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Lateral texts and circuits of value: Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Wer pa Lawino*

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ABSTRACT

African writers are increasingly producing literary texts that appear almost simultaneously in two languages – an indigenous African language and English. One of these texts is often considered a translation while the other is said to be the original. As Harry Garuba has argued, this model does not adequately capture the relationship between these texts for several reasons, not least of all because this conventional description assumes a vertical relationship between the original and translation. To adequately deal with texts such as *Song of Lawino* and *Wer per Lawino,* we need to work with a model of lateral textuality that recognises each text as being inserted into a specific circuit of value that may not be identical with the circuit of value through which the other travels. Taking the idea of lateral textuality and Gikandi's identification of the different value accorded to *Song of Lawino* in East African literature in English in relation to the value accorded to *Wer per Lawino* within the tradition of "African writing in African languages," as our point of departure, this paper explores the different circuits of value in which these two texts have been inserted and the manner in which they have acquired value with each of them.

KEYWORDS

Song of Lawino; *Wer pa Lawino*; Okot p'Bitek; lateral textuality; circuits of value

> What is lost in these debates about the translator's role in relation to his or her target audience is the status of the original itself: is there a *Wer pa Lawino* that can claim to be original? …by the time the Acholi text was published, the English translation, *Song of Lawino,* was already established as a classic of African literature in English. *Wer pa Lawino* was thus secondary to *Song of Lawino.* But even if we grant *Wer pa Lawino* the status of an original in the textual sense, it will be a mistake to extend this originality to cultural authenticity, for Okot p'Bitek's text in Acholi was only original to the extent that it was first written in that language. (Gikandi 2011, 261)

> Okot did not translate *Wer pa Lawino* into *Song of Lawino.* He wrote two books: *Wer pa Lawino* (a very deep, philosophical book in Acholi, a book of morals, religion, anthropology, and wisdom) and a second light book *Song of Lawino.* In *Song of Lawino,* Okot the jester – the cultural critic of the whiteman, the whitewoman, and their African imitators – is in the fore. Whatever was striking, dramatic, and sarcastic was highlighted. And, by the same token, whatever was more philosophical and deeper was suppressed or left out. (Lo Liyong 1993, 87)

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In a wide-ranging discussion of the crisis of comparative literature and the problem of eurocentrism rooted in it at the moment of its formation as a discipline, Simon Gikandi in the essay "Contested Grammars: Comparative Literature, Translation, and the Challenge of Locality" (Gikandi 2011) attempts to dissect the challenges of locality that comparative literature faces when it moves beyond its European confines and its ready reliance on the ability to transfer synchronic models to the languages and literary traditions of East Asia. In his view:

> Often, the dilation of the geography of comparative literature was nothing more than the export of synchronic models to other parts of the world. This explains why the expansion of comparative literature beyond the boundaries of European languages seemed to work best when the languages to be compared were, or appeared to be, synchronic. Indeed, if comparative literature departments have appeared eager to embrace the literatures of East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea) rather than those of Africa and South Asia, it is because they promised cultural entities that could be disciplined into a unified structure that would then enable West/East comparisons. (2011, 258)

He follows this with the question: "What was to be done with the Babel of Africa and South Asia?" (258). In short, what was to be done with those languages to which synchronic structures could not readily be exported, those African and South Asian languages that could not readily be disciplined into a unified structure? His response is that two options presented themselves: the first was to place them under the umbrella of area studies and "[t]he second was to consider translation as the only logical mechanism for collaring these literatures into the existing model of comparative literature" (259). However, as his essay goes to show, the "logical mechanism" of translation which the second option presents turns out not to be as neatly and transparently logical as we would assume when applied to the languages and literatures of Africa. Moreover, European ideas about texts and translation are not directly transferable to African literary texts; in fact, they fall apart when applied to these textual traditions. For example, to assume that there is a stable, pre-existing text always already there, available to be translated – the model on which conventional European ideas of translation function – is to discount the nature and histories of African languages and their forms of literary textuality. Such an assumption flies in the face of these local histories of textuality and translation. The epigraph with which this essay begins shows that it would constitute a misrecognition of these local forms of textuality and, specifically, the history of the writing and publication of the two texts to regard *Song of Lawino* as a translation of *Wer pa Lawino* in the conventional sense. This is what Gikandi refers to as the challenge of locality – instances where the local material refuses to fit into the authorised categories of description and analysis.

One of the lessons that postcolonial studies continually teaches is that some of the normative concepts and categories that guarantee the coherence of our disciplines and analytical procedures do not travel well when they move outside of their European provenance. The idea of original and translation is one such conceptual framework that travels poorly, and Okot p'Bitek's pair of texts constitute one example among several of these categories failing the challenge of locality. If we move beyond the two texts under consideration and look at African literature in general, the problems with adopting the normative model of original and translation multiply. In the review essay "Scholarship in African Universities," one of the authors of this article – Harry Garuba – reminds us that:

> African writers – at least in the early nationalistic phase of modern African literature – never tired of insisting that while they write in English, French or Portuguese, as the case may be, they think and compose in their own mother tongue (*sic*). This is rather like saying that their writings were in effect translations; that the "originals" which African literary criticism should take as its object of study existed at some primary level in a different language, different from that reproduced in the text before us. A substantial part of the scholarly/critical analysis of African literary texts focuses on how the English or French text analysed appropriates and approximates the linguistic structures of some other language, usually the author's first language. (2006, 129)

In addition to this layer of complexity where the original text claims to be a translation, Taban Lo Liyong's re-translation of *Wer pa Lawino* as *The Defence of Lawino* even further problematises the already unsettled distinction between translation and original in African literary cultures. In "On Translating the 'Untranslated': Chapter 14 of Wer pa Lawino by Okot p'Bitek' (Lo Liyong 1993), the commentary piece from which our second epigraph is taken, Taban goes so far as to claim that Okot wrote two different books rather than translating one text from one language into another. This – to some degree – goes further than the first epigraph which merely unsettles the distinction between original and translation as conventionally conceived. Both, however, question the way in which the relationship between these two texts is normally represented.

In line with this problematisation, the first epigraph does something else. By focusing on the publication history of both texts, it highlights the fact that "by the time the Acholi text was published, the English translation, *Song of Lawino* was already established as a classic of African literature in English" (2011, 261). What this means is that the "translation" was not dependent on the "original" for its value, in the conventional way in which this relationship is figured and functions. Since the Acholi original was not available in the form of a printed, published text within the public domain by the time *Song of Lawino* became a classic, it existed for many critics and commentators only as a notional text, an intangible, ghostly presence said to be the source of the translation. This already tenuous link is further diminished when we think of the value of each text. In a recent entry in *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* (2004, 433), Gikandi says that:

> Within the context of African writing in African languages, *Song of Lawino* did not mark a new event, but within the tradition of East African writing in English, a tradition struggling to establish its own identity, the poem enabled writers in the region to overcome a formidable psychological barrier – the belief that African oral forms could not be the basis of refined poetry and that the theme of cultural and political conflict "was not the kind of thing that a fine writer in the English tradition should be concerned with" (Rubadiri 1070, 151). *Song of Lawino* was the first poem in East Africa to "break free of the stranglehold of British writing" (Nazareth 1984, 10) and to assert the centrality of oral forms of literary production (see Heron 1976; Lindfors 1984).

In short, Gikandi is here pressing his problematisation of the original/translation relationship to its limit by claiming that the value of *Song of Lawino* within the tradition of African literature in English is different from its value in Acholi and the tradition of writing in African languages, implicitly confirming Taban's two-books hypothesis. It is important at this point to note that Taban was so dissatisfied with Okot's translation of *Wer pa Lawino* and *Song of Lawino* that he (Taban) embarked upon a new translation effort, to once again translate the Acholi text into English. This effort resulted in a second English version of the text entitled *The Defence of Lawino* which the translator claims is a more faithful rendering

of the Acholi text. This may be the real reason why Taban says in the preface to his translation that when he began his translation, he refused to look at the English version so as not to be influenced by it. "Since I embarked on the translation, I have never revisited Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* at all. I wanted my translation to bear the burden of Lawino's Acholi version and not be coloured by Okot's mannerisms and poetics of translation. I would have cheated if I had tried to rework Okot's version but not ventured to make my own" (p'Bitek 2001, xii). What Taban is trying to do here is not only to cast off the shadow of Okot's translation but also to displace the critical reception and history of the English version and its value-constituting mechanisms and practices and replace it with an Acholi one. As he states it, the objective is "*to return the discussion to where it was:* Lawino discoursing on African ways of life to fellow Africans without too much consciousness about the presence of the whites" (p'Bitek 2001, xvi, emphasis added). In essence, what he seeks to do is reactivate the text within a different circuit of value, different from that of African literature in English. Returning the discussion to where it was effectively means inserting *Wer pa Lawino* into an Acholi universe of discourse and a circuit of value that derives from this world. Taban "ventured to make [his] own" English text because he knew that *Song of Lawino* was constructed to enter into an English circuit of value and wanted a text that would be valued through an Acholi lens.

Our essay begins at this juncture: it explores the relationships between two texts – both written by Okot p'Bitek, the one in Acholi and the other in English – and names the relationship between them as one of lateral textuality rather than one of original and translation. Though the latter version is usually considered a translation of the former in the conventional description, this essay rejects this characterisation and problematises the idea of original and translation with regard to African literary texts. It is worth noting at this point that African writers are increasingly producing literary texts that appear almost simultaneously in two languages – an indigenous African language and English. One of these texts is often considered a translation while the other is said to be the original. As Garuba has argued in "On Lateral Textuality: African Writing, Postcolonial Studies and the Pitfalls of Translation" (Garuba 2013), this translation model does not adequately capture the relationship between these texts for several reasons, which he enumerates in that piece. One major reason he identifies for this is that the conventional description assumes a vertical relationship between the original and the translation, where the original is both source text and source of value. As the background discussions above show, the idea of a source text which serves as the original for the English translation is problematic as is the idea that the value of the translation is tied to the value of this source text. This is why he proposes that to adequately deal with texts of this nature, we need to work with a model of *lateral textuality* that recognises that each text is inserted into a specific *circuit of value* that may or may not be similar to or identical with the circuit of value through which the other travels.

This essay builds upon the proposition that rather than think of originals and translations we should dispose of this vocabulary of original/translation which encourages us to think in vertical, hierarchical terms and instead work with a conception of the relationship between these texts as horizontal and lateral. Working with a conception of lateral textuality also allows us to uncouple the texts and to examine how each one is inserted into its particular literary tradition and the manner in which it partakes in its specific circuit of value. What we will be doing in this essay, therefore, is to follow *Song of Lawino* and *Wer pa Lawino* through their respective circuits of value to understand how the former is valued within

the tradition of African literature in English and how the latter is valued within the Acholi tradition of verbal expression.

This uncoupling is also important because the paradigm of translation is so ingrained in our imagination and in our critical practices that it prevents us from exploring other crucial critical issues that would otherwise command our attention.

Taking the idea of lateral textuality, Taban's two-books hypothesis and Gikandi's identification of the different value accorded to *Song of Lawino* in East African literature in English in relation to the value accorded to *Wer pa Lawino* within the tradition of "African writing in African languages," we explore the manner in which each of these texts has acquired and accumulated value within their communities of interpretation and institutions of recognition. The question we ask is whether the regimes and institutions of recognition and value in African literature in English are the same as those that exist for Acholi literature: are the valued themes and valued artistic strategies similar or different? In seeking to answer this question, we examine the critical literature on the texts to extract the reasons given by commentators and critics about the importance and significance of *Song of Lawino* within the tradition of African literature in English, and then look into the reasons advanced by commentators, critics and respondents about why *Wer pa Lawino* is valued in the Acholi tradition of verbal expression.

Since the reasons for the "canonisation" of *Song of Lawino* in African literature in English are fairly well known, we simply identify these and discuss them in relation to disjuncture between the disciplinary apparatus inherited from the tradition of English Studies and the poetic forms and the practice of poetry in the local African context. We then move on to the value-constituting mechanism and practices within Acholi society and culture. The aim is to elaborate upon the differences between the manner in which *Wer pa Lawino* is valued within the Acholi tradition and how it is valued within the English tradition.

Grounds of comparison: *Song of Lawino,* otherness and a regime of textual governmentality

There is a consensus that the value and significance of *Song of Lawino* to the tradition of East African literature in English is that it broke the stranglehold of "the belief that African oral forms could not be the basis of refined poetry" and allowed writers to explore genres, forms and themes outside those authorised by the tradition of English poetry. For example, rather than simply try for lyrics, sonnets, odes, and so on, you could write poetry as *song* and be liberated from all of the conventions of English verse and verse forms. In short, what Okot's poem did was enable a generation of writers to break free of a specific form of literary/textual governmentality that defined and policed the bounds and boundaries of what could legitimately be considered to be poetry in English. Take, for example, the opening verse of *Song of Lawino*:

> Husband, now you despise me
> Now you treat me with spite
> And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt;
> Son of the Chief,
> Now you compare me
> With the rubbish in the rubbish pit
> You say you no longer want me
> Because I am like the things left behind

> In the deserted homestead.
> (1984, 34)

The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o has remarked that when Taban Lo Liyong lamented that East Africa was a literary desert in his *Transition* magazine essay "Can we Correct Literary Barrenness in East Africa?" reproduced in his book *The Last Word* (Lo Liyong 1969, 23–42) he was unable to see the vast amount of oral literary performances and productions happening all around him because he could only see literature as a specific form of textual production which excluded all of these. "When will the Nile valley find a Dickens or a Conrad?" He laments. "Or a Mark Twain? Or a Joyce Cary? Is Rudyard Kipling coming to Mowgli our national parks?...give us a writer to paint the woes and joys of the day. Kisenyi awaits a Zola to give it fictional immortality" (Lo Liyong 1969, 27, 28). This shows that it is difficult to overestimate the role of English in the production of a kind of literary subject who could not recognise the literary in his own environment. The colonial (English, if you like) regime of textual governmentality (or, stated somewhat tautologically, the codes governing literary conduct) produced a specific rupture or disjunction between the disciplinary apparatus inherited from English literary studies and the practice of poetry in the local (Acholi) context. To fully understand the impact of *Song,* it is important to introduce the concepts of subjectivisation and textual governmentality (Foucault 1988a, 1988b, 1991) into the discussion.

Foucault's notion of governmentality, a neologism first introduced in his lectures at the College de France, has become an important critical concept for understanding the manner in which subjects are made to willingly/voluntarily behave as they ought to through the operations of power, without physical or violent coercion. In his original formulation, governmentality

> is a question not of imposing laws on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even using laws themselves as tactics to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved (1991, 95).

That is to say simply that governmentality refers to the technologies of power through which self-regulating, self-governing subjects are produced. Extending this to the colonies, David Scott in "Colonial Governmentality" argues that:

> In the colonial world, the problem of *modern power* turned on the politico-ethical project of producing subjects and governing their conduct. What this required was the concerted attempt to alter the political and social worlds of the colonized, an attempt to transform and redefine the very condition of the desiring subject (1995, 214).

There has been a fair amount of scholarship on colonial governmentality, the role of missions and mission schools, and the ways in which Africans constituted themselves as subjects in relation to colonial/missionary/modern regimes of power and practice [for example, the Ferguson (1990), Comaroff and Comaroff (1991), Comaroff (2002), Geschiere (1997), Geschiere and Meyer (1999), Mbembe (2000), Peel (2000), Marshall (2009)]. In much of this work, the dominant operative concepts have been those of translation and cultural translation. However, there has not been a similar amount of work on the ways in which the new epistemic structures introduced by colonial conquest and educational institutions set about making textual subjects of the colonised. And it is in this domain of textual capture that Okot's text makes its enduring mark in African literature in English by disrupting a specific regime of textual governmentality and the forms of literary subjectivity it produced.

English literature, its literary genres, conventions and texts were part of the governmental technologies deployed to gain control over the minds of "natives" to bring into being conditions which make it impossible to think of the literary and of textuality in any other manner except that authorised by the regime of English. In short, literary/textual governmentality puts in place a set of subject-reconstituting practices in relation to literature and the literary text. Its field of operation are the institutions of literary studies and publishing and the targets of this kind of power include students and teachers of literature.

When *Song of Lawino* as a text written in English enters into this field of literary production (Bourdieu 1993) constituted by the history of English poetry and literary studies in English, it takes a position of otherness in this field in relation to this history and its regime of values. This is a unique position that is available in this field but may not be available in the field of Acholi literature specifically and African literature in African languages in general. What is innovative and reconstitutive in this field may not be so in the other. In the former field, for example, orality and authenticity are highly valued but are simply taken for granted in the latter. To be innovative and make a mark in the field of the literature in Acholi, the writer has to seek other strategies beyond orality and authenticity. Here, a position of otherness is not available and claims of orality and authenticity cannot be made on the same terms. The innovative and original work that *Song of Lawino* did in the context of East African literature in English was to make legible and legitimate a new practice of poetry in English that would otherwise be illegible and lack legitimacy, under the previous regime of textual governmentality. In this sense, it staged a radical assault on the literary subject produced by the culture of Englishness.

The textual subject produced within the English field of cultural production could only apprehend the literary in particular ways, through specific genres, tropes, critical practices, etc. that define and delimit what a legitimate literary object is and the ways it becomes available to disciplinary analysis. Okot's introduction of oral forms such as the song and cultural authenticity brought to legibility other objects and other modes of apprehending the object outside of the previous authorised ones. A simple model of translation and cultural translation obscures the significance of this intervention within a preconstituted field of discourse and the different ways this intervention works in the field of English and the field of Acholi, respectively. Let us elaborate a little further on this.

In a revealing comment in an interview with Bernth Lindfors, Okot speaks of his attempt to read the first draft of *Song of Lawino* to his mother who was a well-known singer and composer of Acholi songs.

> I took it to her with such great pride and said, "I"ve got a song for you.' And she completely surprised me by asking me to sing it! Of course, I couldn't, and my balloon just collapsed. She went on and asked, "Is it a love song?" I couldn't answer that. "Is it a war song? Is it…What kind of song is it?" So I said, "You shut up. Let me read it to you." So she shut up and I read it aloud. She was very pleased but kept saying, "I wish there was some tune to it." So you see it was not really like an Acholi song. (Lindfors 1977, 283)

Given that the value of *Song of Lawino* in East African literature in English is its African authenticity and its orality, *it's being like an Acholi song*, Okot's admission that it is not really like an Acholi song is significant because it shows that the effect of authenticity and orality that text produces *works* within an English discursive context but falls short in Acholi. In response to an interview question from Kirsten Holst Petersen on *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, Okot also rather cheekily replied: "I don't think they are very much influenced by

the African oral tradition, they cannot be sung, for instance" (Petersen 1979, 89). We may discount statements such as these as exaggerations but we would be making a mistake since it would erase the more important point that Okot is trying to make. We would like to suggest that a better way to read them is see them as Okot's way of saying to us that the genres, forms, functions and mediums of Acholi poetry/songs belong to a different universe of discourse; the English translations only *simulate* the authenticity and orality effect in ways that work within the English tradition. This is why he often said that the works that influenced his *Song of Lawino* were Longfellow's *Song of Haiwatha* and *Song of Solomon* in the Bible.

While the innovative force – if you like – of *Song of Lawino* was to intervene in an English/Anglophone field of cultural production, introduce new positions that foreground orality and authenticity and new genres within it and disrupt its specific form of literary subjectivity and textual governmentality, the Acholi text intervenes from a different direction. Here is what Taban says about the significance of the Acholi text:

> But when I was a student in Gulu High School…we were told in no uncertain terms by our English teacher that poems RHYME. Okot was there before me. Some of my other teachers also attempted poetry composition in Acholi language and they all had end rhymes. Because he [Okot] had to use end rhymes, he had to stretch the Acholi language to its limits in order to squeeze rhyming words out of it. He used the standard orthography of Acholi language as well as the quaint and archaic dialects of east and north Acholi. He also used the joking register of the youth a lot – remember Lawino is talking about their days of youth? Okot also used the sub-dialect of the country bums just come to town who dropped their aiches [*sic*] and swallowed their end syllables. (2001, xiv)

Taban continues by saying that "[w]ords from neighbouring sub-languages – Lango, Alur, Jonam, Jo-Palwo – all these Lwo dialects contributed to the enrichment of the Acholi languages" (2001, xiv). Taban here highlights two major poetic strategies deployed by Okot in the Acholi poem: the use of end rhymes and its heteroglossic use of a variety of dialects, lexical items borrowed for neighbouring linguistic communities, and age and class inflected registers. It would appear that just as Okot had imported the orality and authenticity effect from Acholi into the English poem, he also imported end rhymes and heteroglossia from the English tradition into the Acholi poem. To put it somewhat differently, while he introduced the poetics of song into East African poetry in English, he took the aesthetics of the rhymed verse into Acholi poetry. Note the attempt at rhyming in *Wer pa Lawino* in the verse cited below:

Wod wegi, kadi pud ipora
Ki yugi ma tye wi odur,
Ilanya, ipako ya bong imita,
Ya arom ki gigu ma wi obur,
Iyeta, ibuku dogi ki buru,
Ya bong' ang'eyo wa ki "a",
Ya bong' akwano i cukuru,
Ni an pc amako nying'a,
Ipora ki la-gwok, kurukuru....
(1969, 11–12)
The son of the owner, even if you compare me
With rubbish in the rubbish pit,
You humiliate me, saying you don't love me
That I am like a thing abandoned in a deserted homestead,

You abuse me, dusting your mouth with ashes,
That I don't know the letter "a"
That I have not been to school
That I have not caught a [Christian] name,
You compare me with a dog, a puppy...
(Translation ours)

The emphasis on the use of rhyme is a testament to the power of colonial English education in the literary and intellectual formation of this generation of East African educated elite. The idea that anything that was unrhymed in that rarefied sense was not considered to be poetry and therefore not worthy of literary interest and attention was taken into indigenous language literature. This shows that specific generic practices deriving from a colonial regime of textual governmentality were also inserted into indigenous forms of cultural production.

It is clear from these examples that uncoupling lateral texts and examining the ways in which they acquire significance within the circuits of value into which they are inserted provide us with new insights into what each does as it inserts itself within the primary field of cultural production within which it is positioned.

Wer pa Lawino in its Acholi home

As Muhindi (1983, 380) points out, wider attention and scholarly focus has been mainly on *Song of Lawino.* The critical spotlight is often only briefly shone on *Wer pa Lawino* when discussing its translation (or mistranslation) into *Song of Lawino*. This has been the case with scholars like Heron (1976), Tanna (1978, 57–58), (Lo Liyong 1993, 87–93), and many others. Taban Lo Liyong raises similar concern with other critics in his preface to *The Defence of Lawino* (Lo Liyong 2001, xi):

> *Song of Lawino* (the English language version) is not strictly a faithful translation of *Wer pa Lawino*. It is a version, if you like, of *Wer pa Lawino* in which, what was topical, striking, graphic and easily renderable into English received due prominence. But the darker, more ponderous, more intricate parts, or those nuances that only the best *nanga* players know how to reproduce, suffered summarising or mutilation. Or a new recasting. So,... *Song of Lawino* is a watered down, lighter, elaborated, extended version of *Wer pa Lawino*.

What the above statement underscores is that what the readers of *Song of Lawino* got from the text was not exactly the same as what the readers of *Wer pa Lawino* got. The two texts circulated in different circuits of value.

Although the readers of *Wer pa Lawino* envisage it specifically in terms of Acholi society, that of *Song of Lawino* configure it in terms of Africa. For instance, Knipp (1968, 324) in reading *Song of Lawino* states that: "The real, painful human dilemma of changing Africa is presented sharply and sensitively.... Occasionally the authentic note of African proverbial speech comes through with great power...." It is: changing Africa, and African proverbial speech; not changing Acholi society, and Acholi proverbial speech

Commenting on the views of Lawino and her husband Ocol, in *Song of Lawino*, Weaver (1985, 119) writes: "Both make rather extreme statements, which give the full impact of the conflicts between the old and the new in Africa...." He adds, "This work is very readable, and the expression of many small details by both husband and wife make it seem very close to life in much of Africa today." In the same vein, Tanna (1978, 57) states that

> When Okot transformed the satiric song of his people into a written poem to alert all Africans to the folly of leaving their own traditions for those of the West, his *Song of Lawino* was praised for its wit and originality....

The target readership Tanna has in mind is "all Africans," not just the Acholi people (in spite of *Song of Lawino* being a "translation" of the Acholi *Wer pa Lawino*). Likewise, (Ojaide 1986, 371–383), like many other earlier scholars, read *Song of Lawino* in the context of Africa; unlike readers of *Wer pa Lawino*, who read the text in the context of Acholi society.

However, the imports of the Acholi language version are not lost on Moore (1967, 53) who states that:

> Mr. Okot has *so much more to say*, and the reason, surely, is that he said it first in the language which most perfectly expresses it. Hence, it is no mere accident that the *Song* was first written in Lwo; it is a condition of its very existence.

The ramification of *Wer pa Lawino* to its Acholi readers couldn't be exactly the same with that of *Song of Lawino* to its wider readership. Take for instance this excerpt from *Wer pa Lawino* (1969, 31):

> *Lumyelo ma bong' luworo wego,*
> *Anyira kwakke ki wegi-gi,*
> *Awobe gwakke ting'-ting' ki lumego,*
> *Gimyelo ataa kadi ki megi-gi.*
> They dance without giving fathers respect,
> Girls embrace their fathers,
> Boys embrace tightly with their sisters,
> They dance anyhow even with their mothers
> [Translation ours]

The import of the above verse is heavy on the mind of an Acholi reader, whereby the kind of embrace referred to is considered taboo in Acholi culture unlike other Ugandan cultures such as that of the Bakiga where it is allowed and is a regular practice. However, among the Acholi readers, *Wer pa Lawino* was not so much valued for the cultural debate that *Song of Lawino* generated. The issues that *Wer pa Lawino* raised were relatively well known in Acholi society. They were not new; the people in the community were living them on a daily basis. But the linguistic creativity with which the book put these issues forward, together with the entertainment therein, made it of great interest and value to the indigenes.

At this juncture, we need to appraise the nature of the Acholi society with which *Wer pa Lawino* interacted. Taban Lo Liyong points out that the "problem" of *Wer pa Lawino* (unlike the English version) was a problem of targeting a predominantly non-literate linguistic community.[1] So the mode of interaction of the written text with the populace became, in some cases, slightly modified to fit the nature of the community. Most often the text was read aloud by a literate member of the community to the others (both literate and non-literate) in a performance manner; like the performance of any folklore genre in Acholi, which is regarded as a living art form. As Okumu (1992, 53) points out, this is "performed before responsive audiences." The nature of the consumption of *Wer pa Lawino* in Acholi society was thus somewhat different from that of the English language *Song of Lawino*. In an interview, Beatrice Atto reminisces on how she used to enjoy this book of poem as a young adult in the 1970s[2]:

> *Kit ma wiya poo kwede, ngat acel ma ladiro kwan kwano buk, wan joo mukene wa terro it-wa. Man nongo i mwaka pyere-abiro ki wiye. Man aye kit ma joo ma gingeyo kwan wa joo ma pe gingeyo kwan ducu i ganga-wa gingeyo ngo ma tye in Wer pa Lawino. Ka oo kama wer Acoli ma wangeyo tye iye, dano donyo i wer kacel ki lakwan....*
>
> As I remember, one person gifted in reading would read the book, and the rest of us would tune our ears. This was in the 1970s. In this way both those who could read and those who couldn't read in our homestead would know the content of *Wer pa Lawino*. When it reached where there was a known Acholi song, people would sing along with the reader....

Wer pa Lawino being performed (by being read out aloud in a lively manner, mimicking Lawino) drew a parallel with other Acholi oral narrative performances – whereby people generally knew the story, but still took great interest in the performance because of the creative and skilful manipulation of the Acholi language therein. Linguistic dexterity was usually admired and upheld for emulation in Acholi society – be it in speeches, storytelling or writing. Creative expressions like *Wer pa Lawino,* infused with linguistic dexterity, was therefore valued. Take for example the manipulation of language in the description of the public toilet below:

> *Ng'wec ot coron gami ki teng'e*
> *Idonyo iwacci idonyo i dan ng'uu*
> *Yoki calo amuka ocobi ki tung'e*
> *Ng'wec lac ki cet duny li-tuu....* (1969, 33)
> The toilet stench fetches you from the outskirt
> You enter as if you have entered the throat of a beast
> It knocks you as if a rhino has pierced you with its horn
> The stench of urine and faeces evaporates li-tuu....[3]
> [Translation ours]

The linguistic dexterity is somewhat watered down in the English translation. But suffice to say, this kind of linguistic usage was admired, identified with, and a source of pride for Acholi associated with the language.

Furthermore, *Wer pa Lawino*, has been used for indigenous language education both at primary and secondary school levels. The Uganda National Curriculum Centre, the body charged with developing school curricula in Uganda, has made it a set book for indigenous language education for schools. This is in recognition of its value as language teaching material. It is also worth noting that for a long time the Acholi language did not have a standard orthography, and writings like *Wer pa Lawino* gave guidance on how the language could be written. The earlier published works on Acholi orthography were by a British Anglican missionary Arthur Leonard Kitching ([1907] 1932), an Italian Catholic missionary Joseph Pasquale Crazzolara (1938), and then another Italian Catholic missionary Alfred Malandra (1955). These were European missionaries; and their works (and other lesser-known works by Christian missionaries), sometimes disputed by the indigenes helped to augment disparate denominational-based Acholi orthographies. The Acholi Anglicans and Catholics were taught to write Acholi language differently. It is only of recent that indigenous Acholi scholars have attempted to put together non-denominational works on Acholi orthography (e.g. Okidi 2000; Lakareber 2011). Although it is not very clear to what extent these recent scholars were influenced by *Wer pa Lawino*, the position of the long poem as a trailblazer in this direction is unquestionable.

Wer pa Lawino is also valued among the Acholi for its entertainment qualities. The entertainment value is multidimensional. First of all, the Acholi traditional songs embedded in the long poem can actually be sung, unlike in *Song of Lawino*. Take for instance the song below:

Min anyaka lal yo rego
Calo pe onywal
Latin obedo lilau, lutimo ning'?
Laber too yo kulu
Nyanni kara kite pe!
Latin obedo lilau, lutimo ning'?
(1969, 68)
The girl's mother gets wasted grinding
As if she has not given birth
The child is hopeless, what can be done?
The good-natured dies on the way to the well
This girl has no manners!
The child is hopeless, what can be done?
[Translation ours]

Or, the following folk song to express desolation and destitution:

Anyong'o wi yat calo winyo
An calo ayom munyong'o wi yat
An do wi lobo ogung'u koma
An awac ang'o?
(1969, 94)
I squat on a tree like a bird
I am like a monkey squatting on a tree
Poor me, the world has knelt on me
What can I say?
[Translation ours]

The above folk songs, and many others integrated into *Wer pa Lawino*, were and are still well known among the Acholi. Nobody remembers the original composers, but they have entered the mainstream of Acholi folklore, and are commonly just referred to as "*wer Acholi*" (the songs of the Acholi). In reading the text, the reader and the listeners often recognise the songs, and actually sing them. This is because the embedded songs in the text are direct transcriptions of Acholi traditional songs in performance, unlike in *Song of Lawino* where the embedded Acholi songs are translated to make them understandable within the English language domain (sacrificing rhythm and other acoustic attributes related to the Acholi songs).

Additionally, humour is the hallmark of *Wer pa Lawino*, and the Acholi like a good laugh. According to the Acholi, laughing alone is for mad people. Perhaps this partly account for the common collective enjoyment of the poem in the community, with one person reading and the others as responsive listeners. There are hilarious descriptions of events, actions and people. Take for instance, the description of the happenings in the catechumen class where the catechist is teaching:

Cotte ki dang'nge wan wa-oo i kore,
Calo ocwak i lajanawara.
Lapwony dang'nge ataa pe nyang' tere;
Lacoo-ne kono Acoli...
Ento dumu aduma calo Pare....

Dang'nge ka en-en-en, wan ki kore
Pe ng'atti nyang te lokke kikome.
(1969, 87)
He leaps into a shout and we chorus after him
Like weaver birds in lajanawara grass
The teacher shouts without understanding the meaning;
The man is an Acholi...
But he speaks an alien language like the Priest....
He yells with vigour, and we follow suit
No one understands the actual meaning of the words.
[Translation ours]

Lawino says this of the Catechist, Vincent [corrupted into Biceny]:

Biceny tye ka woo calo ong'era!
Kero calo latin akwara ma mulu!
(1969, 87)
Vincent makes noise like a monkey
He bubbles like a crawling toddler
[Translation ours]

The Acholi cultural-based humour is often lost in the English translation, and is better appreciated within the Acholi linguistic domain.

One could say what makes *Wer pa Lawino* an Acholi classic is different from what makes *Song of Lawino* an African classic. For instance, *Wer pa Lawino* is not so much valued for "Africanisation" through borrowing from Acholi oral literary tradition. This was (and still is) a non-issue for a people with a predominantly oral culture. *Wer pa Lawino* is to a large extent valued in the Acholi community for its linguistic dexterity, the creative manipulation of the Acholi language, the humourous rendition of ordinary actions and situations, and the entertainment qualities therein.

Other translations of *Song of Lawino*, such as that of Abasi Kiyimba who rendered the English text into Luganda and titled it *Omulanga gwa Lawino* (2015), are also most likely to be inserted into different circuits of value from that of the English version. At this stage it is not yet possible to determine the circuit of value into which *Omulanga gwa Lawino* is inserted among the Luganda speech community because the publication is recent and has not yet made any significant in-road among the community in Uganda.

Conclusion

What we have sought to do in this paper is to take forward Harry Garuba's proposition that we recognise African literary texts written in an indigenous language and then supposedly translated into English as lateral texts. The conventional model of translation falls short in many ways when applied to these texts. First, this model assumes that there is an original/source text from which the other text is translated; an assumption that profoundly misrecognises the nature of African literary textuality. Second, the notion of translation sets up a hierarchical relationship between the texts whereby one is seen as the original and the other as the translated copy, a characterisation that distorts the nature of the relationship between them. Third, it is assumed that the original text is the source of value for the translated text which again is not the case in these African literary texts as they are usually inserted into different circuits of value. Hence, his suggestion that we work with a new model of lateral

textuality when dealing with these African texts. The argument we make in this paper is therefore twofold: (1) that *Wer pa Lawino* and *Song of Lawino* are lateral texts and (2) that each is inserted into a specific circuit of value, largely different from the other. What we have tried to demonstrate in this article is that the circuit of value into which each is inserted determines the manner in which it is read, recognised and evaluated.

The story of Lawino, Ocol and his westernised second wife, Clementine, is ubiquitous in the colonised world; it speaks to the anxieties of the colonised about cultural loss and alienation. The subject matter of the poem is therefore not new and original in that sense. What is innovative and original about *Song of Lawino* derives from the English circuit of value into which it is inserted; similarly, what is innovative about *Wer pa Lawino* derives from the Acholi circuit of value. As we have demonstrated in this paper, the valued themes, tropes and rhetorical strategies are not identical within each of the two circuits of value.

Notes

1. The interview with Taban Lo Liyong was conducted on 5 September 2015, at Wandegeya in Kampala.
2. The interview with Beatrice Atto, 64 years old, was conducted on 30 July 2015, in Koch village, Koro sub-county, Gulu district.
3. *Li-tuu* is an Acoli ideophone that expresses a violent explosive evaporation (like smoke from an explosion).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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