

Making home alive again after war: Acoli *Kaka*'s Indigenous land sovereignties in Northern Uganda

LARA ROSENOFF GAUVIN *University of Manitoba*

After the war between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (1986-2006), 90 per cent of the displaced rural population in Northern Uganda returned to small-scale farming on their ancestral lands and their systems of communal land stewardship. At the time, there was much debate about transitional justice interventions to address war's violence, but in that same period over 85 per cent of Acoli chiefdoms saw affiliated clans, or kin-based political communities (*kaka*), negotiate to write down their Indigenous governance constitutions for the first time. Acoli *Kaka*'s return to their ancestral lands and small-scale farming, and subsequent engagements with *tekwaro* – Indigenous knowledge – through constitution writing, served to strengthen Indigenous governance and law after their weakening in contexts of war and displacement. It is argued here that these engagements and negotiations rooted in the land, regardless of their outcomes, served to orient relationships *away* from the fragmenting, unprecedented, forced Acoli-on-Acoli violence experienced during the war. A resurgence of Acoli *Kaka*'s Indigenous law and governance rooted in communal land stewardship is linked to relational repair and supports calls for transitional justice processes to nurture and respect Indigenous land rights. These ethnographic arguments also lend support to *kaka*'s ongoing efforts towards clan unity (*ribbe kaka*) and to secure communal land sovereignties.

Home is dead and its dead are silent. We are in the camp.
Home is dead. Who do you find in it?
Acoliland is dead silent. Home is dead.
Our large homestead has turned into bush.
The large grazing land has turned into bush.
Home is dead.

Excerpt from O.J. Murugut's 'Woda pwoɔ tidi' (2020; original lyrics 2005; reproduced with O.J. Murugut's permission)

The two decades (1986-2006) of fighting and displacement, abduction, and forced soldiering of the civilian population by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group, and forced conscription and intimidation of the same population by the Ugandan government's army, are the specific circumstances of the violence that ripped families apart and 'killed' home for some time in Acoliland, Northern Uganda. Many academic

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 30, 1009-1026

© 2024 The Authors. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Anthropological Institute.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

discussions of the effects of the war have tackled the difficult issues of, as just a few examples, the use of child soldiers and the victim/perpetrator (Baines 2009); government responsibility for the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camps as a form of social torture (Dolan 2009); international humanitarianism's role in perpetuating the conflict (Branch 2011); the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court's involvement (Clarke 2009); and land struggles and claims after war (Atkinson & Hopwood 2013; Hopwood 2022; Whyte, Babiiha, Mukyala & Meinert 2013). What I discuss here instead explores how one survivor kin-based political community¹ in rural Acoliland – *Kaka* Pabwoc – makes a 'dead' home alive again, grounded by their communal stewardship and sovereignty over their ancestral lands.

I understand from my host community teachers that communal stewardship of ancestral lands makes home alive again because of the relational repair that it engenders through the resurgence of Acoli Indigenous knowledge, and thus Acoli *Kaka's*² Indigenous governance and law. Over 90 per cent of land in Acoli is understood to be stewarded communally through 'customary' tenure (Atkinson & Hopwood 2013: i; Kobusingye, Van Leeuwen & Van Dijk 2016), and survival for a majority of Acoli depends on small-scale farming (90 per cent in the case of residents of Pabwoc, my survivor community hosts, as an example). Because of this, the majority of rural Acoli's survival via land access necessarily engages them in negotiating, debating, and applying *tekwaro*, Acoli Indigenous knowledge (including governance and law), to their present circumstances.

Building on significant writing on communal customary land tenure in Acoli that highlights navigating land conflicts and contestations (e.g. Atkinson & Hopwood 2013; Hopwood 2022; Meinert, Willerslev & Seebach 2017), I was taught by my host community to look to *ngom kwaro* (ancestral lands) as the grounding (so to speak) for relational repair and remaking home after war in these same contexts. To see the conflicts over land, yes, but to see the conflicts as important sites for re-engagement and elaborations of Acoli Indigenous knowledge.

I am thinking here alongside Julian Hopwood's (2015) explorations of women's land claims and Julaina Obika's notion of 'intimate governance', which explores how Acoli women assert land claims within Acoli Indigenous law and governance, indicating that 'the process of governing land involves active negotiation, contestation, coercion, and force' (2022: 146). I wish to draw further attention to the question of 'governing', and the important resurgence of Acoli *Kaka's* Indigenous governance and law after war, to support Acolis' own efforts towards Indigenous land sovereignties in the face of ongoing capitalist, neocolonial international pressures (Martiniello 2015), as well as continuing local and national pressures.

The concept of resurgence I draw on here comes from the significant works of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), as well as other Indigenous scholars, such as Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel (2014). Like my host community teachers, they emphasize the existing practices and capacities of Indigenous Nations and communities for regeneration and social and relational repair from within, grounded in the land.

In conversation with all my teachers, then, I attend here to how everyday practices of quotidian labour related to survival from the land – *tic* Acoli³ – and the processes involved in writing down Acoli *Kaka's* Indigenous constitutions, demonstrate the complex ways that people renegotiate life and living after upheaval and violence.

The struggle to ‘move on’ and rebuild life and relationships after violence and forced displacement has been more widely written about as ‘social repair’, which, according to Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, is ‘the set of actions and processes that individuals mobilize to reconstruct social relations, negotiate strategies for coping with violence, and to get on with daily life’ (2015: 284). Shifting to ‘relational repair’ to more explicitly account for relations beyond human sociality, I am interested in the wider set of relations within which human beings make, and remake, their lives (with the land, ancestors, and spirit world, as some examples). Based on participatory and ethnographic fieldwork experiences over the past fourteen years in rural Acoliland, Northern Uganda (mostly in Pabwoc, in the Padibe sub-counties, Lamwo District),⁴ I learned that the practices and actors that actually work to repair relationships in rural Padibe are deeply embedded in processes that are aimed at successful survival, and living ‘in kin-based political communities’ on the land in the present and future – in making and remaking ‘home’ – but less concerned with addressing specific conflict or displacement breaches and violence from the past.

Although most ethnographic studies of lives during and after war rightly emphasize the ways that people navigate experiences of violence that have become incorporated into relationships and the everyday (e.g. Das 2007; Theidon 2013), my attention was drawn to the nuance that relational repair, for my host community of Pabwoc, also consists of trying to live *outside* the frame of social destruction created by the forced intra-community violence of the war years (Rosenoff Gauvin 2019b).⁵ In any given rural village, clan, and/or kin group across Acoliland, there are members who were abducted and served with the LRA, or who were conscripted and served against them with the government’s military. The rest were internally displaced, often facing harassment from both sides. Like Henni Alava’s (2019) exploration of how her own writing can break or shield purposeful silences about violent pasts in Acoli, members and residents of Pabwoc choose in the everyday which silences to amplify and break as they work to meet their physical and spiritual needs and rebuild home together.

Although I am trying to write about these complex processes, they are not black and white or absolute. The concepts of relational repair and resurgence acknowledge how individuals, families, and communities reorient relationality itself to a set of coordinates *not* grounded in the destructive, pervasive, and forced intra-community violence of the 1986–2006 war (or of enduring colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial violences, for that matter). What is significant here is the effort – the struggle and the work that reorient relationality towards an ideal impetus that drives moving on and everyday survival while dealing with extreme trauma or difficulties wrought by forced displacement and violence. It is important to establish here that I am interested specifically in exploring how the resurgence of Acoli *Kaka*’s Indigenous governance and law, facilitated by communal land stewardship (and the sovereignty that this implies), contributes to these ongoing efforts and not to an idealized state of equilibrium, repair, or legislative governance.

I think in this way with teachings from Indigenous scholarship that questions a damage-centred approach to research that perpetuates colonial relations, which then demands outside intervention (Tuck 2009). I am also in dialogue with an Afrocentric perspective (Asante 2003) that, according to Ama Mazama (2001), must highlight African experiences of victory and growth, rather than only oppression and despair. More recently, other scholars have emphasized that love and care should be taken seriously in the remaking of worlds in the wake of violence (Krystalli & Schutz 2022).

I thus find resonance with Indigenous, Afrocentric, and contemporary scholars as I honour here the teachings received from my host community, and support their own efforts at relational repair, *ribbe kaka* (clan unity), and resurgence.⁶

These insights about relational repair also add to the critique of international transitional justice, which is a field and set of policy directives that examine political transformation after prolonged periods of dictatorship, authoritarianism, civil war, mass violence, and genocide. Until recently, the field was dominated by a focus on macro-level mechanisms (such as trials and truth commissions) that attempt to redress past wrongs. It had been critiqued, however, for its narrow conception of time, ignoring injustice associated with colonialism or the slave trade, and its denial of trajectories of historical atrocity that perpetuate the violence of inequality, poverty, and conflict (Arbour 2008; J. Cole 2001; Soyinka 2000). As a 'rule of law movement' (Clarke 2009), transitional justice also privileges formal legal processes that emphasize civil and political rights as distinct from social, economic, and cultural ones (Arbour 2008; Okello 2010; Roht-Arriaza 2006) and sidelines diverse gendered experiences (Ní Aoláin 2012; Schulz 2020). Furthermore, transitional justice practices' reliance on the redemptive power of speaking and remembering (J. Cole 2001; Shaw 2007), and specific testimonial narratives (Jackson 2005; Ross 2010), seen in an emphasis on trials and truth commissions, for example, may ignore or seek to repress local Indigenous governance and law that is working in the everyday towards relational repair (Snelgrove *et al.* 2014).

Within these robust discourses on transitional justice and relational repair, I wish to add to recent work that calls attention to the role of communal land sovereignties and the safeguarding of Indigenous ancestral lands (Izquierdo & Viaene 2018; Teló, Gasparotto, de Medeiros & Saraiva 2021). Centring the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles 25 and 26, and their assertions that Indigenous peoples have the rights to their lands according to their own practices and tenures (UN General Assembly 2007), is an important aspect to any considerations of transitional justice and relational repair.

To these ends, I first discuss my methods, and then recount a very brief history of the LRA-Museveni war based on my host community's experiences. Emphasizing everyday small-scale farming labour activities (*tic Acoli*) in one rural village of Pabwoc, I move to discussing how these activities work to engage multiple generations in *tekwaro*, or Acoli Indigenous knowledge, and how this engagement also helps to repair relationships in post-conflict and post-displacement contexts. I then explore the writing of Pabwoc's constitution in the immediate postwar period, as well as our survey confirming the unicity of constitution writing at that time, and further connect the resurgence of Acoli *Kaka's* Indigenous governance and law to vital practices of relational repair, grounded in the land and the struggle to protect communal land rights and sovereignties.

Methods and scope

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork while living in Pabwoc village in 2012, and then across Acoliland in 2018. I was assisted on both these occasions, and in countless other visits, by Augustine Nyero Caesar, whom I met in 2006.⁷ I first came to Northern Uganda in 2004 and 2005 as part of a film crew for the documentary *Uganda rising* and visited various IDP camps, as well as Gulu and Kitgum towns, in what were then the three Acoli districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. In 2006, I began staying in Padibe IDP camp (in Kitgum District at the time, now Lamwo). I have since spent approximately

fifteen months in annual and bi-annual visits to Acoliland, most of those in Pabwoc village, in what is now Lamwo District (about 8 kilometres from the former Padibe IDP camp and 25 kilometres from Kitgum) for work relating to my MFA, Ph.D., and post-doctoral research.

From 2004 to 2008, I worked in English, with different translators when necessary. I began Acoli Luo classes in Vancouver, Canada, in 2010, and took an intensive month-long course in early 2012 in Pabwoc village with Ojera John Okello. Most of my interactions were either in English (if people spoke it) or in Acoli Luo.

Since 2010, I have been hosted by a particular extended family in Pabwoc whom I first met in Padibe IDP camp in late 2006. My main methodologies in 2012 included a village-wide homestead survey (with all the forty-eight extended homesteads in Pabwoc-East – the interviews lasted from thirty minutes to two hours) and what I call ‘participant learning’, living within the homestead of my host family for seven months, learning how to ‘live’ in the village, and participating in everyday life. The survey and participant learning were complemented by responsive methodologies that included (1) interviews, tracing genealogies within Pabwoc village, and historical song recordings with Elders and youth from Pabwoc to create a community workbook; (2) attending over 150 nightly fireside chats within Pabwoc;⁸ (3) support and participation in a youth group’s ‘cultural revival’ programme, which included village debates, focus group interviews, a cultural festival, and village-wide fireside chats across the Padibe sub-counties; (4) a focus group interview with Pabwoc youth (eleven participants); and (5) three interviews outside of Pabwoc, including with Rwot Padibe, Otto Matthew (Kitgum Land Officer), and Enoji (the eldest person in Padibe at that time, since deceased – may he rest in peace).

Facts per extended homestead were compiled, such as: (1) kinds of marriage (polygamous or monogamous); (2) homestead composition (multi-generational? Daughters or sons of Bwoc? etc.); (3) times and details of displacements from the war; (4) procedures enacted to return and access land after displacement; (5) practice of *wang oo* (fireside chats); (6) ideas about *tekwaro*. I also reviewed the interview transcriptions and organized the data into a timeline of my experiences in the Padibe sub-counties. Consulting these various forms of documented knowledge, I cross-referenced the sources to understand how general trends in people’s understandings of Acoli Indigenous knowledge, daily practices in village life, survey results, the youth group’s cultural revival activities, and public dialogue and debate regarding the effects of war converged around certain key issues. I mostly identified these issues by their frequency – and the time given to their explanation and practice – in conversation, interviews, debates, and everyday life. For example, *tic Acoli* (literally, Acoli work, but referring to small-scale farming work here) and *ribbe kaka* (clan or kin-group unity) were much discussed within the village survey, at *wang oo*, in the youth group’s debate programmes, and also deeply affected the everyday lives of my host family (it was how, and with whom, they spent the majority of their time). This recurrence and prevalence of *tic Acoli* and *ribbe kaka* – in conversation, interviews, surveys, debates, and in daily village life – identified them as key sites of interest, and of remaking home, to a majority of people in Pabwoc.

I also travelled back to Pabwoc in April 2015 to deliver the workbooks we co-created and to discuss what I thought I learned: that communal land tenure grounded certain frameworks of intergenerational engagement with *tekwaro* that serve to repair relationships and order life in the community at large. In personal conversations, as

well as at a celebratory clan gathering, I discussed what I had begun to write about, and asked for input and guidance in these matters. This article is part of those learnings. I returned again in 2018 for the chiefdom/clan surveys on constitutions, and organized radio debates with Augustine in 2021, further researching Acoli Indigenous governance and ongoing struggles to protect communal land rights.

When I speak of the village of Pabwoc, it is important to note that I am also speaking about the larger kin-based political community group (*kaka*) Pabwoc that corresponds to the village, but whose members may reside outside it, in Uganda, or elsewhere. You can be a voting, rights-bearing, responsibility-owing member of Pabwoc while living outside 'the village' (this is confirmed in their constitution). Pabwoc village is the grounding centre of a large kin group whose members reside within (in Padibe West sub-county and Lamwo District), within various places outside Pabwoc in Uganda, and in various places outside Uganda in the world. Throughout my research time, I have witnessed interactions between those living elsewhere in Uganda (through frequent visits, sending children to Pabwoc village on holidays, travel for funerals, return for burial, etc.) and outside Uganda (through assisting with constitution writing, sending funds to host gatherings because they had missed many funerals, etc.). Members of Pabwoc, regardless of where they live, keep relationships alive in various ways and participate in Indigenous governance and law as members of the *kaka*. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, Pabwoc is also part of the Padibe chiefdom (in the Padibe sub-counties) and the larger *Kaka* Bobi (throughout Acoliland) – both groups having representative Indigenous governance organizations of their own (see Rosenoff Gauvin 2016 for more details). In addition to these various spheres of Acoli Indigenous governance, relationships with other entities such as churches, schools, and district and state governments are also negotiated on a daily basis by members of Pabwoc (for examples, see Alava 2019; 2022; Porter 2015). My choice to highlight *kaka* – and kin-based Acoli Indigenous governance and law within – is to acknowledge their less explored but absolutely central role in vital aspects of rural life in my host community (e.g. land access, dispute resolution, marriage regulations).

The LRA-government war in Padibe sub-counties, Acoliland

The key effects of the twenty-year war on the extended family that I lived and worked with in Pabwoc were (1) abductions and violence by the LRA rebel group; (2) forced displacement, conscription, as well as intimidation and violence by the Ugandan government through its military; and (3) the destruction of their homes and fields owing to years of forced displacement and targeted burnings. Members of Pabwoc – the clan/kin group⁹ – therefore variously became internally displaced, part of the LRA, and part of the UPDF (Uganda People's Defence Force or Ugandan military) throughout the course of the war. This very brief history focuses on their own experiences of the war, as recounted in my 2012 village survey and through personal conversations.¹⁰

In the Padibe sub-counties, where Pabwoc is situated, road travel in the early years of the LRA was hazardous and precarious – roadblocks, intimidation, and theft by the LRA were allegedly common – but people were able to remain on their ancestral lands (*ngom kwaro*) in their home villages, and continue their way of life. As always, some members still moved elsewhere in Uganda or abroad if opportunity and finances allowed.

The effects of the war became far more prominent in Padibe in January 1997, when the LRA began massacres in the area, killing a total of 450 people (JRP 2008). At that

time, most people living in what is now the Padibe sub-counties, including members of Pabwoc, lost members of their extended families and villages, and fled in fear to the closest town of Kitgum (approximately 25 kilometres away) to seek refuge at a primary school. They were transferred to a makeshift camp, still in Kitgum town, after a few months, but there was a cholera outbreak from the deplorable conditions (author's 2012 village survey). At this time, President Museveni's government opened so-called 'protected villages,' IDP camps, back in people's own sub-counties. Most members of Pabwoc were then transported from Kitgum back to Padibe IDP camp, where they remained until late 2008. Some members did return to their ancestral lands for two to three years during the relative calm associated with peace negotiations in 1999 before another upswing of LRA activity in 2003. Many abductions and killings in Pabwoc occurred in that interim period for people who had returned, before they were finally given twenty-four hours by the Ugandan military in 2003 to move back to Padibe IDP camp (author's 2012 village survey). My host mother and father recounted one such attack that saw them on the run with their children and babies in their arms trying to cross a raging river to escape. Many were killed, including their close family members.

Across Acoliland, IDP camp conditions were deplorable, with overcrowding and improper access to clean water, hygienic facilities, and food, leading to more than a thousand excess deaths per week (UMH 2005). It is estimated that at the height of the war, over 1.3 million Acoli people were forcibly displaced to the under-serviced camps in the then districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader (Bøås & Hatløy 2005). While the government maintains that the IDP camps were there to protect the population from LRA attacks, many scholars hold it responsible for the high death rates and call the inhuman living conditions in the camps genocide (Obote 1990; Otunnu 2009; Whitmore 2010), a form of social torture (Dolan 2009), and a violation of international humanitarian law (Okello & Hovil 2007: 437).¹¹

In addition, the IDP camp population was still targeted by the LRA for abductions and the looting of what little foodstuff it received. Padibe IDP camp, where my host family and most of their extended kin group of Pabwoc were displaced, suffered numerous attacks from the LRA; many of these were repelled, but three (in 2000, 2003, and 2004) resulted in heavy looting, damage, abductions, and killings (JRP 2008; author's 2012 village survey).

A negotiated ceasefire between the LRA and President Museveni's government in September 2006 began to improve the situation. People started to leave Padibe IDP camp permanently in 2008 when they trusted that the ceasefire would hold – and they worked hard to rebuild huts, clear and prepare fields, and fix boreholes – assuring that the necessities of their small-scale farming way of life were in place. According to my 2012 village survey, 90 per cent of the population had returned by 2009, and 98 per cent by 2010.

Every village and *kaka*, including Pabwoc, therefore has multiple members who, in addition to being internally displaced, both received violence at the hands of, and perpetrated violence on behalf of, the LRA and the UPDF. This condition of 'unprecedented Acoli-on-Acoli violence' (O. Oloya 2013) not only complicates the line between victim and perpetrator (Baines 2009; 2015; Mawson 2004), but also necessarily impacts realities and conceptions of 'moving on,' relational repair, and enacting Indigenous governance and law to communally steward land, achieve justice, address violence, and remake home after war.

Everyday life, *tic Acoli* (Acoli work), and ancestral lands

I was shown and told many times how *tic Acoli* engages multiple generations in *tekwaro pa Acoli* (Acoli Indigenous knowledge). This engagement is political, owing to the communal, Indigenous land tenure system, as well as physical, owing to the nature of the activities themselves. The term *tekwaro* in Acoli Luo has a large semantic range that includes culture, history, and tradition. I use the term Indigenous knowledge as a translation to encompass this range, following Gloria Emeagwali's description of it as 'the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs, and values accumulated over time in a particular locality' (2014: 1).

I'll repeat here that in rural Acoliland, over 90 per cent of people exercise claims to their land through their clans, or kin network political communities (*kaka*), by virtue of customary land tenure (Atkinson & Hopwood 2013). In Pabwoc, land claims are assessed and managed by Indigenous governance and law ways as a first point of contact, and the *Rwot Kweri* (an elected position within each Indigenous governance organization) is responsible for safekeeping knowledge about the *kaka*'s land boundaries and historical patterns of individual families' use on their ancestral lands (author's 2012 village survey; but also see again Atkinson & Hopwood 2013 for the ubiquity of the role throughout Acoliland). Land claims are mostly exercised through people's father's or husband's *kaka*, as the case may be, but access is often obtained through their mother's *kaka* as well (e.g. in 2012, about 30 per cent of households were headed by daughters of Bwoc, or daughters' children).¹² Within Pabwoc village in 2012, for example, all residents were related, and all were 'sons or daughters of Bwoc' – their apical ancestor.¹³

Because of the communal, Indigenous, kin-based land tenure of over 90 per cent of Acoliland (Atkinson & Hopwood 2013: i; Kobusingye *et al.* 2016), accessing land for residence and small-scale farming requires engagement with some form of Indigenous, communal kin-based governance. As Francis Adyanga Akena (2018) and Julian Hopwood (2022) point out, there is no agreed-upon pan-Acoli form of customary land tenure, and when I refer to Acoli Indigenous communal land tenure or stewardship, or Acoli Indigenous governance and law, I am referring to the manifestations of Acoli Indigenous law and governance in *Kaka* Pabwoc specifically as a case study.¹⁴ Each chiefdom, clan, and/or kin group will have specific governance and law practices – in various levels of harmony and conflict with each other.

According to the village survey I undertook in Pabwoc, over 90 per cent of the households survived from small-scale farming alone. The remaining approximate 10 per cent had one or more individuals whose employment (teacher, police, soldier, tailor, carpenter) added to the family's farming activities.¹⁵ Cash crop growing was minimal – a lack of storage infrastructure was cited as the main obstacle back in 2012 – yet some residents did grow cotton, tobacco, or extra foodstuff to raise additional funds.¹⁶ Aside from school-age children, then, over 90 per cent of the village population's daily activities mostly revolved around the procurement, not to mention the preparation, of foodstuff on the *kaka*'s ancestral lands. *Tic Acoli*'s importance cannot be overstated as a fundamental organizing, relational, and pedagogical force of daily life.

In addition to the political engagement with Acoli Indigenous knowledge, law, and governance needed to access and manage land for survival, the physical and practical aspects of labour connected to small-scale farming (some call this foodways) provoked other kinds of vital engagements with *tekwaro*. I think in this alongside Giuliano

Martiniello (2015) and Francis Adyanga Akena (2018), who, among other things, emphasize the links between Acoli food sovereignty, social relations, and communal land tenure. Nancy and Katherine Turner (2008) also emphasize that what they call 'place-based knowledge' is manifest in food production – which is essential to physical survival but also to knowledge transmissions through the teachings and learnings of planting, harvesting, processing, serving, as well as in the economic and ceremonial uses of the foods. Further emphasizing the relationality enacted in food procurement, Métis scholar Zoe Todd (2014) explores how in Treaty Six Territory within Canada, fishing is not just about 'the catch', but concerns entering into a series of relationships with other people, the environment, and the fish, to try to get fish. Connecting more explicitly with Indigenous law and governance, Michelle Daigle (2019) further explores how Indigenous food sovereignties shape movements for decolonization and self-determination in Canada.

When speaking of everyday life and small-scale farming on communal lands in Pabwoc, then, it is thus important to consider that kin, via Indigenous governance and law, ascribe rights to use ancestral lands, and that kin relations beyond the nuclear family are also needed to efficiently survive from the land. In Acoliland, John Jaramogi Oloya (2015: 234) similarly describes how the collective responsibility for *pito lwak* (feeding and growing community) encompassed the entire *kaka*: the clan/sub-clan or kin-based Indigenous governance group. These works implicitly recognize how small-scale farming labour engages people in *tekwaro*, and how that engagement elaborates, or re-elaborates in this case, co-operative, interdependent relationships. These are relationships which, importantly, are then not overly determined by the extreme forced, intra-communal violence of the war years.

These academic assertions were supported by my participant learning and conversations throughout the full seven months that I spent in Pabwoc in 2012, and the many sporadic months before and after. To access the gardens to grow food for survival after the years of displacement, small-scale farmers either accessed lands previously used for their gardens, or were assigned new plots by the *Rwot Kweri*. The *Rwot Kweri* investigated the farmer's family, history of land use, open plots, and so on, and sanctioned access and use of particular plots in the communal gardening areas (author's 2012 village survey). The farmers necessarily worked together in groups (often along gender lines) to share the labour at various times of the farming cycle, including tilling, weeding, and harvesting. When more labour was needed (e.g. at harvest), work parties (*awak*) were formed. Through the farming itself, different generations were brought together in training, the more mature sharing knowledge about soils, seeds, when to plant, weeding tips, and harvest practices with youth who had not known this life of small-scale farming in the IDP camps. Additionally, the communal garden plots in Pabwoc are situated a good walk away from the homestead sites, and in walking to the gardens, information about land boundaries and historical facts relating to the land (e.g. the last lion killed on the land; conflicts with neighbouring clans; which rocks and trees mark the edge of the land) were shared amongst farmers of all ages heading to and from work (personal experiences, 2012).

I was also shown and told many times during my periods of fieldwork in the IDP camps, as well as back on residents' ancestral lands, how everyday activities that were connected to the land – small-scale farming, animal rearing, and food preparation and consumption – constitute an important aspect of *tekwaro pa Acoli*, and 'what makes you Acoli' – Acoli personhood. The quotidian activities connected with the land therefore

contribute to ideas of being a 'good' person and a contributing member of society. In my village survey of forty-eight extended homesteads in 2012, over 70 per cent spoke about small-scale farm work practices as important aspects of *tekwaro pa Acoli*. One elderly woman said: 'Acoli *tekwaro* is the things that we Acoli people do, it is *kit me kwor* [our ways of life]'. Her daughter-in-law added, 'Acoli *tekwaro* is seen in the ways we live and the ways we do our things, planting, weeding, cooking, eating'. As one male adult said: 'Acoli *tekwaro* is how to live with others and do work together'. Another, a woman, explained: 'Since before 1986 [the war], *tekwaro* was in good order – there was *wang oo*, we ate together, we dug together'.

Land in Acoli, as in many Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, is acknowledged as an important participant that guides and creates normative and ethical multi-temporal, interpersonal, human-land, human-animal, human-ancestor, and intergenerational relations (Rosenoff Gauvin 2016). From the village survey, I was told how at home, the land served as an important pedagogical tool as children learned the daily and annual cycle of work connected to the land. They learned how to farm, collect firewood, rear animals, and so on, all the while receiving important intergenerational instruction, provoked and supported by the land. At home, they also visibly and spatially learned about their extended families as they corresponded to land boundaries (villages), and how the *kaka* functions through communal labour practices, land allocation, ritual, dispute resolution mechanisms, and respectful prohibitions of nonhuman elements (*kwer*).

In contrast, within the IDP camp, there was a disconnection from ancestral lands, and thus your larger kin group, in a multitude of ways. Reliance on others for food (from the World Food Programme) distributed to individual households de-emphasized co-operative interdependence as well as Indigenous governance and law. According to many residents (author's village survey), this dependency promoted individualism (*ki langat acel-acel*), as does its legacy to this day.¹⁷

Acknowledging how the work concerned with Acoli foodways (*tic Acoli*) functions as relational repair attends to how small-scale farming work engages people in Indigenous knowledge, in Acoli Indigenous governance, and thus in the creation and re-creation of social, political, and moral communities that cannot possibly be defined by the forced wartime violence. I will now turn to the writing of Indigenous governance constitutions to further discuss the resurgence of Acoli Indigenous governance and law, and the centrality of communal land sovereignties within this.

Indigenous governance constitutions

In 2014, Augustine (my host brother, long-time research assistant, and now colleague) sent me Pabwoc's newly written draft constitution. It was the first time that his *kaka* had written down the previous oral Acoli Indigenous knowledge that made up their governance and legal order, and they were in the process of finally voting as a *kaka* on its many sections.¹⁸ The process of writing involved much engagement, negotiation, and collaboratively thinking through the best ways they had to govern their families and communities after war, and into the future – as they have always done (see Simpson 2017). The processes involved in this translation, in this writing down, further served to engage multiple generations in the elaboration and re-elaboration of *tekwaro*, and emphasized the importance of *ribbe kaka* that served to reground, so to speak, peoples' relationships to each other, and to the land.

The document consisted of twenty-two pages, written in English, and included descriptions that detail community membership, community leadership and elections, membership rights and responsibilities, specific marriage rules, as well as other prohibitions pertaining to peaceable existence. The writing of the constitution was a culmination (at a certain point in time) of processes that re-evaluated, renegotiated, and rearticulated some of Pabwoc's Indigenous knowledge, its governance and law, in response to significant familial, local, regional, and global events and processes (conflicts, war, displacement, return).

However, when I first asked Augustine, who was in his early thirties at the time, how this constitution writing came about, he replied:

We have decided to do this to especially bring together all the members of Pabwoc, since the population is adding up and there are some who don't even know each other well. Also the young generations are growing up and they need to be guided on many issues like land, marriages, and much more.

He has since spoken about how *tekwaro* should be 'streamlined', to make it more transparent and readily known and accessible to people, as well as to facilitate people's engagement with it. I also asked Oyil Francis (who helped collect songs in 2012 and worked for the youth group), in his late twenties then, about Pabwoc's constitution, and he replied that his clan was also working on its own:

To me, I see that what has made almost all the clans in Acoliland to start coming together in this way is due to a series of disputes that people are undergoing, and the Uganda Court of Law has no permanent solutions to the problems. This has made people to go back to looking at *tekwaro*, and it has proved itself to be helping a lot in settling disputes in society.

Oyil's understanding of the efficacy of *tekwaro* in providing 'permanent solutions' to disputes, especially in post-conflict contexts, is key. It also draws attention to the inaccessibility to many in Lamwo District of Uganda's courts – owing to finances and their removal from local Indigenous governance and law.¹⁹ His comments about the ubiquity of the initiative have been verified through further work that Augustine and I conducted in 2018, briefly described below.

Pabwoc's constitution, and the intergenerational negotiation processes that led to the drafting of the constitution, provided a framework in the postwar years within which different constituencies and members could work to address present and future conflicts, concerns, and realities.²⁰ Within the constitution, for example, women – including daughters and nieces of Pabwoc, as well as those related by marriage – have a vote as members. Additionally, there is a women's circle, and its leader and secretary are members of the executive committee.²¹ While only youth technically above 18 are granted voting membership rights (in accordance with Uganda's constitution), those interested from about the age of 15 are welcome to vote in Pabwoc (personal experience attending clan meeting). There is also a youth circle, and its leader and secretary sit on the executive committee as well.²²

In speaking about Pabwoc's constitutions throughout the years, I have encountered some long-standing uneasiness from academics regarding what has been called the 'codification' of mostly oral traditions that might fix and distort the fluidity and negotiability of Indigenous knowledge.²³ Additionally, the historical results of attempts at codification on the African continent, found in 'customary law' in many colonized countries, has been charged with being the joint creation of African leaders and

colonial officials, rather than an accurate interpretation of Indigenous knowledge and conceptual frameworks (Colson 1971; Moore 1986).

In Pabwoc, though, it was the internal writing and voting process itself that generated intergenerational participation, debate, and negotiation with *tekwaro*. Participatory engagement in the process supported the reweaving of functioning relationships and the establishing of an ideal governance and legal vision of a rebuilt and alive home soon after the decades of war and displacement. This does not mean that this was achieved without conflict and disagreement, but the point itself is participation – engagement, negotiation, and debate in Acoli Indigenous political and legal processes – particularly after decades of their weakening and lessening of relevance in IDP camps. Whether the constitution document itself is codified and distorted, and even whether it is adopted and followed, may be a moot point if the *processes* that led to the creation of the document served the purposes of bringing people together in a particular moment in time to once more negotiate Indigenous governance and law after two decades of displacement and war. More important perhaps than the long-term effects of this drafted constitution, these *kaka*-wide processes of discussion, negotiation, and debate that work at relational repair and resurgence are key.

Further research with Augustine in 2018 found that over 85 per cent of chiefdoms across Acoliland saw either their own chiefdoms or affiliated *kaka* writing constitutions in that postwar period.²⁴ This widespread practice and process of trying to write clan and chiefdom constitutions after the war supports what I learned about relational repair from members of Pabwoc. This repair is grounded in communal land sovereignties, and concerns rebuilding home and relationships in ways that refuse the pervasive, divisive forced wartime violence and damage. Pabwoc's constitution, then, in addition to everyday *tic Acoli*, works at relational repair – grounded in and only possible through the land – that engages multiple generations and both men and women in Acoli Indigenous knowledge. This is mutually constitutive of the resurgence of Acoli Indigenous law and governance that ultimately fosters *ribbe kaka*.

Another facet of the constitutions that demonstrates the urgency of communal land's role in relational repair was the aspiration, expressed by many in the chiefdom constitution survey, as well as in Pabwoc, that these constitutions may also be used to register for Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs). Although there have been multiple barriers to *kaka* actually registering for and receiving CCOs, the scope of which is beyond this article, ongoing struggles against land privatization, land grabs, and squatters make aspirations to protect communal land sovereignties ever more salient and urgent.

Relational repair, Acoli Indigenous knowledge, and Acoli land sovereignties

Heeding Snelgrove *et al.* (2014), and following Moses Chrispus Okello's (2010: 279) call for a reconceptualization of justice and rights after violence and war informed by local, place-based practice – a localized transitional justice – I emphasize here that a return to ancestral lands after displacement spurred intergenerational engagement with *tekwaro*. This engagement with *tekwaro* provoked a resurgence of Acoli *Kaka's* Indigenous law and governance in post-conflict contexts that works at relational repair. This is not strictly what has mostly been called 'traditional justice' or 'customary law', as written about and debated elsewhere, nor a discussion of Acoli chiefs and customary authorities (Komujuni & Büscher 2020), but instead highlights a holistic understanding of engagements with Acoli Indigenous knowledge, and how *kaka's* practices of law and

governance – grounded by Acoli land sovereignties and communal land tenure – work at relational repair.

I emphasize here, too, that we must question what we may or may not understand about relational repair by assuming a priori, and maintaining, that *violence* is an enduring primary point of reference in relational repair, indeed in ‘justice’ practices in general. I am not saying in any way that violence is unimportant and does not affect survivors and survivors’ families for generations. I am the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, and my family’s experience with mass violence still reverberates today and into my, my children’s, and my grandchildren’s future. I don’t think that the legacy of violence is erasable, but people work through it in different ways of surviving, of living, both directly during and after violence, and in all the days thereafter. To discount the vitality of communal land tenure and sovereignties within these relational repair processes only contributes to furthering violence.

In the past, I have explored relational repair in this way, considering practices, knowledges, and epistemologies manifest in Acoli oral tradition (Rosenoff Gauvin 2013) that were ‘outside the frame of violence’ (Rosenoff Gauvin 2019b), grounded in ancestral lands (Rosenoff Gauvin 2016) and through courtship and love (Rosenoff Gauvin 2019a). In agreement with more recent scholarship that also explores relational repair in Northern Uganda through ‘confusion’ and ‘embedded political narratives’ (Alava 2022), and justice as recognition (Schulz 2020), I continue to argue here for epistemic justice when considering the very fraught and complex question of how people live through violence.

Although it has now been eighteen years since the ceasefire, and sixteen years since people began returning to their ancestral lands in Acoli, this article revisits and emphasizes important lessons about communal land sovereignties, Indigenous governance and law, and their absolute necessity and vitality to rebuilding home and relational repair. I also want to draw attention to the fact that Pabwoc and other *kaka*’s struggles to secure their ancestral lands in Acoliland are in fact ongoing, and thus the recognition of Indigenous land rights within these contexts is as urgent today as it was in the immediate aftermath of the Museveni-LRA war.

Conclusion

A return home to ancestral lands in Padibe sub-county after war and displacement necessitated small-scale farming labour (*tic Acoli*) for survival. This survival provoked engagement with Acoli Indigenous knowledge because of communal land tenure and stewardship, which also supported the resurgence of Acoli *Kaka*’s Indigenous governance and law. While these engagements, grounded in the land, are not the only forms of intra-community relational repair needed or wanted in rural Acoli, they did significantly and practically contribute to these processes every day.

Tekwaro is about reconciling people in the *paco* [home, village, homestead]. Unity is the most important aspect of *tekwaro pa Acoli*. If people fight, no matter who they are, *tekwaro* would find every way to bring them back together. Because, in the end, we all must live together (35-year-old man, Pabwoc).

Accessing, renegotiating, making relevant, and applying Indigenous knowledge to ‘unite’ by repairing relationships is drawing upon the same body of knowledge that has historically guided *kaka* through past periods of violence and disruption; including everyday breaches, inter-clan conflicts, encounters with British colonial

officials, churches, Arab traders, as well as cataclysmic droughts and disease. It will also no doubt be the basis for resistance to various contemporary and future bodies, institutions, and schemes that continue to try to grab land and deterritorialize Acoli *Kaka* and communities.

The ethnographic insights offered here about resurging Indigenous governance and law and the vitality of Indigenous communal land sovereignties thus support the fact that strong land tenure rights are vital to post-conflict politics and peacebuilding (Boone 2014; Unruh 2011), and also call urgent attention to and support for various *kaka*'s ongoing and significant struggles to protect their communal landholdings.

Acknowledgements

Pwoc to *Kaka Pabwoc* for generously hosting me, and for sharing their knowledge and life experiences with me. I also wish to acknowledge the anonymous reviewers who contributed to my thinking through this work. Finally, I thank my Canadian family for all their love and support. Research contributing to this article was funded by SSHRC, the Trudeau Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Ethical conduct for research processes were approved for a first period of fieldwork by the University of British Columbia (2012), Makerere University (2012), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (2012). A second period of fieldwork was also approved by McGill University (2017), Makerere University (2018), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (2018).

NOTES

¹ The term 'survivor community' is my own and is used purposely to emphasize survival over the oft-used terms 'war-affected', 'victim groups', and so on.

² Roughly translated as clan, but better described as a kin-based governance group (J.J. Oloya 2015).

³ Although Porter and Victor (2017) use *tic Acoli* to describe ritual as well, in Pabwoc, the term *tic Acoli* exclusively refers to Acoli work related to survival. *Cik* was the term used for ritual and law in Pabwoc.

⁴ I spent three months travelling throughout Northern Uganda during the war in 2004 and 2005. I then began staying exclusively in Padibe IDP camp (2006, 2007, 2008, for a total of four months), Padibe Trading Centre (one month in 2010), and then Pabwoc village (2012, 2015, 2018, for a total of eight months).

⁵ Similarly, for Indigenous scholars in North America, this resurgence is linked to imagining relations 'outside of, or beyond, the violence of colonialism and the settler colonial state.

⁶ I speak more elsewhere about this ethical stance and the decisions I made as a researcher to support *ribbe kaka* (Rosenoff Gauvin 2023).

⁷ Please note that Augustine has waived anonymity and wishes to be named. Also note that leadership in Pabwoc-East also indicated that they would like to be named.

⁸ It is difficult to estimate the number of people overall attending nightly fireside chats. These occurred spontaneously every night when it was not raining, at supertime and afterwards. The fireside was the nighttime gathering place and supper place, and so sometimes it was just the extended homestead family, and sometimes guests, neighbours, and youth on school holiday would also be present (four to eight adults, four to eight youth, two to eight children plus myself and my husband in the later months).

⁹ As noted elsewhere (e.g. Hopwood 2022; J.J. Oloya 2015), kin groups in Acoli do not directly correspond to English descriptors such as clan, sub-clan, or lineage. Generally, the Acoli term *kaka* describes a form of kin-based communal governance (J.J. Oloya 2015). Depending on what association you are encountering, and how you define the terms, *kaka* can be translated as clan, sub-clan, lineage, chiefdom, and so on. For example, Bwoc was one of three sons of Bobi, and himself had two sons. The two sons could correspond to the two sub-clans or lineages of Otuna and Acuga; however, there are actually three of these smaller kin groups in Pabwoc (the reason is explored in Rosenoff Gauvin 2016). I therefore use the term *kaka* or kin-based political community throughout to avoid these oft-colonial descriptors, and to refer to forms of kin-based association and governance.

¹⁰ For more general and in-depth histories of the war, please see, among others, Behrend (1999), Branch (2011), Dolan (2009), and Finnström (2008), who describe the beginnings of the war in 1986, its

transformations from the defeat of Alice Lakwena in 1987, and the subsequent emergence of Joseph Kony as leader of the LRA.

¹¹ There was also discussion amongst academics of the international community's complicity in the terrible conditions that caused egregious harm (Branch 2011; Dolan 2009).

¹² According to the Pabwoc genealogies, there were also two major families who traced themselves back to a daughter of Bwoc from way before the war years in the early 1900s and 1950s. (In both cases, there was better treatment for the couple in Pabwoc than in the husband's village.)

¹³ This has not always been so, and at various times in Pabwoc's history, guests have been welcome. I was told that after the war and the return home, people were encouraged to return to their rightful ancestral lands so that organization and governance could be facilitated by kin ties. Also, there have recently been issues with people described as nomadic pastoralist herders (Balaalo) moving into Acoliland, and Pabwoc is no exception. I reference these as ongoing local, regional, and national pressures in the introduction.

¹⁴ Anthropology is often the study of broader phenomena as they manifest in specific places.

¹⁵ Even these employments, however, mostly bring in very little money, and families are still completely dependent on subsistence farming for survival. For instance, my host family is counted in the 10 per cent, but my host father teaches at the technical school in Padibe centre, and his monthly salary is about US\$60.

¹⁶ Casual job prospects are quite narrow in the Padibe sub-counties – brick-making during the dry season is the most available casual employment. There was no market in Pabwoc in 2012.

¹⁷ The push against individualism can also be linked to the significant pressures to individualize and privatize property. Like Akena's (2018) excellent critique of Hardin's 'The tragedy of the commons' (1968) and the continuing pressures of international non-governmental organizations, and the Ugandan government, Acoli Indigenous governance and law is inextricably connected to Acoli communal tenure and land sovereignty.

¹⁸ Although some NGOs were championing this kind of project in several parts of Acoliland, none were involved in Pabwoc.

¹⁹ As Hopwood asserts, formal justice processes in Acoliland are not entirely absent, 'but are largely irrelevant as the higher courts lack both moral authority and the means to enforce their rulings' (2015: 388).

²⁰ Although there have been concerns from some scholars regarding potential 'patrilineal fundamentalism' (Whyte *et al.* 2013) in Acoli Indigenous governance and law, and the forced imposition of male authority on women and youth as people returned home and patrilineal kin authority returned (Branch 2013), I am uncomfortable with the trope of white academics and international non-governmental organization workers saving African women and children from African men (see the white-saviour industrial complex: T. Cole 2012).

²¹ This is supported by Hopwood (2015), who wrote that, generally, women are not highly marginalized in Acoli land regimes.

²² There is also documentation that *kaka* included these kinds of committees, or what J.J. Oloya (2015: 262) calls civil society organizations or 'interest groups' (of aunts, nephews, youth), before the war, and historically back to the 1800s.

²³ For example, Cruikshank (1995) on the state's attempt to codify, within a Western framework, concepts embedded in Indigenous frames of meaning.

²⁴ Supported by a Wenner-Gren Post Ph.D. Research Grant, Augustine visited all chiefdoms in Acoli to learn about whether they, and the clans within their chiefdoms, had already written or were currently writing constitutions.

REFERENCES

- AKENA, F.A. 2018. Customary land tenure and ecological sustainability in Acholi Land, Northern Uganda. In *Balancing individualism and collectivism: contemporary systems thinking* (eds) J. McIntyre-Mills, N. Romm & Y. Corcoran-Nantes, 221-37. Cham: Springer.
- ALAVA, H. 2019. The Lord's Resistance Army and the arms that brought the Lord: amplifying polyphonic silences in Northern Uganda. *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 44, 9-29.
- 2022. *Christianity, politics, and the aftermath of war in Uganda: there is confusion*. London: Bloomsbury.
- ARBOUR, L. 2008. Economic and social justice for societies in transition. *International Law and Politics* 40, 1-27.
- ASANTE, M.K. 2003. *Afrocentricity: the theory of social change*. Chicago: African American Images.

- ATKINSON, R.R. & J. HOPWOOD 2013. Land conflict monitoring and mapping tool for the Acholi sub-region. Final Report. Research conducted under the United Nations Peacebuilding Programme in Uganda by Human Rights Focus. <https://hurifo.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Land-Conflict-Research-Report.pdf>.
- BAINES, E.K. 2009. Complex political perpetrators: reflections on Dominic Ongwen. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, 163–91.
- 2015. 'Today, I want to speak out the truth': victim agency, responsibility, and transitional justice. *International Political Sociology* 9, 316–32.
- BEHREND, H. 1999. *Alice Lakwena and the holy spirits: war in Northern Uganda, 1986–97*. Oxford: James Currey.
- BÖÅS, M. & A. HATLØY 2005. *Northern Uganda internally displaced persons profiling study*. Kampala: Office of the Prime Minister/UNDP. <https://www.eldis.org/document/A21273>.
- BOONE, C. 2014. *Property and political order in Africa: land rights and the structure of politics*. Cambridge: University Press.
- BRANCH, A. 2011. *Displacing human rights: war and intervention in Northern Uganda*. Oxford: University Press.
- 2013. Gulu in war ... and peace? The town as camp in Northern Uganda. *Urban Studies* 50, 3152–67.
- CLARKE, K.M. 2009. *Fictions of justice: the International Criminal Court and the challenge of legal pluralism in sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge: University Press.
- COLE, J. 2001. *Forget colonialism: sacrifice and the art of memory in Madagascar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- COLE, T. 2012. The white-savior industrial complex. *The Atlantic*, 21 March. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.
- COLSON, E. 1971. *The social consequences of resettlement: the impact of the Karibe resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga*. Manchester: University Press for the Institute of African Studies, University of Zambia.
- CRUIKSHANK, J. 1995. Imperfect translations: rethinking objects of ethnographic collection. *Museum Anthropology* 19, 25–38.
- DAIGLE, M. 2019. Tracing the terrain of Indigenous food sovereignties. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 46, 297–315.
- DAS, V. 2007. *Life and words: violence and the descent into the ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DOLAN, C. 2009. *Social torture: the case of Northern Uganda, 1986–2006*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- EMEAGWALI, G. 2014. Intersections between Africa's Indigenous knowledge systems and history. In *African Indigenous knowledge and the disciplines: anti-colonial educational perspectives for transformative change* (eds) G. Emeagwali & G.J.S. Dei, 1–17. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- FINNSTRÖM, S. 2008. *Living with bad surroundings: war and existential uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- HOPWOOD, J. 2015. Women's land claims in the Acholi region of Northern Uganda: what can be learned from what is contested. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22, 387–409.
- 2022. An inherited animus to communal land: the mechanisms of coloniality in land reform agendas in Acholiland, Northern Uganda. *Critical African Studies* 14, 38–54.
- IZQUIERDO, B. & L. VIAENE 2018. Decolonizing transitional justice from Indigenous territories. *Peace in Progress* 34, 11–19.
- JACKSON, M. 2005. West-African warsapes: storytelling events, violence, and the appearance of the past. *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, 355–75.
- JRP [JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION PROJECT] 2008. Massacre in Mucwini. Field Note VIII. Gulu. https://justiceandreconciliation.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/JRP_FN8_Mucwini.pdf.
- KOBUSINGYE, D.N., M. VAN LEEUWEN & H. VAN DIJK 2016. Where do I report my land dispute? The impact of institutional proliferation on land governance in postconflict Northern Uganda. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 48, 238–55.
- KOMUJUNI, S. & K. BÜSCHER 2020. In search of chiefly authority in 'post-aid' Acholiland: transformations of customary authorities in Northern Uganda. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, 103–24.
- KRYSTALLI, R. & P. SCHUTZ 2022. Taking love and care seriously: an emergent research agenda for remaking worlds in the wake of violence. *International Studies Review* 24: 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac003>.
- MARTINIELLO, G. 2015. Food sovereignty as praxis: rethinking the food question in Uganda. *Third World Quarterly* 36, 508–25.
- MAWSON, A. 2004. Children, impunity and justice: some dilemmas from Northern Uganda. In *Children and youth on the front line: ethnography, armed conflict, and displacement* (eds) J. Boyden & J. Berry, 130–41. New York: Berghahn Books.

- MAZAMA, A. 2001. The Afrocentric paradigm: contours and definitions. *Journal of Black Studies* 31, 387-405.
- MEINERT, L., R. WILLERSLEV & S.H. SEEBACH 2017. Cement, graves, and pillars in land disputes in Northern Uganda. *African Studies Review* 60, 37-57.
- MOORE, S.F. 1986. *Social facts and fabrications: customary law on Kilimanjaro, 1880-1980*. Cambridge: University Press.
- MURUGUT, O.J. 2020. Woda pwod tidi. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tX_jNNZmRI.
- NÍ AOLÁIN, F. 2012. Advancing feminist positioning in the field of transitional justice. *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, 205-28.
- OBIKA, J. 2022. The 'intimate governance' of land in Northern Uganda. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 31, 138-52.
- OBOTE, A.M. 1990. *Notes on concealment of genocide in Uganda*. Lusaka: A.M. Obote.
- OKELLO, M.C. 2010. Elevating transitional local justice or crystalizing global governance? In *Localizing transitional justice: interventions and priorities after mass violence* (eds) R. Shaw & P. Waldorf, 275-84. Stanford: University Press.
- & L. HOVIL 2007. Confronting the reality of gender-based violence in Northern Uganda. *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, 433-43.
- OLOYA, J.J. 2015. How did governance in Acholi dovetail with violence? A case study of multiperiod communal practices in a fragile situation in Uganda. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bradford.
- OLOYA, O. 2013. *Child to soldier: stories from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army*. Toronto: University Press.
- OTUNNU, O.A. 2009. The secret genocide. *Foreign Policy*, 19 October. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/19/the-secret-genocide/>.
- PORTER, H. 2015. Mango trees, offices and altars: the role of relatives, NGOs and churches after rape in Northern Uganda. *International Journal for Group and Minority Rights* 22, 309-34.
- & L. VICTOR 2017. Dirty things: spiritual pollution and life after the Lord's Resistance Army. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11, 590-608.
- RIAÑO-ALCALÁ, P. 2015. Emplaced witnessing: sites of insight, imagination and commemoration among the Wayuu. *Memory Studies* 8, 282-97.
- ROHT-ARRIAZA, N. 2006. The new landscape of transitional justice. In *Transitional justice in the twenty-first century: beyond truth versus justice* (eds) N. Roht-Arriaza & J. Mariezcurrena, 1-16. Cambridge: University Press.
- ROSENOFF GAUVIN, L. 2013. In and out of culture: Okot p'Bitek's work and social repair in post-conflict Acoliland. *Oral Tradition* 28, 35-54.
- 2016. 'The land grows people': Indigenous knowledge and social repairing in rural post-conflict Northern Uganda. PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia.
- 2019a. Love in and after war: courtship (*cuna*) in rural Acoliland, Northern Uganda. In *Africa every day: fun, leisure, and expressive culture on the continent* (eds) O.M. Balogun, L. Gilman, M. Graboyes & H. Iddrisu, 133-42. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- 2019b. Outside the frame of violence: unsettling visual projects in and after war in Northern Uganda. *Visual Ethnography Journal* 8: 2. <http://www.vejournal.org/index.php/vejournal/article/view/198>.
- 2023. But where is the violence? Reflections on honouring relationships and troubling academia. In *Messy ethics in human rights work* (eds) S. Plaut, N. Bilotta, L. Rosenoff Gauvin, C. Clarke-Kazak & M. Felices-Luna, 237-50. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- ROSS, F.C. 2010. An acknowledged failure: women, voice, violence, and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In *Localizing transitional justice: interventions and priorities after mass violence* (eds) R. Shaw, L. Waldorf & P. Hazan, 69-91. Stanford: University Press.
- SCHULZ, P. 2020. Examining male wartime rape survivors' perspectives on justice in Northern Uganda. *Social & Legal Studies* 29, 19-40.
- SHAW, R. 2007. Displacing violence: making Pentecostal memory in postwar Sierra Leone. *Cultural Anthropology* 22, 66-93.
- SIMPSON, L.B. 2017. *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- SNELGROVE, C., R. DHAMMOON & J. CORNTASSEL 2014. Unsettling settler colonialism: the discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 3: 2, 1-32.
- SOYINKA, W. 2000. Memory, truth and healing. In *The politics of memory: truth, healing and social justice* (eds) I. Amadiume & A. An-Na'im, 21-37. London: Zed Books.

- TELÓ, F., A. GASPAROTTO, L.S. DE MEDEIROS & R.C.F. SARAIVA 2021. Land and transitional justice in Brazil. *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 15, 190-209.
- THEIDON, K.S. 2013. *Intimate enemies: violence and reconciliation in Peru*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- TODD, Z. 2014. Fish pluralities: human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuuq, Arctic. *Études Inuit* 38, 217-38.
- TUCK, E. 2009. Suspending damage: a letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review* 79, 409-28.
- TURNER, N.J. & K.L. TURNER 2008. 'Where our women used to get the food': cumulative effects and loss of ethnobotanical knowledge and practice; case study from Coastal British Columbia. *Botany* 86, 103-15.
- UMH [UGANDA MINISTRY OF HEALTH] 2005. Health and mortality survey among internally displaced persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts in Northern Uganda. 31 July. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, IRC. <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/health-and-mortality-survey-among-internally-displaced-persons-gulu-kitgum-and-pader>.
- UN General Assembly 2007. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October, A/RES/61/295. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html>.
- UNRUH, J.D. 2011. Rights to land resources in post-conflict settings: challenges and responses. Background paper for a workshop on 'Natural Resource Conflicts and Conflict Transformation', 20 June.
- WHITMORE, T.D. 2010. Genocide or just another 'casualty of war'? The implications of the memo attributed to President Yoweri K. Museveni of Uganda. *Practical Matters: A Transdisciplinary Multimedia Journal of Religious Practices and Practical Theology* 3, 1-49.
- WHYTE, S.R., S.M. BABIHA, R. MUKYALA & L. MEINERT 2013. Remaining internally displaced: missing links to security in Northern Uganda. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 26, 283-301.

Ramener le foyer à la vie après la guerre : souverainetés foncières Indigènes des *Kaka Acoli* dans le Nord de l'Ouganda

Résumé

Après la guerre entre le gouvernement ougandais et l'Armée de résistance du Seigneur (1986-2006), 90 % des déplacés du Nord rural de l'Ouganda sont revenus sur leurs terrains ancestraux et aux systèmes de gestion Indigènes et communales. D'habitude, il y a un discours de la justice transitionnelle qui interviendrait après les violences des conflits, mais, dans ce temps après la guerre, plus de 85 % des chefferies ont vu les *kaka* (clans affiliés), négocier pour que leurs constitutions du gouvernement autochtone soient, pour la première fois, mises par écrit. En revenant sur les terres ancestrales et les petites exploitations agricoles et en se plongeant dans le *tekwaro*, le savoir autochtone, au travers de la rédaction de constitutions, les *Kaka Acoli* ont pu renforcer la gouvernance et le droit autochtones, affaiblis par la guerre et les déplacements de population. L'auteur avance que cet engagement et ces négociations enracinées dans la terre, quelle que soient leurs effets pratiques, ont offert encore un modèle alternatif de relations que les violences sans précédent vécues pendant la guerre, qui ont vu les *Acoli* dressés les uns contre les autres et dispersés. La résurgence du droit et de la gouvernance autochtones des *kaka*, enracinée dans la gestion communale des terres, est liée à la réparation des relations et va dans le sens des appels aux processus de justice transitionnelle pour le maintien et le respect des droits fonciers Indigènes. Ces arguments ethnographiques viennent aussi à l'appui des efforts des *kaka* pour unifier les clans (*ribbe kaka*) et garantir leurs souverainetés sur les terres ancestrales et communales.

Lara Rosenoff Gauvin is an Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology and co-chair of the Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba. She is a mother, daughter, wife, sister, scholar, artist, advocate, and curator whose work centres the knowledge and practices of survivors of violence, conflict, and forced displacement.

Department of Anthropology, 432 Fletcher Argue Building, 15 Chancellor Circle, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada. lara.rosenoffgauvin@umanitoba.ca