Music as Education, Voice, Memory, and Healing: Community Views on the Roles of Music in Conflict Transformation in Northern Uganda

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MUSIC AS EDUCATION, VOICE, MEMORY, AND HEALING:

Community Views on the Roles of Music in Conflict Transformation in Northern Uganda

Lindsay McClain Opiyo

ABSTRACT: *The Acholi of northern Uganda widely credit music with playing a central role in ending more than two decades of armed conflict. Drawing upon a conflict transformation framework—as well as more than 200 conflict-related songs and primary source interviews and focus group discussions with 46 community members and artists—this article explores how Acholi communities experience and perceive music as creating peaceful change through the community-identified roles of music as education, voice, memory, and healing. It suggests that listening to community members' perceptions on the role of music provides deeply rooted, context-specific insights into how communities experience and respond to the circumstances around them. Furthermore, by listening to community members' experiences and interactions with music, one can better assess how music may have contributed to transformation in a setting. It concludes by proposing ways in which these insights can inform, and possibly improve, future peacebuilding strategies involving music.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Peace returns, northern Uganda. Peace returns, our prayer," sang Acholi artist Bosmic Otim in his popular song about the 2006 to 2008 peace talks aimed at ending the longstanding conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda.[1] Local radio stations played "Peace Returns" extensively across northern Uganda's airwaves, during a period in which the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the violence waited anxiously to see if the tentative peace would hold. Community members regularly mention the song and credit it as giving hope to those caught in the middle of the violence. Like dozens of other northern Ugandan artists at the time, Otim used his music to promote and create peaceful change.

Among the Acholi of northern Uganda, the performing arts, especially music, resonate in the public sphere more than any other expressive form and are therefore a natural avenue for further exploration (McClain 2010; Opiyo and Hepner 2013). Historically and regionally known for its linkage to cultural performances, recent Acholi music has centered on the lived realities of a people who have experienced more than two decades of armed conflict. Today, nearly ten years since the guns have fallen silent and northern Uganda has experienced relative peace and stability, the Acholi people widely credit music with playing a central role in positively transforming the conflict. Moreover, they continue to call for local artists to influence the ongoing transition. Although the primary rebel faction, the LRA, still operates in neighboring countries, leading many community members to question whether the peace will hold, communities, civil society, and government officials regularly debate the best avenues for rebuilding northern Uganda's torn social and economic fabrics and facilitating accountability and reconciliation for those involved (Carrington and Naughton 2012; Tenove and Radziejowska 2013). For popular opinion on these issues of peacebuilding, the arts provide one meaningful avenue.

Drawing upon a conflict transformation (CT) framework—as well as more than two hundred conflict-related songs, and primary source interviews and focus group discussions with forty-six Acholi commu-

nity members and artists—this article explores how communities experience and perceive music as playing a role in creating peaceful change in northern Uganda. Listening to community members' perceptions on the role of music provides deeply rooted, context-specific insights into how communities experience and respond to the circumstances around them. Furthermore, by listening to community members' experiences and interactions with music, one can better assess how music may have contributed to transformation in the setting. In doing so, this article is divided into three sections. First is the conceptual and methodological overview of music and CT. Second is a description of Acholi musical traditions, contemporary genres, and the recent conflict. The third section explores how the community-identified roles of Acholi music as education, voice, memory, and healing relate to CT theory. The article concludes by proposing ways in which these insights can inform, and possibly improve, future peacebuilding strategies involving music.

II. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

This article was born out of a recent study on music and CT in the Acholi subregion of northern Uganda. The study was implemented in partnership with Music for Peace (MfP), an initiative I co-founded in 2009 with two Acholi artists, Jeff Korondo and Jahria Okwera, to promote the power of music in peacebuilding. The overarching study sought to understand how a variety of musical genres emergent in the Acholi subregion in the last thirty years have contributed to constructive change in individual, relational, structural, and cultural realms in the setting. By better understanding music's contributions to conflict transformation to date, the study also sought to better recognize and utilize the potential for music to influence Uganda's ongoing transition as it attempts to move forward.

Data were collected in two phases between June 2013 and January 2014. In phase one, the lyrics of 218 conflict-related songs were documented, translated, and categorized into a database for recurring themes such as genre, audience, actors, place, problem, response, and conflict transformation level. For the purpose of the study, conflict-related music can be defined as any music composed or recorded from 1986 to date with reference to violence in northern Uganda and its impact on society. In phase two, six interviews and four focus group

discussions were conducted in the Acholi subregion with a total of 46 participants, including 24 men and 22 women. Participants also completed a qualitative survey in order to further assess their views. Eager to unpack and share the rich community responses received from this broader study and aware of the missing perspective of community members and "beneficiaries" in much of the existing literature pertaining to music and peacebuilding (Bergh and Sloboda 2010: 8), this article is developed from the aforementioned data on community views of music and CT.

In his *Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, John Paul Lederach offers the following definition of CT: "Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice, in direct action and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships" (Lederach 2003: 14). CT seeks to "move [things] from one shape to a different one," to change the situation, not just to stop a problem (Lederach 2003: 29). This is even more crucial as new evidence suggests that "new outbreaks of conflicts often are the result of a recurrence of a conflict that was once thought to have ended" (Dayton and Kriesberg 2009: 2). In the context of northern Uganda, community members, including the artists, undoubtedly expressed an explicit desire to bring the conflict to an end by "resolving" the ongoing violence between the LRA and the government, as evidenced by the opening song by Otim that calls for resolution through the then-ongoing peace talks. However, there is other evidence, found within the lyrics of hundreds of other conflict-related songs and in the community-identified roles of Acholi music within the society, that communities desired—and arguably realized—"bigger picture" transformation, as well. After all, datasets reveal that between 1989 and 2005, "40 percent of the conflicts ending in peace agreements had seen a return to violence within five years" (Dayton and Kriesberg 2009: 2-3).

Along with the merits of conceptualizing peacebuilding as a process for creating constructive change, I adopt a CT lens in this article for two additional reasons. First, CT holds that peacebuilders must "develop a capacity to hear and engage the voices of identity" (Lederach 2003: 55), as I have attempted to do by including community perceptions on the role of music in CT in northern Uganda. Dialogue, in whatever form it may take, including creativity and the arts, offers one

form of engagement and hearing and provides a platform for people to share their deep-rooted perceptions (Lederach 2003: 58-59). According Bruce Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, "violent conflicts occur, in part, because of social-psychological processes related to dehumanization, stereotyping, and the application of negative attributions to the motivation of one's adversary and positive attributions to the motivations of one's own side" (Dayton and Kriesberg 2009: 4). Rather than turning away from perceptions and "othering," CT argues for turning to them, as they may hold the key to transformation. Furthermore, John Paul Lederach and Angela Lederach propose a "preferential option for the local community" because "social healing is best understood and explored at the level of real-life, face-to-face relationships" (2010: 9-10). Scholars such as Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond have noted that the recent "local turn" in peacebuilding was largely brought on by the growing prominence of "voice and confidence of actors from the global South" (2013: 766). This article asserts that communities, as fluid bodies comprised of the very people who experience and live the day-to-day realities of peace and conflict, are best placed to comment on how they interact with music and experience its transformative power.

Second, CT calls for a response to conflict that has the capacity to look at the situation through different lenses that show both the present situation and its causal patterns and context (Lederach 2003). As this article demonstrates, music does this with ease, oftentimes allowing one to hold the multiple complexities of a conflict's immediacy and underlying patterns in one coherent space. Musical frameworks provide opportunities to better understand and address the content, context, and structure of relationships in a conflict (Lederach 2003).

In recent years, academics and practitioners alike have expressed growing interest in the role of music in CT, as evidenced by the surge in articles, books, edited volumes, programs, and projects on the topic (Bergh and Sloboda 2010; Lederach and Lederach 2010; O'Connell and Castelo-Branco 2010; Urbain 2008; Zelizer 2003). Admittedly, not all of this literature or programming definitively falls within the peace studies or CT fields, but rather, it exhibits the interdisciplinary, transformative nature of music, drawing from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and ethnomusicology, and practice realms of development and peacebuilding. Without doubt, music in peacebuilding is a nascent field that is growing both in sophistication and reach.

III. MUSIC IN CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING ACHOLI MUSICAL TRADITIONS

According to J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "A village that has no organized music or neglects community singing, drumming, or dancing is said to be dead" (1966: 25). Within the musicology and ethnomusicology fields, scholars widely study African musical traditions and the integration of music into all aspects of social, economic, and political life (Chernoff 1979: 35; Emielu 2011; Nketia 1974; Rosenberg 2011; Tenaille 2002). However, in the social sciences and peace studies fields, many comment on events and activities on the continent without noting or analyzing the significance of music. But, as John Chernoff states, "There are very few important things which happen without music" (Chernoff 1979: 34). He has noted two major gaps in the study of African music. First, there is "lack of a unifying framework for evaluating the information about African music," and second, there is a "lack of theoretical perspective for integrating musical analysis with social analysis" (Chernoff 1979: 29). This article seeks to fill both gaps by offering community perceptions as a framework for evaluation, and by integrating musical analysis within CT theory and the northern Ugandan political context.

Acholi Oral Traditions and Taxonomies

Among the Acholi of northern Uganda, a Luo-speaking Nilotic people, music and dance reign supreme. Historically, Acholi music played a central role in fostering community, as well as safeguarding ritual, tradition, and authority (Atkinson 1994; Okumu 1999). Charles Okumu (1999: 65) divides Acholi oral traditions into three categories: prose narrative, formulaic, (i.e. riddle, simile and proverb) and song. He asserts that the three are not mutually exclusive. For instance, song often features in prose narrative and formulaic genres, playing a functional role to carry narratives forward or giving songs their poetic qualities (Okumu 1999).

Okumu (1999: 88) calls *wer,* or song, "the most popular and important genre of Acholi orality," since songs often accompany important rites of passage, such as birth, transitioning into adulthood, marriage, and death. According to his definition: "The term song denotes a composition orally performed to a responsive audience. We define songs as personal creations which spring from the innermost part of the in-

dividual who feels strongly about a particular subject within the social setting in which s/he resides" (Okumu 1999: 89).

Within Acholi orality, and important to its connection to CT, artists oftentimes position themselves as "the voice of the people," and in doing so receive protection if they criticize, often through satire, controversial leaders or public figures capable of retribution (Okumu 1999: 80). The late Okot p'Bitek, renowned for his literary works that depict the jarring effects of colonialization and modernization on Acholi culture, often used "satirical proverbs inter-woven into political song . . . like a needle which 'pricks' leaders so that they are brought into the correct social line" (Okumu 1999: 80). This is especially relevant to present-day Acholi music and its criticisms of the conflict and those benefiting from it. Thus, through the musical traditions of song, Acholi artists have utilized a cultural platform for social commentary that has widespread social acceptance, reach, and influence in the community.

Acholi Music Today

Within recent Acholi musical traditions, the many distinct and hybrid genres incorporate indigenous Acholi rhythms and instruments with modern trends and styles in contemporary digital instrumentality from the United States, Jamaica, and Nigeria, among others. The majority of contemporary artists in the Acholi music industry are male youth, although there are notable examples of well-known female performers, such as Lady Grace Atim, Pamela Peace, and Kella Charlotte, to name a few.

Within Acholi society, artists closely identify themselves as being part of the community, and community members recognize them as being "sons and daughters of the soil." The artists are known and accessible, and their personalities and personal styles affect how people view them. Most community members engage Acholi music on a daily basis through a variety of channels, including radio (perhaps the most pervasive), bars and nightclubs, impromptu performances (often in homesteads), church, concerts, etc. Furthermore, music is often highly participatory, being performed, danced, and/or listened to in the company of others.

Some of the most well-known Acholi artists of this era gained notoriety by releasing emotionally charged songs related to the recent conflict between the Ugandan government and various rebel groups and armed militias. From 1986 to 2006, the majority of the Acholi people,

including former and current local artists, experienced severe persecution, marginalization, and social suffering at the hands of government forces and rebel insurgencies, most notoriously the LRA (Finnström 2008). The violence displaced millions for more than ten years, and the rebels abducted an estimated 52,000 to 75,000 people (Pham et al. 2007: 3). As a result, northern Uganda has some of the highest rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) ever recorded (Roberts et al. 2008), and enormous developmental and societal challenges pertaining to recovery and reconstruction.[2]

During the periods of instability, local artists composed and shared widely among communities a multitude of songs that commented on the conflicts and their consequences (McClain 2012). Ranging from appeals to the rebels to return home and accept amnesty, to analysis on the peace talks in Juba, local music captured popular sentiments and shared them widely with all parties to the conflict, including displaced persons, rebels in the bush, and government forces. By "speaking" to these diverse, often opposing, segments of society, bridging and articulating various interests and identities, local artists served, and continue to serve, as pivotal stakeholders in transforming northern Uganda.

IV. COMMUNITY VIEWS ON THE ROLES OF ACHOLI MUSIC

According to Ian Cross (2003: 19), "Music can only make sense if it resonates." The following section explores four community-identified roles of Acholi music—as education, voice, memory, and healing—and contextualizes them in terms of the recent conflict, conflict-related Acholi songs, and CT literature. In doing so, the article demonstrates how these roles contribute to constructive change in the setting. The following community-identified roles and examples illustrate how Acholi music serves as a platform to hear and engage voices of identity and to connect, build bridges, and respond to real-life problems in relationships, core tenets of CT theory and practice.

Music as Education

Okumu (1999: 76) calls songs "regulators of social norms." Among the community members who participated in this study in the Acholi subregion, in every focus group or interview, someone mentioned the

role of music as education. For instance, "Music also helps in educating the people on how they should live in the current situation with peace and leave alone the conflict situation."[3] Among men, responses were offered like: "Music in Acholi culture helps in educating the youth, women, men, and even the young ones,"[4] and "Music during the conflict was basically for educating the people on peace. It also made people to know the rights of children and the roles of parents."[5] Among women, responses provided include: "Music has helped the youth to get back in line because they were getting wild while in the camps. Currently, that music has played a role to educate the youth. I have started seeing them get in groups that are productive in the community."[6] Through imparting knowledge, music teaches people good practices to follow and "bad practices to avoid."[7]

In his book on East African popular songs, Aaron Rosenberg argues: "The ability of songs to communicate aggressively and flexibly with the public has made them into powerful socializing agents" (Rosenberg 2011: 28). The participating community members regularly mentioned three themes that educative Acholi music often "teaches:" antistigmatization of former combatants, reduction of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and children's rights.

For example, in the antistigmatization song "Okwera Nono" (You Reject Me for Nothing), Acholi artist Jeff Korondo embodies the persona of many ex-combatants and explains from their perspective how the LRA, after abducting young children, forced them to commit atrocities against their will. Through this song, Korondo advocates for understanding and empathy of the returned persons. In the chorus, he sings, "My people, you reject me for nothing. Where do I go? Maybe it was meant to be like this. What if it were you? What would you do?"[8] In verse two of "Okwera Nono," Korondo explains the hardships many abducted children went through while in the captivity of the rebels:

> Our little children are coming back from the bush with different sorts of problems.
> See, they have come back from the bush after suffering from lots of problems.
> Carrying heavy loads, seeing people being murdered, and walking long distances.
> But apart from that, they are being forced to murder against their will.

This and other songs demystify the experiences and plight of abducted persons while with the rebels and upon return to their communities. They encourage empathy from listeners, rather than ostracization, and widen the narratives about the war and how it has affected different groups, especially those believed to be perpetrators.

While scholars and practitioners have regularly lamented the difficulties associated with measuring most relationship-centered transformation (Neufeldt 2011), the prevalence of theme-specific examples of music as education offered by respondents and the popularity of key songs on these themes allude to shared struggles for education and music's positive influence on these issues. Furthermore, with an influx of persons with dual victim-perpetrator identities following the LRA's tactics of abducting and forcibly recruiting civilians, as well as an alarming rise in incidents of domestic violence and defilement, northern Ugandan's conflicts are being domesticated (Acord 2010: 5; Okello and Hovil 2007: 442-443). Rather than playing out in running battles between armed actors in the bush, violence has entered the home and family spheres. One cannot deny the pervasive nature of conflicts related to these themes, and the significance of songs that foster dialogue between the seemingly opposing groups in society, such as men and women, children and parents, and ex-combatants and their communities.

As another example, community members widely credited female artist Kella Charlotte's song, "Mak Kwan—Uganda" (Study Hard—Uganda), with influencing their actions and informing their decisions pertaining to their children.[9] In the chorus of "Mak Kwan—Uganda," Charlotte sings:

> Study very hard so that you are able to stand up high, please my girl.
> Study very hard so that you are able to stand tall. Please, my daughter, study hard.
> Look here, my daughter. If you study hard, you will get money, and the money will be helpful.
> The men will not run away. My daughter, please study hard. [x2]
> This is not a game because you will become pregnant. This is not a game because tomorrow it will become real.
> Once you are done with school, you will come back, and the men will come after you.

Although music is one form of education, community members still acknowledge the role of the formal education sector in further developing and nurturing the minds of young people. They credit Charlotte's song with increasing the numbers of girls in schools by sensitizing parents on the value of formal education. Historically, as a patriarchal society, the Acholi prioritized boy-child over girl-child education, with many families sending their girls for limited schooling, if at all. According to Rosenberg, one can gauge the effects of music as "socializing agents, homiletic tools and stimulating entertainment" by noting the extent to which individuals "absorb and employ phrases from songs . . . and incorporate [such songs] into their lives" (2011: 29-30). Therefore, gauging by the number of times male and female respondents positively mentioned Charlotte's song in the course of discussions, "Mak Kwan—Uganda" arguably achieved, at least in part, its desired impact of educating parents on the value of girl-child education.

Acholi music's educative ability lies firmly rooted in its communicative properties. According to a female community member, "Music is to educate and a way of communication."[10] The conflict and its mass displacement often disrupted formal education and typical methods of communication among the Acholi. Music, through its historical role to educate, has filled gaps in the conflict and postconflict periods and contributed to transforming individual perceptions and conflictual relationships within society, while bolstering community support for institutions, such as the formal education sector. In doing so, it provides a medium through which to initiate, to varying degrees, the four levels of conflict transformation: personal, relational, structural, and cultural change (Lederach 2003).

Music as Voice

As a respondent shares, "Music helps amplify the voice of the voiceless."[11] According to Rosenberg, "Popular songs articulate aspects of the circumstances of the average individual" (2011: 27). In northern Uganda during the conflict period, "average" oftentimes consisted of displacement, abduction, hunger, disease, looting, and killing. In such settings of protracted violence and suffering, music has the potential to give people a sense of voice, which suggests internal and external movement, both within a person and in the form of a "social echo and resonance that emerges from collective spaces that build meaningful conversation" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 7). According to

Thomas Porter, there is need to provide "a space, a time, and a process where people can feel empowered to find their own voice, tell their own stories, and find their own healing solution" (2010: 65). Lederach and Lederach (2010: 65) cite two levels of voice: powerlessness, as well as space and relationships. At the first level of powerlessness, victims who express voicelessness often report feeling left out of processes that relate to their circumstances, and instead, feel others conduct those processes on their behalf. At the second level of space and relationships, victims who express having a voice often report that people hear them and then feel proximate to the "significant processes affecting their lives" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 65). Porter (2010: 77) suggests: "Generally people can live with a decision they may not actually prefer if they have had a voice in that decision or resolution." At a deeper level, Lederach and Lederach suggest that voicelessness equates to a loss of personhood (Lederach and Lederach 2010), such that when community members claim that artists give them a voice, it is as if music is sonically filling that void and restoring their perceived loss of humanity.

Furthermore, by saying that artists give them a voice, community members suggest that the artists have the power to participate, on their behalf, in processes of "acknowledgment, respectful exchange, [and] meaningful conversation, [which] affect actual decisions that affect their lives" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 66). They view the artists as being in closer proximity and relationship to the decision-makers, thus having greater capacity to carry their messages forward to those with the power to make changes.

Perhaps, the major way in which Acholi music facilitated a sense of voice was in fostering communication between the rebels and communities. Harold Saunders (Saunders 1999: 39), in his seminal work on sustained dialogue and public peace processes, champions nonofficial channels of communication and dialogue that can "broaden the range of interaction, sharpen understanding, deepen communication, and partly replace adversarial interaction and contests of forces as a means of resolving differences." In both the absence and midst of governmental efforts to resolve the conflict—through a variety of measures, including blanket amnesty, peace talks, and military campaigns—Acholi artists remained in near-constant communication with the rebels through their music. Almost as a proxy for the local communities, they produced numerous songs in the early to mid-2000s urging the rebels to abandon rebellion and come back home.

Two such songs, "Omera Dwog Gang" (My Brother, Come Home) by Lady Grace Atim and "Dwog Paco" (Come back Home) by Jahria Okwera, were immensely popular. At the height of the conflict, local radio stations would play these songs on radio programs that featured ex-combatants who had recently returned from the bush (Omach 2011: 290). The recent returnees would urge on-air for the rebels still at-large to come back home. At times, rebel commanders would call in to such programs and speak to the communities listening, or those on-air would cite the songs and programs that they heard from the bush as giving them the courage to return.[12]

In "Omera Dwog Gang," Atim refers to the rebels as her brothers and pleads with them to end the suffering that the Acholi people experienced because of the war:

> We have really died. Brothers, come back home.
> Now see, the Acholi have become like wild cats.
> Now see, the Acholi are finished.
> Listen how our mothers are crying.
> Peace talks are here. Amnesty is also in place.
> We have really died, and it is enough. Brothers, come back home.[13]

Okwera uses language similar to Atim, calling the rebels his brothers and sisters. In verse two of "Dwog Paco," he sings:

> Listen, all people call for you, my brother, to change your attitude.
> You, my sister, change your attitude.
> People want peace, and they are crying.
> Listen to my voice and think.
> I am your brother, and I do not deceive you.
> Listen, your family members are calling you because people there love you.
> All people are crying.
> People want all of you to come back.[14]

When community members were asked what roles artists played in bringing peace to northern Uganda, their first response was nearly always something along the lines of: "[M]ost of the artists sang songs to encourage the rebels to come back home, and indeed, most of them

came."[15] When asked if Acholi music contributed to bringing those in the bush home, 78 percent of respondents to the aforementioned survey answered "always," "often," or "sometimes."

At the time these songs were composed, the average Acholi did not have the means or power to engage in such dialogue with rebels or government officials. They largely relied on the artists to communicate their perspectives and views. Within the CT literature, this points to immense potential through music and artists for vertical and horizontal integration, which acknowledges and identifies actors and activities that cut across and between sectors of society (Lederach 1997). Some artists in northern Uganda, as "change agents," have had the capacity to "cut" horizontally across lower and middle levels of society, the grassroots and middle-range leadership. They also cut vertically, connecting these two lower levels with top-level leadership, such as the rebel commanders and the government officials. Much of this is possible through their ability to exercise the power of voice.

Music as Memory

According to a respondent, "Music is very important because it will help to store information that we, the current generation, went through, and the future generation will have a chance of knowing it, too."[16] Many have noted that music has the capacity to take us back in time (Lederach and Lederach 2010; Snyder 2001). For instance, songs facilitate a sort of "transportability," in which different time periods—past, present and future—seem to merge, and people "are capable of holding at the same time a sensation of being in more than one spatial and temporal sphere" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 135). Among the Acholi, where much of the tradition has been remembered in oral form, music plays a pivotal role in storing past knowledge and memorializing past people and events. As summarized by one respondent: "People would compose songs about events, about occurrences, and that is how they would store it and remember it. They would remember that in [this] period, [this] happened. So, music was a sort of historical record—so easy to remember and so easy to pass on to the next generation. It was also a way of imparting knowledge to people, girls and boys".[17] Another community member seconded this role, adding that "information was stored in musical form for educating the future generation."[18] In this role, music as memory connects very closely to its role as education among the Acholi.

However, in addition to preserving accounts of the past for future generations, music in northern Uganda plays a role in preserving memories of identity. According to Lederach and Lederach (2010: 129): "Central rather than periphery, music creates the soundscape of memory . . . . Sound and song become tools that locate a person, provide a compass that makes sense of things and creates meaning." Through memorializing past events, especially those related to conflict, Acholi artists, in their music, seek to make meaning of the events and situate these experiences within a broader cultural and historical framework. In doing so, they provide the present generation with a common frame of reference. As Lederach and Lederach (2010: 13) assert: "[V]iolence and response to violence creates the need for people to locate themselves and name the realities that surround them." Songs become "like maps of geography" that "provide a sense of location, name, and meaning" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 13).

According to Chernoff (1979: 35): "[M]usic itself provides a basis for thinking around and ensuring the integrity of a group, like a symbolic characterization of a person's heritage." Many community members I spoke to articulated this role of music as memory to maintain traditions and help people to "know their culture."[19] However, at times, the memories and feelings music evokes can become so deep in these "songlines,"[20] that they lead to sadness so intense that an artist can even destroy his or her instrument.[21]

Countless songs that Acholi artists released in the last decade have focused on the sadness that has come from this loss of self and culture because of the war. With a recent history characterized by mass displacement, death, and poverty for much of the population, the content of the songs reflects this reality. Whereas some artists choose to lament the circumstances, others offer prescriptions for change. For instance, in only eight minutes, the song "Peko me Camp" (Problems in the Camp) by the music group Guti Kwaro highlights a plethora of issues that plagued the communities during the war, including poverty, lack of cattle, hunger, alcoholism, nongovernmental organization (NGO) shortcomings, HIV/AIDS, displacement, lack of infrastructure, inequality, and death.[22] Without doubt, the situations they describe memorialize the everyday experiences of millions of Acholi during the conflict. As a response to these hardships, they call for togetherness, improved international and NGO assistance, going home (i.e. leaving the camps), infrastructure development, and ultimately, negotiations between the rebels and the government. Despite this ad-

vocacy for change and the hope for a better future, lines such as "We have suffered so much. Even Jinja bats live better than us," and "If I was staying somewhere, I would have served my clan" connote a perceived loss of personhood and purpose.

Another powerful example of music in the wake of violence, reflecting memory and identity, can be found in the song "Nene Con" (Long Time) by Acholi artist BSG Labongo. In the chorus, Labongo sings: "For a long time, we used to move while our heads were held high. But now days, we move as our heads are bowed down."[23] The music video that accompanies this song depicts life in the internally displaced persons camps, characterized by overcrowding, idleness, and drinking alcohol.[24] "Nene Con" provides another avenue for the community to make meaning out of the current situation by comparing the context of the past and the historical identities of "being Acholi," to the current incongruous reality of life characterized by violence and conflict.

In CT, the role of music as memory must not be overlooked. With this role comes a sense of identity, heritage, and culture, not only a factual record of the past. According to John M. O'Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco (2010: vii), there is a "potential of music to articulate distinctive cultural perspectives as an integral part of harmonious solutions." Music creates space in the present for "restorying," a process Lederach describes as "the weaving of a legitimate and community-determined place [for one's stories] among others' stories" (Lederach 2005: 140). Furthermore: "While language as prose tends to delimit interpretation . . . , music as practice serves to liberate interpretation according to the multiple views of audience reception" (O'Connell 2010: 2). Oftentimes, groups who undergo violence develop a "chosen trauma" that they pass from generation to generation, creating a narrative of identity of "who we are as a people and a place" (Lederach 2005: 142). Therefore, songs become maps for charting individual and collective histories, preserving accounts for future generations and also providing markers of identity to listeners in the present and future context. Music promotes "iterative learning" that makes and remakes meaning of an integrated past, present and future (Lederach 2003: 58). With the ultimate goal of CT being to facilitate the movement of situations of conflict into more peaceful states, songs and how affected persons and communities interpret and understand them may provide valuable insights into the shared identity of a group and how these identities and memories can be engaged in their fullest sense to promote transformation.

Music as Healing

According to a respondent, "Whenever I listen to music, I get consoled and forget of tomorrow and think of the day."[25] Within the growing field of music therapy, there is mounting evidence that "music can help cure a whole range of illnesses, and that it can promote well-being at many different levels: physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual" (Urbain 2008: 3). According to June Boyce-Tillman (1996: 223), "Music is a manipulative art" that one cannot escape. However, by developing a greater awareness of how different types of music influence one's moods, one can harness the "listening mode of musical experience for [healing], for resolving [one's] inner conflicts" (Boyce-Tillman 1996: 223). Within settings of protracted violence, such as Kenya (Akombo 2009) and Israel-Palestine (Al-Taee 2002), and with refugees in resettlement countries, such as Germany (Zharinova-Sanderson 2004), the efforts of music therapists and popular artists have contributed to the healing of victims of conflict.

Within peace studies, Lederach and Lederach and others (Gobodo-Madikizela and Van der Merwe 2009; Levinge 1996; Yoder and Zehr 2005) have used the lens of social healing to better understand the effects on societies and individuals when music elicits feelings "not always easily conveyed through the spoken word" and experiences not easily "conveyed by explanation or conversation" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 120). Social healing can be defined as "the capacity of communities and their respective individuals to survive, locate voice, and resiliently innovate spaces of interaction that nurture meaningful conversation and purposeful action in the midst and aftermath of escalated and structural violence" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 208). In settings of conflict, music can serve as a container and space for conflict through which individuals and communities can analyze and resolve intense emotions and feelings (Levinge 1996: 244).

When exploring the role of music in northern Uganda among the Acholi, respondents offered statements, such as: "Music helps in encouraging and strengthening one in situations where things are very hard"[26] and "Music also strengthens us and our children who were abducted to have faith that one day they will get to see home."[27] When asked why artists sing, one woman said, "They sing purposely to console the community on the past events."[28] Each focus group offered countless examples of their favorite songs and why they liked them. Popular songs by well-known artists, such as Opio Twongweno, Justin Obol

Simpleman, Jeff Korondo, Rosalyn Atim, Jahria Okwera, and Lucky David Wilson were all mentioned. Several respondents recounted the song "Kuc Cok Dwogo" (Peace Is about to Return) by the late Dida Moses, saying that it gave people hope that the worst was over in the early days of the Juba peace talks.[29] In one verse of "Kuc Cok Dwogo," Moses sings:

> For me today, I sing because death is too much for us.
> But even though there is death, do not mind.
> Peace is soon coming back.
> We are smelling it.
> For me, I have smelt it.
> It is going to surprise us.[30]

Others mentioned gospel songs, saying, "Music has also rebuilt broken relationships amongst people and God."[31] For nearly every song they mentioned, they attributed their fondness to the ways in which the songs consoled them and gave them hope for the future. For example, Bosmic Otim's song "Mama" helped one woman "persevere for the sake of [her] children despite the challenges."[32]

The fact that these examples allude to relief and healing during the violence, as well as in the present postconflict period, should challenge our understanding of when healing and reconciliation take place in the lifetime of a conflict system. CT theorists often challenge the assumptions held in prevalent peace and conflict models, such as Michael Lund's "Curve of Conflict" (Lund 1996: 38), which says that the need and potential for healing and reconciliation take place in the postconflict phase, "around and after signed peace agreements and ceasefires" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 48). There is growing literature that explores the everyday indicators of peace and how communities develop routines of normalcy, even in the midst of protracted violence (Autesserre 2010; Mac Ginty 2013; Theidon 2014). Acknowledging the cyclical patterns of violence and conflict, and upholding a tenet of CT that recognizes that conflict is part and parcel of the human experience (and the goal is thus to learn how to handle conflict nonviolently), such claims assert that healing and reconciliation must, and oftentimes do, "take place in highly dynamic and unpredictable settings whether or not peace agreements have been signed" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 45). CT theory further asserts that change, including healing, is circular and multidimensional, with periods of progress and periods of regression (Led-

erach 2003). Acholi music captures this landscape, with songs that depict pervasive feelings of hope and promise, such as Moses's "Kuc Cok Dwogo", as well as despair and lament. However, whilst acknowledging the circularity of healing, the responses from community members I interviewed in northern Uganda underscore music's healing potential, with nearly every conversation alluding to the psychosocial relief offered by Acholi music during the height of the conflict period and in its wake.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As this article asserts, the Acholi of northern Uganda have widely employed music as a tool for transforming the longstanding conflicts brought about by decades of armed violence between the government and various nonstate actors. In considering the hundreds of conflict-related songs produced by Acholi artists in the recent past, and the long-established traditions of Acholi orality, especially through song which often challenges the status quo, community-identified roles of Acholi music as education, voice, memory, and healing provide deeper insight into music's contribution to constructive change at individual, relational, structural, and cultural levels.

For instance, because Acholi music historically played a role in educating the population, it made for a particularly suitable medium through which to pass messages related to peace. Because it offered relief and made an otherwise powerless-feeling group feel heard and consoled, listening to music was, and continues to be, a very popular pastime in northern Uganda, with nearly all subsets of the population accessing local music through the radio and digital media. As demonstrated throughout this article, the capacity of media to facilitate transformative dialogue, communication, and change has enormous potential and therefore merits further investigation in future research.

Further, listening to communities, whether through facilitated discussions and interviews, or through local music, is key to understanding how they view and respond to the circumstances around them. According to O'Connell (2010: 4), "Music provides an excellent medium for understanding conflict." Rather than hypothesize in a vacuum, taking the time to listen to grassroots views on a subject and listening to their music, provided that it resonates among much of the community, can generate insights that are very rooted in the local context and experience, something that CT holds as critical to creating positive change.

Furthermore, due to challenges measuring levels of change and conflict transformation resulting from music, this article demonstrates how combining qualitative community perceptions, together with analysis of popular peace songs, provides greater insight into how communities understand and experience music's role in peace processes.

Although every situation is context-specific, the universality of music may provide crucial insights and transformative potential in other settings. Not only can inquiring into the roles of music in particular contexts offer invaluable insights into local peace and conflict dynamics, it can provide strategic entry-points for peacebuilders to support transformation of conflict systems.

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NOTES

1. Bosmic Otim, "Peace Returns," n.d.
2. According to Roberts et. al.'s study, 54 percent of 1210 respondents accessed in northern Uganda met symptom criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Roberts et al. 2008: 4. Sixty-seven percent of respondents met symptom criteria for depression.
3. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
4. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
5. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
6. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
7. Male civil society leader, interview with author, Gulu town, Uganda, December 19, 2013.
8. Jeff Korondo, "Okwera Nono" (You Reject Me for Nothing), translated by Jeff Korondo, 2008.
9. Kella Charlotte, "Mak Kwan" Uganda (Study Hard, Uganda), translated by Ketty Anyeko, n.d.

10. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
11. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
12. Jahria Okwera, interview with author, Gulu town, Uganda, December 21, 2013.
13. Lady Grace Atim, "Omera Dwog Gang" (My Brother, Come Home), translated by Joyce Abalo, n.d.
14. Jahria Okwera, "Dwog Paco" (Come back Home), translated by Joyce Abalo, 2003.
15. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
16. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
17. Male civil society leader, interview with author, Gulu town, Uganda, December 19, 2013.
18. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
19. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
20. Lederach and Lederach draw upon the work of Judy Atkinson (2002) to apply the term "songlines" as a "metaphor to identify the journey of healing that links place with finding oneself in terms of geographic connection and transgenerational location" (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 60).
21. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
22. Guti Kwaro, "Peko me Camp (Problems in the Camp)," translated by Steward Akera, n.d.
23. BSG Labongo, "Nene Con (Long Time)," translated by Steward Akera, n.d.
24. BSG Labongo, "NENECHON | WWW.ACHOLIWEB.COM | BY BSG LABONGO | ACHOLI HIP HOP MUSIC VIDEO," YouTube video, 4:39, April 8, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9hJVWxIJUw (accessed December 27, 2014).
25. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.

26. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
27. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
28. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
29. Male civil society leader, interview with author, Gulu town, Uganda, December 19, 2013; Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.
30. Dida Moses, "Kuc Cok Dwogo (Peace Is about to Return)," translated by Joyce Abalo, n.d.
31. Male community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 12, 2013.
32. Female community member, focus group discussion with author, translated by Joyce Abalo, Gulu district, Uganda, December 16, 2013.

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