense, the milk curdled. If I was hungry, there was not enough milk. If I was thirsty and breastfed, a harsh wind blew through my throat and I became so parched that my voice went hoarse. I lost a lot of weight and became very thin. And when I understood our link, the ghosts of the past lifted themselves and moved on, leaving images in my mind that allowed me to recount my stories without pain. The killings, the beatings, the canings, , the mutilations, the torture, the deaths I'd seen from bullet wounds, landmines, starvation, malaria and cholera were all reminders of why I had to be even more vigilant. I had to live for my son.

My son is a story that is just as ordinary as other children's stories. He toddled, like they all do. My son got up, walked one step, two, fell on his bottom. We laughed. He got up again with his dusty bottom, held his arms out for balance and ran across the compound into the safety of my waiting arms. I carried him high as he laughed out loud, drooling onto my face and chest. I kissed him on the way down, as mothers everywhere do. My son is a story that has been told been told before. My son is a story that tells itself every day, all the time. He grew into a little boy that could talk, walk, run little errands — fetch this and that from one step mother to another, carry a little container of water, watch. I wanted him to grow into a man who was aware of himself and his relationships with others around him. I wanted him to know that he was never alone, that he belonged. He belonged to me and with me. He belonged to his family, his clan, the African soil. I wanted him to know that there was another family waiting for him in another country. I wanted him to meet my family, to know the home I was born into, speak my language, and claim the ascendancy of the people of his blood. This was exile. This was *tim*. We were going to go home, my son and I. I wanted him to know where home was; that it was not here, not in this place.

I wanted my son to know the stories that we'd grown up with at wang' oo, the night time fireside story telling where adults told folk tales after dinner until late. There was the Obibi, the ogre, who needed a haircut, but no one would give it to him. Why? Because, as the hare found out, you could only shave one half. By the time you started on the other, the first half was the same length as before you'd started — and if you didn't finish the haircut, you ended up a dinner for the ogre. We'd suck in our breaths, us kids, whenever we heard stories about the ogre. Obibi would come in the night to take away children who didn't listen to their parents. We'd suck in our breaths again, hold both hands to our mouths, and promise inside ourselves that we'd always listen to our parents. Aha, the adults would say. You'll see what can happen if you don't listen. If I believed those stories, I might have thought that Obibi came to our school at Aboke and took us because we didn't listen to our parents. But those were only stories for children. It was the rebels that took us. The rebels were students, themselves, fellow school mates; people I'd gone to school with. They were people who'd been forced to become rebels, same way as we had. These were humans, people like us. Obibi did not exist, except in the stories like those I told my son.

1999. My son was born in the third year of my captivity. By then, we'd been almost three years in Sudan, not counting the two months that it took to walk there. His birth was unremarkable, his infancy, special only to me. My son knew he was loved. My son was there when I started the trip back home to Uganda, back home. We almost got there. Freedom was so close. We were just three days away. Three more days without water or food But my son vanished without a word to remember him by, without a photograph, baby clothes, a blanket into which I could immerse my face and imagine I could still smell him. He died instantly when a government helicopter gunship blew his head off.

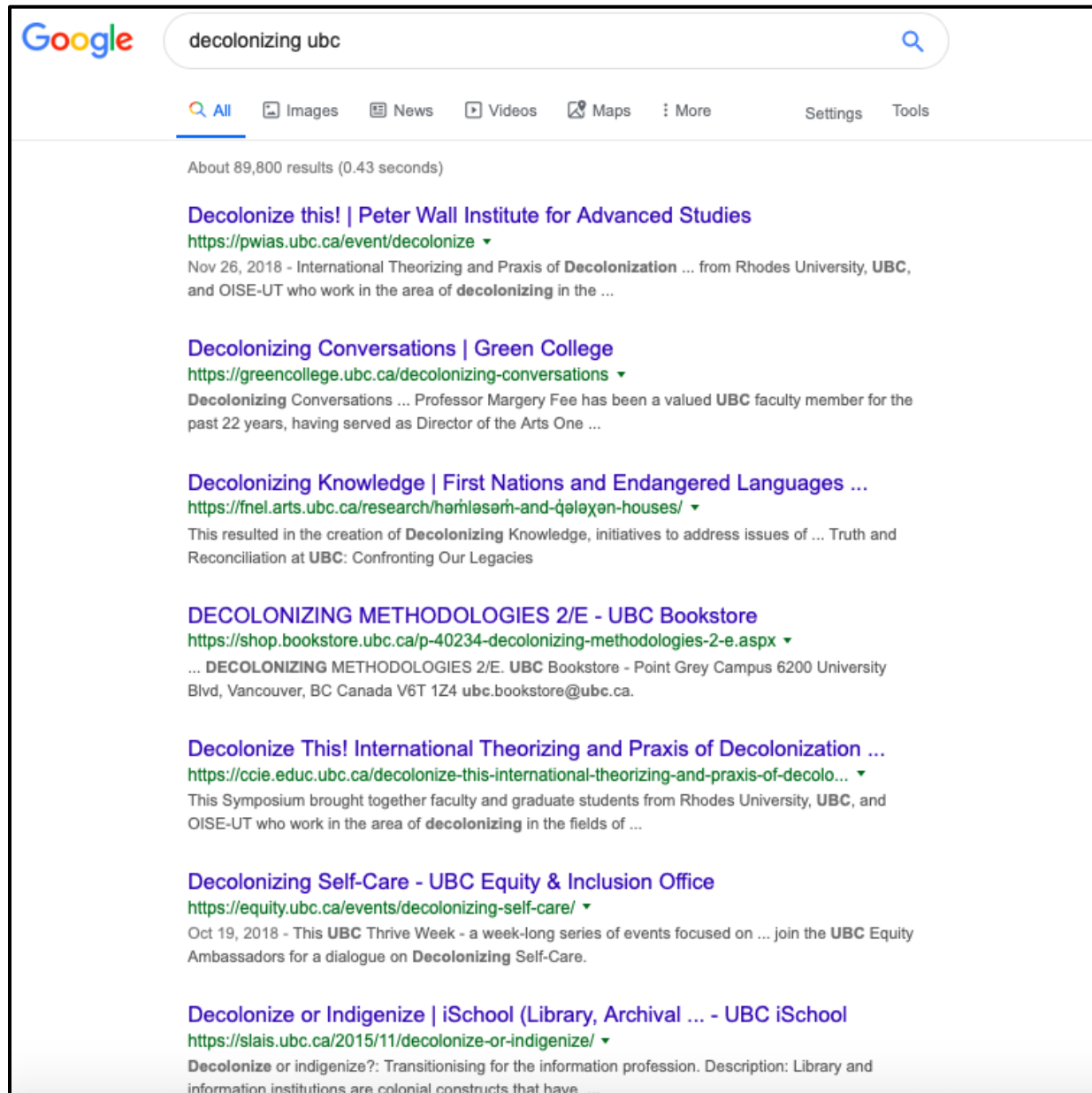
In those days, the government claimed that they rescued children from the rebels and counted the number of rebels that they killed. My son is a story that belongs to every mother. My son listened to my stories about Obibi who would take him away if he didn't listen. My son held both hands to his mouth as he sucked in his breath in horror of that idea. He promised he'd always listen to me. My son was never a rebel.

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## Appendix E

### Decolonizing UBC



Screenshot of Google Search results for: 'decolonizing UBC.

Taken on August 11, 2019, 5.35 PM



## **Appendix F**

### **Notes from the Field**

#### **London, September 2014**

Do you know the story of how your father turned up with only one shoe on? E asks me.

Your dad was once accosted by two men who demanded that he strip off his clothes and hand everything to them. So he agreed and asked if he could start with his shoes and they said yes. So he bent down to undo his shoe laces and when he removed his shoes, he was quick to use it against one as a weapon. And as the first man was stunned, holding his head, he hit the other one and took off. So that's how he arrived with one shoe.

#### **Kampala, February 2015**

Earlier, we had been served tea by a woman, a relative, who is G's caretaker. Afterwards, as she walked out with me to the taxi stop, she told me that she knew my home in Gulu and shared a story with me. A man had been seen hitting at the cross on my brother's grave, trying to break it off. The neighbour, an old woman, screamed at him. Told him never to touch that grave ever again.

We don't know where your grandmother is buried, she told me. It has been built over now, but your brother's grave remains intact.

**Gulu, March 2015**

A figure caught my eye, walking along the fence at TAKS as I waited for A and B. I looked at the time. It was 12.30, half an hour before I was scheduled to meet them. After some time I saw the figure again. It peeked up and I recognized A. He walked in at 12.45. You know us former soldiers always scout the area before, right? I couldn't agree more. A few steps behind him, B appeared. He was dressed very smartly. On Saturday when we'd met for introductions he'd suggested sitting outside at TAKS because it was a quiet place and provide some privacy. It was a bit cool and windy, so after a small lunch we moved the table and chairs out of the mango tree shade and into the sunshine that filtered through the clouds. It looked like it was going to rain again but it was definitely warmer. Since most of my interview was recorded, I want to document the conversation I had with A and B before the interview began.

We spoke generally and much of what was said was not much different from conversations that I'd had with many others. An anecdote about my dad or other family members, the way things used to be and the way things were now, the importance of education and how the war had had an impact on young people today. Many of the conversations I've had also featured the impact of corruption in preventing development in Uganda in general, and in Acholi specifically. A and B also took some time to explain their role in the war and the extent to which they distanced themselves before and now, after, from the LRA. I wasn't going to spend any time in interviewing them on the LRA but I didn't really engage with that aspect of the conversation. What threw me for a loop was when B started to talk about my late brother, Keny. He told me about how Keny was recruited from Kenya during 1978. At the time we, the rest of the family, were living in Nigeria except for Keny and Agnes, our

oldest sister who was raising a young family at the time. I listened as he described how Keny was the youngest of the lot; how he was nicknamed Apico after another commander; how he was so little compared to the rest of them and how brave he was – Keny was not afraid of anyone or anything. How they were taken into TZ as a special group and trained as an intelligence squad there and kept away from all the other exiles who did not even know about their existence. How they were only known to the president, his brother Joseph, and the minister of defence. How they used to travel back and forth from TZ into Kenya and Uganda, with different IDs.

As he spoke, I could see the picture of my father on the wall across from me. Sometimes it was comforting and other times it seemed a mockery. I could have doubted every word that B had spoken but there's a deep hunger in wanting to know what happened to my brother. Just last week, I had discovered that Keny had been in a training camp in Mundoni, TZ and it's generally understood that he was being trained in TZ to return to fight with other exiles. From my impression of B's story, there was a lot more to it than that. The training in Mundoni had been a cover. And so it might have been a cover when Keny came to visit dad and they had a conversation about him joining the army. How my father had been so angry and how Keny had stormed out. That was my last memory of the final encounter between these two men who I have missed so much.

I learned that there were four ways that exiles ended up in TZ. First was the initial group that left with President Obote when he landed in Kenya in January, 1971. The next wave was the soldiers that escaped over the TZ border from being murdered during Amin's intense killing spree, targeting Acholi and Lango soldiers in the barracks in 1972. Later

were the groups who had escaped through northern Uganda into Owiny ki Bul and then by train to Port Said and on by boat to Tanga, Tanzania. Finally was the group that was actively recruited in Kenya and was an underground network that ended up at statehouse in Dar-es-Salaam.

My belly was in turmoil. I could barely pay attention to the rest of what I was hearing. I kept fumbling the recording and had to start again, four times. I felt nauseous and deeply manipulated although I couldn't put my finger on it.

After everything I stood up to leave but B mumbled something. Huh? Facilitation. What do you mean? I asked. No one had yet asked me for facilitation even though I'd heard about the NGO-ization of things and how everything, especially local knowledge, had been commodified. B went on to explain how he and A are well known and were often sought out for their knowledge by scholars, researchers, foreigners, movie makers and politicians. Not long before, a young man, Billy Graham Olanya, DCV of Gulu, had spent 20 minutes explaining his position as an NRM rep and how he was trying to do his best for the youth of Acholi. He sought their advice and was given it. A and B told him to think big, dream big, expect big. They told him that he and other young people were the future and that we depended on them making the best decisions going forward. All had held hands and prayed for the success of BG Olanya who left with gratitude.

We usually ask for a rate beginning at 250K Shillings and go all the way to 500K. My face must have fallen. I didn't have that kind of money. I took out the 60K someone had pressed into my hands that morning on discovering that I'm the daughter of Okot Bitek. For your father, he'd said when I'd tried to refuse. B took it quickly. A looked at me expectantly. I

hadn't interviewed him and hadn't expected to. He'd been there like a guard, listening in on everything sometimes being a foil to agree on a memory.

I don't have anything. I still have to pay for our lunch and transport back. Indeed, I didn't have much left. I got up to leave and B took my hand. I want to take a photo with you and your dad's picture. That was another reason we wanted to have the interview here.

He gestured at a waitress to come take a picture of us. Expectedly, I took out my smart phone. What a nice camera this phone has, the waitress mused as she took our pictures.

One shows B reaching to hold my shoulder. I don't reach back. The other two pictures have A cut off but enough of his face shows to see that it is him. My face looks disturbed in all three. My dad's picture looks the same as it does in every photo I have taken with anyone.

We shake hands and go our separate ways. I head to my favourite coffee shop haunt. On the way back home after an hour of reflection, I buy two beers and go back home.

### **Lira, April 2015**

Breakfast in a hotel in Lira. The newscast on TV is in Luganda. The only other customer aside from me, is a traffic policeman in uniform.

And just like that he says: "I don't know why they should have the TV on that channel.

These people wouldn't understand the language."

I ignore him.

"Hey! You girl! He calls to an employee. "Change the channel. You people don't know that language. Why do you even have it on?"

"Why would you say a thing like that?" I ask him. "May be I can understand the language.

Maybe I'm following the news."

“Oh. Maybe you. But these people, no. And I thought you were reading.”

“Why do you say “these people”? If you understand Luganda, why shouldn’t any Ugandan understand it?”

“Because these people, they understand nothing. These people! Ha!”

He goes on to make disparaging marks about how northerners were good for nothing. How they’re a waste of tax payer money. How the government decision to redistribute animals in the north is a waste because “they cannot even take care of animals.”

I ask him why he’s there, working in the north if he feels that way. He says that he’s been posted to work there and that it has been difficult working with “these people” because “they don’t even understand that zebra crossings is for slowing down or for pedestrian crossing.”

Eventually, I tell him that I am one of these people. He’s astonished. He thinks I’m lying. I show him my card. He says: “Okot Bitek. You must be one of those diaspora who are always planning to overthrow the government.”

## **Tanzania**

### **Mwanza, January, 2016**

Follow the tarmac road to town and if in doubt, take the road that goes downhill. Easy enough. I went to town and to make it as easy as can be, I crossed streets but never made any turns. On the way back a man calls out: Rasta! Mambo? I say, *poa*! So he gets up and comes right to me.

What’s your name?

You just called me Rasta and I answered didn’t I?

No. Your big name. What’s your big name?

What's your name?

Mine is Milstone.

Habari Milstone

Where do you stay? Where do you sleep?

Why would you want to know where I sleep?

I want to take you to sleep.

So why would you want to know where I sleep if you want to take me to sleep?

Ah, you know rav. Rav is not easy.

I guess not. Bye Rasta.

I walk away, same way, uphill this time. For the most part it's okay. I think I understand/know what I'm doing. Till the place starts to look familiar in an unfamiliar way. That's what I think it is, being inhabited by others. I've been here and I haven't. I feel as if I have but it's a strange déjà vu.

After an hour and a half and asking tons of people I come to a place where three guys are hanging out at a school. You must be Kenyan.

I'm not.

You must be. I hear your accent. (Ha ha so even Swahili can have an accent 30 years later)

Fine yes, I was born there.

We chat for a bit. He tells me why memory and narrative are so closely related to politics, why I keep hearing the same story everywhere I go in TZ, and why it sucks to have Swahili as a national language. Couldn't have read this anywhere. Bye Mwanza. With love from Rasta.

## **Tarime, January 2016**

I walk into a restaurant. A big mama is clearing the plates and she turns to me in the gruffest possible voice and says: what do you want?

Food, I answer.

You don't want soda?

No.

Okay wash your hands there then sit there.

I place my back pack down.

Do you have a toilet I can use?

At the back of the building. You'll find someone there with a key.

I go to the back of the building. She's there with a key. She unlocks the toilet door. African toilet, she says. No problem.

There is no latch on the door. Don't worry she says, I'm here.

A couple of people go by as I pee but no one is concerned. After we return to the restaurant, different entries. I have an excellent lunch – cassava and sorghum ugali, with cabbage and fried fish. You have to have fried tilapia when you're by Lake Victoria. I thank her on the way out. She doesn't respond. Welcome to Tarime.

On the Bus from Tarime to Musoma, January 2016

On the bus from Tarime to Musoma there's a woman who spits out of the bus. A lot. As the bus comes to a stop she sends out one of her missives. It almost lands on a man. He shouts:

Hey! Are you trying to spit on me?

Very much so, she answers, pan faced.

No jokes, man. No jokes.



**Mwanza to Tabora, January 2016**

The taxi driver has generously escorted me to the right bus, the one to Tabora.

You pay here! Just like the plane! You pay, you get an assigned seat and then we take off!

It was true. I got seat 21, a window seat. A man came by looking for 22. He had a little girl with him. He sat as men sometimes do, with his legs apart and the little girl was perched, mostly standing between his legs. Both of them were so tired. He had his head back and was kind of dozing. She was leaning on back of the chair in front of them. Then she started to slip to her knees. So I became an African mama and reached out and put the girl on my lap and her head on my shoulder. She fell asleep almost immediately. After 20 minutes or so she sat straight up with her mouth full. Her father reached out for a filthy sticky sweater he had pulled off her when they sat down. She vomited into it. He wiped her mouth with the edges and she lay back asleep. A few minutes later, again and again. I asked her father: is this girl alright? She's fine, he said. She gets like that when she travels. She might have thrown up at least 6 or seven times when we got a stop for a break. Bathroom break and such. We got back on. She had bottle of pop in her hand. Rehydration. Great idea. Seconds after the bus started to move, there she went again. This time he has to carry his own kid, I thought. Same thing. She slipped right to her knees and father was completely gone asleep. I picked her up again, very sure that when I arrived I would be the one smelling of vomit and pee. When we got to Tabora, father sat up. Got his girl form my lap. Come one, find your slippers. She crouched down and found them under the seat. Let's go. And they did.

Welcome to Tabora.

## **Kigwa, February 2016**

First was the shock of it. This was Kigwa? It was barely a trading centre. What was I going to do there and when could I go back? I asked the matatu conductor. Where can I find something to eat? Breakfast at the hotel was disgusting. I couldn't hack it so by the time we got to Kigwa I thought all I can do is grab a bite and see how to get back to Tabora. It seemed too small to have a history. It looked like people only got here a month ago. But the conductor said he'd take me to a very good place. It was closed. Then he took me by the hand and we went across and sat in a little restaurant — 2 tables, one of which is half full of flasks with hot water and milk and such, for those who want tea. Then I told the young man that I was interested in the history of Kigwa, where could I go see something? So he said, hang on. He called his friend whose dad might know. Friend walked us across the street and we sat at the verandah of a certain old woman who stood. I asked if conductor whose name by now was Musoma, could get up for the mama. Ah, no. she said. No, the other man agreed. She's young. She's just a young woman. She giggled. Then after a while we heard that the mzee was at home and we went to his house. He told us how he moved to Kigwa in 1975 and how there were already Ugandans living there. So many. So so many. Could be even up to 300. He described what it was like, how the people were and it was uncanny. He was saying the same things I'd heard in London, Kampala, Gulu and Kitgum. How they got there and found that there was no gardening happening. How they started to plant sweet poetess and cassava and make charcoal.

We went for lunch. Another old man had been showed up. He said he heard there was a visitor interested in the history of Kigwa. This one was an agriculture officer called George and he spoke English very clearly and proudly. He came here in 1973 and was hired to help

resettle the Ugandans. He mentioned people by name, two that I'd already interviewed and Samuel Olara's dad. It was like finding kin. I was taken to the church that the Ugandans built. It still standing. I was assured that no matter how it looks, it's very strong and no one has built anything like that since. I was taken to a road that's called Kampala that was named by the Ugandans. Shown an area called Mbarara where the people from Ankole lived. The Ugandans left in 1978 and those who were married returned to get their women. Lunch was beans and ugali for me and meat and ugali for Musoma and his friend whose name I never found out.

Afterwards, I took the same matatu back, of course! They dropped me off right at the hotel. You can just see the gates being opened for a matatu with people in it. The other passengers, 2 by this time, both got out to say bye. The younger one, a woman, curtsied and said. Welcome. Thank you for your cooperation.