Expectations of peace: documentation, memorialization, and construction of the archive in northern Uganda

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Expectations of Peace:
Documentation, Memorialization, and the Construction of the Archive in Northern Uganda

A Thesis
Presented in
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Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how documentation and memorialization initiatives curate historical narratives in contemporary northern Uganda since the collapse of the Juba peace talks in 2008. Taking the collapse of political settlement as my starting point while staying attuned to the history of humanitarian activity in the region more broadly, I address how each of these initiatives produces knowledge about the war between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army and its aftermath despite the lack of a formal resolution or cessation of hostilities. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted annually between 2009 and 2014, I argue that sites of memory do not simply recall the past, but instead produce new meanings about that past as a response to present anxieties. They challenge, sustain, or mollify already-circulating meanings in order to produce new ways of thinking about the future of a conflict that is not yet past. Taken together, sites of memory map the availability of political claims in a time of political uncertainty. The construction of the archive in northern Uganda operates within a larger discourse of peace-after-war, an expectation that after war comes a more productive, participatory future characterized by peace. Juxtaposing the lived experiences of Acholi men and women against the expectation that documenting these experiences will bring lasting peace to the region provokes new questions about the contingencies of documentary practices and the indeterminacy of their subsequent uses.

Key Words: Northern Uganda, Documentation, Memorialization, Humanitarianism, Peace and Conflict, Archives
For Aciro Gloria, Kilama Francis, and Piloya Emily, 
who keep me thinking about the future.
Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally. The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of lieux de mémoire – that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless; if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no lieux de mémoire. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces lieux de mémoire – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned: no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.


The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; that which determines that they do not withdraw at the same pace in time, but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale.

—Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1972: 129
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFRICOM – United States African Command
AU-RTF – African Union Regional Task Force
DRC – Democratic Republic of the Congo
CAR – Central African Republic
GoU – Government of Uganda
HSM – Holy Spirit Movement
ICC – International Criminal Court
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
K/NMPDC – Kitgum/National Memory Peace and Documentation Centre
LRA – Lord’s Resistance Army
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
NRM/A – National Resistance Movement/Army (later renamed UPDF)
SPLA – Sudan People’s Liberation Army
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission (in South Africa)
UNLA – Uganda National Liberation Army
UPDA – Uganda People’s Democratic Army
UPDF – Uganda People’s Defence Force
WFP – World Food Programme
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The opinions expressed herein are the author’s alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the individuals named above.
A NOTE ON NAMES, DATES, AND LOCATIONS

Any names, dates, or locations in this thesis that might disclose the identity of any one of my interlocutors have been changed.

Unless citing an official or NGO representative in a publicly available source, all names are pseudonyms, selected at random from a list of commonly-given Acholi names. These names are normally imbued with meaning surrounding the circumstances of that child’s birth or family environment. Unfortunately, in choosing these pseudonyms at random, the meaning behind the names used here is incidental.

The specific dates and times of my conversations are excluded and I have instead anchored various fieldwork moments included in this thesis around watershed events (such as the Juba peace talks, which transpired between 2006 and 2008) in order to anchor my informant’s voices to vital historical markers without disclosing information that might make their identities easily discoverable.

The locations of the most prominent sites of memory in northern Uganda are very well known. While the specific locations of my conversations are left nondescript (i.e. “outside of Gulu Town” or “near Pabbo” instead of the specific village’s name), the names of each site of memory – and correspondingly their easily recognizable locations – remain intact.
INTRODUCTION

I. ARCHIVAL VIOLENCE

In the summer of 2011, as I was finalizing the research proposal for my larger thesis project, I came across an article in Uganda’s state-owned newspaper, the New Vision, carrying the headline “IDP Camps to Become Tourist Sites.”¹ The article presented, for the first time in a public forum,² a new pilot project headed by tourism state minister Agnes Akiror Egunyu that would transform four former Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps “into tourism and educational centers” (New Vision 2011).³ The tourist sites, Egunyu explains, would serve as a teaching moment in conflict resolution, delivering a message about the “disadvantages of using [war] to settle differences.” In addition, they would be income-generating; the local community would be trained to “make good use of revenue that will be generated from the sites.” Rather than stand as an incident in Uganda’s “unfortunate past,” the camp would be transformed into “a lesson” to be absorbed by both future generations and foreign tourists looking for a window into the violent geographies of years past, a rekindling of a temporal experience that is no longer present for immediate consumption.⁴

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¹ A nearly identical article was published in the leading independent newspaper, The Daily Monitor, just four days earlier. It reads, in part: “While officiating at the workshop for archaeology, environment and heritage around Lake Victoria at Brisk Hotel in Jinja yesterday, Ms Akiror, who called the package ‘dark tourism’ said the four IDP camps will be used to promote peace as ‘we remember our unfortunate past.’ She added that communities living around the IDPs will manage and earn a living from the sites, besides empowering them to come out of the misery.” (Ssegawa 2011). Emphasis mine.
² As will be made clear later in the thesis, this project was actually launched two years earlier, in 2009. However, this was the first announcement of the project in a forum as widely read as the nation’s two leading daily newspapers.
³ It should be noted here that this article has since been removed from the newspaper’s online archive and is now only available through AllAfrica, a third-party site that archives newspaper articles from across the continent. All of my attempts to communicate with the state minister about her proposal remain unanswered.
⁴ With the majority of the formerly displaced now returned home, most IDP camps have been dismantled barring the notable exception of the mostly elderly and disabled individuals that remain in what is left of the camps. The “IDP camp as tourist site” is reminiscent of a story that ran in this same paper five and a half years...
I was immediately struck by the discontinuities between this new government-led initiative and the experiences of the individuals with whom I had been working in the region for years. While the Government of Uganda (GoU) euphemistically referred to these camps as “protection camps” throughout the war, this was far from the case – those living in the camps were nothing if not unprotected. The experience of internal displacement in northern Uganda was one of forced displacement, not of protected encampment. Nearly two million people were forcibly displaced by the Ugandan government under intimidation and bombing campaigns by the national army, the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) (Otunnu 1998). The migration into these camps was by-and-large not one of voluntary necessity to flee the violence of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) but of violent state practice.  

Once settled in the camp, the population was frequently subjected to the arbitrary violence of the UPDF (Human Rights Watch 2005: 24). When the LRA raided the camps, the UPDF, put in charge of providing camp protection, often fled, leaving civilians easy targets for LRA abductions (Branch 2009). A lesson in conflict resolution led by the state, on the

earlier that described the field trip a group of school children from Kampala took to Bobi IDP camp in which the “visitors’ smooth skin” is juxtaposed with the dirt-matted faces of those youth in Bobi (Onyalla 2005). The convergence of these two groups of children is generously presented as a learning experience for those youth in Kampala, a moment to recognize the (then still active) violence in the north of their country. 

5 It should be clear that my project explores the construction of the archive and the construction of conflict narratives in Acholiland, the area of northern Uganda where the Acholi people call home. While the LRA is itself from Acholiland (Joseph Kony is from Odek sub-county in Gulu district) and the majority of LRA activity has been in Acholiland throughout the twenty years the group spent in Uganda, other areas of northern and eastern Uganda have also been affected, most notably Langi, Teso, Lugbara, and Madi communities. The narratives these communities produce, no longer informed by a shared genealogical history, might reflect a different relational position to the LRA and the conflict at large.  

6 Of course the state was not in all places at all times, and many individuals did relocate to camps without the UPDF forcibly directing them to do so, but this was often the result of two pragmatic realities. First, for security from retributive attacks by the UPDF. Individuals found outside of the camp were assumed to be rebels or rebel collaborators, liable to be shot and killed by the UPDF which directed many to the camps, even if they themselves did not have their immediate safety threatened at the moment. Second, out of economic necessity. Camps were transformed into micro-economic units. Valuable resources were funneled through camp bureaucracies and institutional structures. It would have been incredibly difficult for someone to remain economically viable – even on a subsistence level – without interacting with the market of the camp, itself driven by humanitarian handouts.
“disadvantages of using [war] to settle differences,” then, would not be a moment to recall state culpability and mourn the losses it inflicted, but one to discourage unrest. It would be an opportunity to herald the valiant attempts made to intervene in order to protect the citizenry from the barbarity of the LRA and discourage others from following in the LRA’s footsteps. The imagery of peasants being removed from their land and forced into the enclosed space of the camp would be framed as a necessary response to insurgent violence.

Given the immense chasm between state and individual narratives of the experience of the camp, how could these sites that were representative of such rampant state violence be reorganized, reframed, and re-presented as sites of shared memorialization by the very institutions that remained at the helm of that violence? How does the reconstitution of past violence into new sites of memorialization inform the ways in which we understand the veracity of historical claims within the context of conflict resolution? That the Ugandan state would try to create sites of memorialization with its own discursive logic should not come as a surprise. Constructing meanings of the past amidst ongoing civil conflict has profound implications for the ways in which communities – and the nation with which that community interacts – move forward from civil war (Triulzi 2006). How that past is curated for public consumption, then, is of the upmost importance.

II. ARGUMENT AND PARAMETERS OF THESIS PROJECT

This thesis explores how documentation and memorialization initiatives curate historical narratives in contemporary northern Uganda since the collapse of the Juba peace talks in 2008. Taking the collapse of political settlement as my starting point while staying attuned to the history of humanitarian activity in the region more broadly, I address how each
of these initiatives produces knowledge about the war and its aftermath despite the lack of a formal resolution or cessation of hostilities.

Following Sara Guyer (2009), I propose not to celebrate or condemn these projects, but to read their emergence, “to take account of their assumptions and effects” and examine how these assumptions and effects organize the subjectivities of those involved in the construction, maintenance, and modification of these projects, as well as the communities they intend to represent (162). I argue that sites of memory do not simply recall the past, but instead produce new meanings about that past as a response to present anxieties. They challenge, sustain, or mollify already-circulating meanings in order to produce new ways of thinking about the future of a conflict that is not yet past. This project is less interested in memory understood as the recollections of individuals affected by the conflict, then, as it is in how those memories are collected and presented. It is interested in the emergence of institutionalized memories of the conflict.

Given the way in which post-Juba memorialization sites are increasingly the product of state and non-state institutions, they tend to advance dominant narratives that align with well-known governmental or organizational frameworks. As we will see later, whether these projects tend towards affirming “the official discourse” (Finnström 2008a) of the conflict put forward by the GoU and most international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as we will see at the site in Pabbo, or towards advancing more nuanced arguments about the incomplete nature of conflict narratives themselves, such as we will see at the site in Kitgum, they nevertheless both advance the proposition that collecting testimony, constructing sites of memory, and archiving the conflict’s multiple visages will result in a more peaceful,
prosperous northern Uganda. It is this expectation, operating in the “liminal space and time between peace and war,” that is the subject of this thesis (Nibbe 2010: 344).

Northern Uganda has been witness to violent civil conflict since 1986, and, while the LRA – the primary rebel group in question – has not been active in Ugandan territory since late 2005, the conflict nevertheless continues to animate everyday life in Acholiland, the area that bore the brunt of the war and where the Acholi people call home.

Twenty years of war have left a massive humanitarian footprint. Gulu Town, once an important but relatively modest trading hub for northern residents and frequent Kampala to Juba business, has now become a booming peri-urban space featuring a number of major petrol stations; a dozen national and international banks such as Barclays, Stanbic, and Bank of Africa; a handful of night clubs; and a new assortment of multi-story luxury hotels. The regular and massive influx of aid workers, missionaries, and, now, “voluntourists” has generated a lucrative service economy for these communities and their continually growing numbers (e.g. Nibbe 2010: 59-83, 137-162).

Simultaneously, the UPDF continues to lead anti-LRA military excursions in neighboring countries as part of the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF). LRA returnees continue to be processed by the Ugandan Amnesty Commission through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs before returning to their communities, although the frequency of returnees has reduced significantly since the height of the war. In December 2013 the GoU responded to the recent outbreak of violence in South Sudan by sending troops northward through Gulu. As new violence broke out in Gulu at the time of writing in May-June 2014, residents were quick to call attention to the open migration of both people and arms across this border. When I traveled towards the Sudan
border a year and half prior in 2012, one resident remarked, “They tells us war is over, but we know better,” as a Ugandan fighter jet conducted training exercises in the skies above. The region consequently still occupies a central role in the larger “regional warscape” (Hoffman 2007: 403) which includes neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR), the nations in which the LRA continues to operate and where Uganda retains an ongoing presence. This presence continues to inform life in northern Uganda in myriad ways.

The emergence of sites of memory (Nora 1989; Carrier 2000; Winter 2010) during this period in northern Uganda, I argue, is indicative of a broader process of closure wherein communities are encouraged to participate in programs focused on collating the past for an imagined collective future. Sites of memory can take on multiple forms: public or private archives, museums, permanent and temporary monuments built to commemorate past events, and sites of past atrocities, to name just a few. These sites are material in that they are tangible invocations of the past, symbolic in that they assign meaning to this past, and functional in that they advance particular visions of the purpose and worth of such projects (Nora 1989).

While these three characteristics coalesce to form a single site, their impending utility remains all but certain. Documentation initiatives certainly may serve to legitimate the state. Richard Wilson (2001) makes a compelling case of this within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) became “a rhetorical expression of an all-inclusive rainbow nationalism” rather than a recognition of institutionalized violence (6). Testimonies were reduced to narratives of a healing nation,
where individuals sought redemption for past crimes and institutional responsibility was curtailed for the sake of national unity and strength.

Other forms of documentation in South Africa, however, have had less fixed legacies. Sara Byala’s (2005, 2010, 2013) work on the transformations that Johannesburg’s MuseumAfrica (formerly Africana Museum) underwent in early, late, and post-apartheid periods is a useful mirror for understanding the ways in which sites of memory are, above all, malleable to meet the demands of the present moment. The museum, at the time named Africana Museum, was an individual collection that provided two very separate genealogies: that of the white, Dutch communities (to which the curator belonged), forward-looking and modern, and that of the black, African communities, traditional and anthropological. As apartheid-era institutions struggled to hold ground, the museum’s mission shifted, saving face by making appearances of racial parity but still resorting to modernization narratives that ignored intertwined realities. The museum attempted to reinvent itself a third time as a site that would “do neglected history” (Byala 2010, 18). Its focus changed to highlight the partial-ness of political history, a history of Johannesburg that would challenge its own birth (and rebirths). While it is widely considered to have been a failure in retrospect, Byala points out that the museum nevertheless retains its potentiality. Its potential, both as a site and as a set of materials that point towards a shared past, remains for a future generation.

Keeping in mind the myriad ways in which various forms of documentation and sites of memory operate within given historical moments under particular political constraints, I focus my analysis of northern Uganda on a rubric of expectations. Unlike Byala, who is looking at an archive-museum at the end of its tenure, in many ways “past its prime,” the initiatives I explore in northern Uganda are emergent, evoking a very contemporary present.
In this way, how might we anticipate the sort of analyses that Wilson, Byala, and many others undertake by tracking this emergence as it unfolds? How can a project on documentation and memorialization – two processes that are intent on harnessing the past in order to affect a community’s future – insist on an analysis of the very present, emergent forms of power that give them life?

It is from this position that I use expectation as an analytical category to explore the contingencies of documentation and memorialization projects in northern Uganda. If there is “no archive without outside” (Derrida 1995: 11) – that is, no archive without the conditions of the world that stands outside its walls – then our analysis must pay attention to the work that the archive does within a given public. In the case of northern Uganda, no indicator is more suited to analyze the work of documentation and memorialization projects than that of expectation, and there is no greater expectation in the region than the expectation of peace.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

A number of terms are used regularly throughout this thesis and it is important that each be clearly situated in its use before moving forward.

The two constituent elements of the title of this work – that of “expectation” and that of “peace” – animate the pages that follow. The first is a reference to James Ferguson’s text Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt (1999). Following Ferguson, I understand expectation as a currency that circulates in the present, is informed by the presence of global forces on a particularly local geography, and shifts meanings of present-day life towards an imagining of what they might one day become. In the political impasse of contemporary northern Uganda which sits at the interstice
of not-quite-war but not-quite-peace, expectation serves as a productive tool for individuals and institutions to articulate their futures and to imagine the future of the region more broadly.

The second, peace (kuc, in Acholi), operates as an expectation in much the same way as modernity in Ferguson’s work. It serves as a temporal destination along a pre-determined timeline of war → peace, much as modernity serves as a destination from “primitiveness” or “tradition.” Its politics are not identical as those of modernity, but the forms such concepts take as expectant end-points in anticipated historical trajectories make for a useful comparison. Concurrently, the transition between such present moments and their expectant futures correspond to the parallel technologies of development, in the case of modernity, and peace-building, in the case of peace.

In Acholi, kuc can take on a number of meanings. In the time period during which I conducted my fieldwork (2009-2014), kuc often did refer to the absence of open hostilities between the GoU and the LRA in Acholiland after the latter was forced out of Uganda in late 2005. But it also referred to something more. I would argue that kuc is best understood as what is sometimes called “positive peace”: not merely the absence of violence but also the presence of a stable sense of well-being. At the fifth anniversary celebration of a small community-based organization in Pader district, I listened as a community leader publicly decried, “There is no peace for the Acholi. There are no more gunshots, but problems persist: land grabbing, nodding disease, and others. These are challenges. The war that is now existing is the war to provide for our families. That is a war that is worse than the war that existed for twenty years. If these problems are still persisting, then there is no peace for Acholi.” It might therefore be productive to consider kuc alongside piny maber, which
Sverker Finnström translates as “good surroundings” (in opposition to *piny marac*, or “bad surroundings”), a signifier that the wider social, cultural, and environmental world that one inhabits is aligned with a positive cosmological order (2008a: 4-14).

I refer to “documentation” as both object and process, as the paper traces of documentary practices and as those practices themselves. Documentation projects, which have become cornerstones of the programmatic agendas of peace-building organizations, aim to codify the history of the conflict in sites of memory scattered across northern Uganda through the regular participation of those affected. They collect testimony, record violent events, and geo-tag the location of well-known and less publicized sites of atrocity. An individual or community is interviewed, photographed, and often recorded sharing stories of difficulty and resilience, of violence and of everyday life. These testimonies are then produced into a variety of media, some of which might be added to public sites of memory such as textual histories, photography, audio, and video, and some of which will instead be fashioned into reports, research notes, and other organizational publications. Sites of memory are legitimized by the voices they collect. Documentation projects are therefore an essential component in the construction of sites of memory. They provide the lifeblood to what is an otherwise hollow building.

I refer to “memorialization” as the process through which moments of the war are publicly remembered in order to reflect on their meaning in present-day life. For the purposes of this thesis, I will only discuss memorialization projects that produce physical structures such as monuments, museums, commemorative graves, buildings, or archives. Following Pierre Nora (1989), I consider such structures “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*) and will
use this term throughout. While memorialization may also comprise of remembrance prayers, annual meetings, or other immaterial ceremonies, these will not be discussed here.

The actors involved in documentation and memorialization projects are nothing if not dynamic. Analyzing these projects as either “local” or “international/foreign” initiatives is not a useful analytic frame. After presenting the earliest versions of this work at a conference in early 2012, I was asked: “Are these projects best categorized as local or foreign?” Such clear demarcations are not present in these sites and so I avoid such typologies here as well.

Many projects are led by Ugandan NGOs who receive their funding through international granting agencies. Many of them have strong ties to the region and have operated throughout the twenty years of active conflict, while many others are brand new arrivals that are eager to participate in the growing economy of peace-building organizations. Some partner with local community leaders to identify and communicate with their informants, while others work directly through their networks of “beneficiaries”.

Some projects are direct appendages of the state, acting in their capacities as cultural institutions or local government offices performing their civic duty to their constituencies. Their participation often begets government funding and other sources of revenue and legitimation that some other sites may not have. Some projects receive funds from a combination of both governmental and international donors and many projects, regardless of their sources of funding, are built on government land. As Peter Redfield has written, “An NGO in Uganda is hardly sovereign… It participates within a large NGO complex actively pursuing governance projects alongside, in place of, and occasionally at odds with those of
the state” (2010: 190). Concurrently, my analysis does not presume any site of memory is a homogenous unit directed above by a singular entity. 7

Lastly, I refer to “the archive” in three separate, although intimately linked, ways. First, I am referring to the physical sites that house documents, the buildings themselves. Second, I am referring to the physical documentation that is stored inside said buildings, the collection of which constitutes a body of thought about a variety of subjects. Thirdly, I am referring to this body of thought and the judgments instituted therein. Whether we might refer to this as discourse, knowledge, or another signifier, the archive here is much more than an NGO, community, or government project. All three understandings are essential to an analysis of what “the archive” does as opposed to what it merely is (about which more will be said in Chapter Two). By highlighting “the inescapable materiality of the archive as well as its resulting role… as an instituting imaginary” (Mbembe 2002: 19), I hope to provide a rich perspective on what the emergence of such an entity might portend in contemporary northern Uganda.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This thesis is informed by the last nine years I have spent following advocacy and non-governmental initiatives in the region and five years of fieldwork conducted intermittently between 2009 and 2014 in one to three month intervals. I first traveled to

7 In thinking about the collective network of humanitarian and development workers, organizations, projects, and their constituent discourses, I find Giorgio Agamben’s elaboration of Michel Foucault’s “apparatus” (dispositif) useful. I suggest we correspondingly think about this network – and the larger networks against which its practices are informed – as a humanitarian apparatus, a network “always inscribed into a play of power, but… also always linked to certain limits of knowledge that arise from it and, to an equal degree, condition it” (Foucault 1980: 194-96). I find thinking about these limits as an instructive way to contemplate humanitarianism as “a set of practices and mechanisms… that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate” (Agamben 2009: 8).
northern Uganda in 2009-10 and then followed up with another visit in late 2011. I undertook more formal fieldwork specifically for this thesis during the summers of 2012 and 2013, followed by a return visit and write-up in 2014. The majority of this fieldwork took place in six districts – Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Amuru, and Kole – although time spent in other districts also informs my work.

During these research trips, I used ethnographic research methods including semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and the close observation of my own day-to-day activities as a researcher to investigate the ways in which various actors participate in documentation, memorialization, and, more broadly, “peace-building” initiatives. I spent a majority of my time speaking to government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders who identify as contributors to such initiatives and visiting their various projects.

I held formal interviews with NGO employees who are leading documentation initiatives to better understand the methods by which individual experiences are translated, presented, and archived. I accompanied these interviews with questions about their organization’s desired outcomes, that is, how the organization sees these processes affecting the region, the conflict, and the nation. Even more specifically, I was interested in how they imagined potential futures of the region and what role they felt their projects play in such futures. Much of my research on NGO-practice is informed by these conversations.

I did not, however, shadow archivists or travel with these NGOs to their field sites in order to participate in the act of documentation itself. This was partly a consequence of conducting fieldwork intermittently – my time was never long enough to justify my regular participation in any one NGO’s activities – but also of personal concern. Not having the language skills to follow extended, detailed conversations in Acholi, translation would have
been necessary throughout each field visit, creating a substantial distraction to the organization’s work and the narration of the testimony itself. While this is an important point and clearly a limitation to my work, it should be clear that my project is interested in how these sites came to be and how their architects and employees foresee their role in the future of Uganda. While it would have been very useful to be able to track an individual’s testimony through the process of narration, translation, codification, and presentation, many of these sites are still in the process of being constructed and such an endeavor would unfortunately have been impossible at this stage in most sites’ development.

Additionally, I paid close attention to the physical documentation that these organizations produce. A cornerstone of the NGO enterprise is publication – to appease current donors, attract potential donors, and take part in extensive programmatic and organizational reviews – and as such these publications provide a powerful look into the residual logic, assumptions, and expectations that orchestrate the work that these organizations undertake. Such publications include: field reports; templates for recording testimony; concept proposals; recommendations for policy formation; promotional materials such as newsletters, posters, and information flyers; documentary/advocacy films produced by the organizations; and other similar items. While these publications inform much of my work, I only refer here to those publications that maintain the confidentiality of each NGO’s employees.

I also spent an extended amount of time acquiring a sense of how community members think about the emergence of these sites and their management. This information was gathered through formal and informal conversations with community members who were either participants in community sensitization programs that preaced the site’s
construction, active community coordinators for the development of the site, or individuals who otherwise come from the community that site intends to represent. Many of my friends in Uganda have close connections to the various sites described in these pages. A number completed secondary school at St. Mary’s College Aboke, came of age in the camp in Pabbo, or are themselves employed by organizations that partner with many of the programs described here. As a result, conversations often found their way of coming back to the topic of contentious historical memories and, increasingly, how such memories circulate in public sites such as those described in this thesis. More than anything, then, this work is informed by the many informal, unplanned, and often serendipitous conversations I have shared with Acholi men and women in Uganda throughout these five years.

V. CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into four chapters followed by a conclusion.

Chapter One begins by providing a brief history of the LRA conflict in northern Uganda. It begins in December 2008 as the Juba peace talks collapse and works backwards to account for the multiple historical linkages that gave rise to the conflict in 1986. It then goes on to account for the massive humanitarian presence in northern Uganda across the history of the conflict alongside a review of the most prominent literature as a way to situate this thesis within a broader conversation about war and peace in northern Uganda.

Chapter Two establishes a theoretical framework for thinking about the construction of the archive in northern Uganda. Beginning with Jacque Derrida’s landmark text Archive Fever (1995), it considers how archives produce political meanings. Thinking about the codification of documentation into sites of memory through a lens of humanitarian action –
and as a practice of humanitarian governance more broadly – leads me to characterize these sites as *humanitarian archives*. While influenced, facilitated, and funded to various degrees by the state, the humanitarian archive nevertheless develops as an assemblage of interventions and technologies led (but not wholly dominated) by human rights and development organizations. I then provide a brief overview of memorialization projects in northern Uganda with an emphasis on the most prominent monuments prior to the start of the Juba peace talks in 2006. By doing so, my intention is to trace a lineage of memorialization in the region across a pre- and post-Juba era.

Chapter Three concerns the documentary practices of a variety of individuals operating in northern Uganda, including (foreign) researchers such as myself. I begin by describing the various ways in which documentation teams collect testimony in conflict-affected communities. I provide a detailed outline of who is employed by documentation teams, what methodologies they utilize, and how such practices transform narrative testimony into a usable form. From here, I expand on an encounter with a former LRA commander that opened the chapter in order to situate myself within the broader social context of northern Uganda, particularly in Gulu Town where the conversation took place. Finally, I reflect on the ethnographic “complicities” (Marcus 1997) that inform the knowledge that I produce here before concluding with a brief discussion about the inherent distance between the event and its testimony.

Chapter Four considers two sites of memory that have emerged since 2008 in detail: The Kitgum/National Memory Peace and Documentation Centre (K/NMPDC) and The Memorial IDP Camp and Information Centre in Pabbo. These two sites, I argue, are illustrative of the sort of memorialization projects that have emerged from the ashes of the
Juba peace talks. I focus on these two sites in order to elucidate the entangled networks that inform both their emergence and continued presence. Both are concerned with developing an archive of the conflict from which nearby residents, tourists, researchers, and future generations of Acholi can learn “what happened” in the twenty years of active conflict that decimated the region. Both sites serve as worthwhile cases through which to explore the contingencies of archival production amidst an unresolved civil conflict.

Finally, I conclude by commenting on where a conversation about the emergence of an archive in northern Uganda might take us and how such an emergence is forging new pathways for thinking about conflict resolution in the broader region. Many projects consider their work to be laying the groundwork for a future transitional justice program, whatever form that may take. Most projects also point to how their work will provide a repository of information for future generations to engage. The future, they maintain, will be found in the archive.
CHAPTER ONE

NARRATING VIOLENCE, NARRATING PEACE

I. INTRODUCTION: ON WRITING THE HISTORY OF CONFLICT

“Writing about conflict in Africa is a tricky thing” (McGovern 2011: 314). Wedged between reports produced by human rights groups that “read as if they were calibrated to maximize public distress” to shore up political or financial support and the many journalistic accounts that over-sensationalize and exoticize violence into an easily digestible form, academic writing vacillates between making political sense of violence that is otherwise presented as illegible, on the one hand, and insisting on its particularity at the risk that “leaving [conflict] inscrutable” in this way reifies its illegibility, on the other (328). For a project interested in the contentiousness of conflict narratives, writing a history of the war becomes an even more perilous task.

The sort of “authoritative history” one expects to find here – no matter how brief – would be ill-served in such a project. The history of Ugandan politics and the conflict between the GoU and the LRA in particular have been written many times with much greater precision than could be included here. Rather than refuse to trace the history that underpins the contemporary moment which is the subject of my research, however, I have undertaken a somewhat unorthodox – but I hope nonetheless elucidatory – approach. Through a broad reading of the history of the conflict, I situate my research project as an extension of Sverker Finnström’s *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (2008a) and Adam Branch’s *Displacing Human Rights: War and*

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Intervention in Northern Uganda (2011), two important texts in the literature on northern Uganda. Rather than separate a historical background and literature review as individual chapters leading up to my own original research as is standard, I have instead collapsed them into one chapter in the hopes that it not only provides the reader with a general background in the history of the region concerned in this thesis, but also to consider the ways in which the conflict has been written into Ugandan history alongside the ways in which it is discussed in academic literature.

I begin by outlining the ways in which northern Uganda has been inscribed as a site of conflict since the colonial era followed by a broad reading of the history of the conflict from its beginnings in 1986 until the present. From there, I focus more directly on the form and content of humanitarian interventions in the region as a means to think about the transformation of humanitarian practices over time and, ultimately, how a project on documentation and memorialization can serve as an appropriate contemporary elaboration of this history.

I conclude with the last event of political collapse between the LRA and the GoU: the Juba peace talks. Occurring between 2006 and 2008, the Juba peace talks were the last of a series of peace talks which began as early as 1993-4 but were regularly interrupted by violent incursions by both the LRA and the UPDF which led to their persistent collapse. For many, the Juba peace talks served as the best chance for a protracted political agreement between the LRA and the GoU. Their collapse, then, I argue, acted as a sort of rupture between the expectation that peace would come from a durable political resolution and the expectation that peace would come despite the absence of a durable political resolution. It is in the space
between these two expectations that contemporary documentation and memorialization projects emerge.

II. WRITING THE COLONIAL SUBJECT

Writing was an essential tool in the colonial project in Uganda. Others have effectively traced the lineages between colonial writings of northern Uganda and the contemporary political landscape leading to the LRA conflict and it is not necessary to repeat those efforts here. Nevertheless, the content and form of these writings cast a long shadow on contemporary practices of documentation in the projects of concern to this thesis, and therefore cannot be excluded from a conversation about the practice and product of writing lives in contemporary northern Uganda.

There has been much written about the origin of the Acholi as a discrete social, cultural, and political unit (e.g. Allen 1994; Atkinson 1989, 1994; Behrend 1999). Heike Behrend (1999) argues that, “The Acholi did not exist in precolonial times,” and that their emergence was a distinctly colonial phenomenon prefaced upon the fixation of new administrative districts (14). Ronald Atkinson (1994), on the other hand, argues that “the colonial and post-colonial representations of ethnic identities in Uganda, however distorted or manipulative, have not been plucked from the air or created out of nothingness,” and instead have their roots in the gradual formation of a social identity across an extended period of time which, by the time the first Europeans arrived in what is now Acholiland in the 1850s, already had the makings of a coherent polity (2). Ultimately, I favor Sverker Finnström’s more even reading, in which he argues, “Acholi ethnic identity and other

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9 See, for example: Finnström 2007: 29-63; Branch 2011: 45-53
Ugandan ethnic identities were reified or codified because of colonialism,” but that “Acholi collective belonging cannot be said to be a mere colonial invention, imposed from above” (2008: 31). Writing is not merely inventive, it is also supplementary (54).

The earliest writings on northern Uganda emphasized the region’s alleged lack of coherent political authority. Whereas the British found in the Buganda kingdom of the south a readily-recognizable – and even familiar – socio-political order, they found no such system in the north. Instead, they struggled to make sense of the decentralized and segmented political order of the Acholi. As a result, “Non–Bantu-speaking peoples of Uganda were defined in terms of what political institutions they were perceived to have lacked rather than in terms of how they organized their political life” (Finnström 2008a: 40).

J.R.P. Postlethwaite, an agent of the colonial administration, noted his aggravation with the lack of an apparent power structure in the north when he wrote, “I became so discouraged by the absence of any real chiefs with definite, permanent tribal authority, that I found my mind turning for salvation to the old Buganda Agent policy of the Eastern Province of Uganda and, in fact, I actually installed one or two Banyoro as advisors to individual chiefs” (Postlethwaite 1947: 56; also cited in Finnström 2008a: 40).

Rennie Bere, Postlethwaite’s successor, echoed this anxiety when he emphasized that the colonial state must “make the Acholi conscious of their unity as a single people” in order to build a single political faction that could be administered by a recognized hierarchy of chiefs, or rwodi (Bere 1947: 8; also cited in Finnström 2008a: 37). Colonial administrators consequently established a central Acholi authority through which colonial decrees and regulations could be passed.
Following this “lack” of political organization, colonial bureaucrats wrote about the Acholi as best suited for military service and flexible labor. As early as 1919, in the first ethnography of the Acholi, E.T.N. Grove wrote, “War was the constant occupation of the Acholi before the Government took over their country” (163; also cited in Finnström 2008a: 61). This characterization was carried forward through colonial administrators and the Acholi were put into corresponding state positions.

Under the new colonial system of the British, northerners found themselves in a much different position than southerners. Generally, occupational preference was given to “southerners (notably Baganda) for agriculture and the civil service, northerners (including the Acholi) for the security establishment” (Dolan 2009: 41). Northerners were not only used for security, however, as they also constituted much of the labor reserves for the colonial administration.

There was nothing “natural” about the separation between northerners and southerners – neither group was better equipped for work in agricultural or security sectors, of course – but such separation was hardly arbitrary. Splitting these two groups provided an effective check on the otherwise politically powerful southerners. Northerners could be sent south as either security to force resistant southerners to continue cultivating their land for the British Crown or as replacement laborers for those same southerners (Mamdani 1984: 10). It was an effective strategy for colonial rule.

As a result of these colonial stratifications, classes were formed along regional lines. Few infrastructural projects were connected to the north as colonial administrators located themselves in the southern capital of Kampala. It also lost much of its male population as they migrated towards the south and elsewhere to become the laborers and soldiers for the
colonial administration, leaving the north densely populated by female-headed households which were of little concern for the British to provide the type of infrastructure reserved for single-headed households in the West. As a consequence, as independence erupted in 1962, the north was left at a considerable infrastructural disadvantage while the south was already heavily integrated into the burgeoning nation’s commercial endeavors.

Ann Stoler (2007) argues that to consider colonial archives mere repositories of history would be misguided, and instead urges scholars to consider colonial archives as “both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves” (267), that is, to “critically [reflect]… on archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but as sites of knowledge production…as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography” (268). In this spirit, thinking about how the colonial archive in northern Uganda produced new meanings but also how it supplemented existing meanings about Acholi identity within the emergent Ugandan polity reveals timely parallels to the political order of contemporary Uganda. This is not to say that one can follow a straight line from the colonial order in historical Acholiland and arrive in the present-day. As Frederick Cooper (2007) has written, “colonialism has left no single set of memories but rather a complex array,” but it is nevertheless in this complex array that “one can find bits and pieces of illuminating recollection” (264).

III. WORKING BACKWARDS FROM POLITICAL COLLAPSE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WAR, 1986-PRESENT

From 1986 – when current President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni came to power in a coup – until late 2005 – when the LRA was pushed out of Uganda by the Ugandan military and entered the Juba peace talks – northern Uganda was the site of an intensely drawn-out
and bloody civil conflict. For twenty years an entire third of Uganda remained in violent turmoil, taking a particularly significant toll on civilians. The population found itself in an extremely precarious situation, stuck between two violent groups: the first being an historically antagonistic national army (the UPDF), the other a rebel movement that was born in the north but was enacting significant retaliation on those who refused to take part. A young Acholi woman I spoke with in Lira put it aptly when she told me, “For us, we cannot support the government. We have seen what they have done. But we cannot support the rebels, either. How can you support a group like the LRA? No, we cannot support anyone.”

The LRA emerged from the dissolution of a number of earlier rebel groups, most notably the Uganda National Liberation Army/Uganda People’s Democratic Army (UNLA/UPDA) and the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) led by Alice Lakwena. The UNLA was the military force that, together with Tanzanian intervention, overthrew Idi Amin in April 1979 and later became the national army during Milton Obote’s second term (1980-1985). It was primarily made up of Acholi and Langi from the northern regions. After Museveni came to power in an additional coup in 1986, the UNLA fled north fearing retribution for their “often vicious anticivilian violence” (Branch 2011: 60). The National Resistance Army (NRA), Museveni’s army, followed and the UNLA fled to southern Sudan and regrouped as the UPDA. They returned to northern Uganda to attempt to overthrow Museveni but were unable to do so. By 1987 the UPDA began to split and many joined a burgeoning new movement, the HSM.

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10 Sverker Finnström recalls a similar conversation with a young woman who told him, “I do not support the rebels, nor am I supporting the government. I am just in a dilemma. I would like to support the rebels, but they are killing my people” (2008a: 118).
The Holy Spirit Movement emerged as a response to the increasingly coercive and oftentimes violent practices of the UPDA on the Acholi people themselves. The HSM promised to “cleanse” the Acholi by mending these internal conflicts and forging a new Acholi identity uncontaminated by the violence of the past. While this was the official position of the HSM, many youth joined as a response to a lack of alternative leadership at a time where rebellion felt necessary, rather than the desire to cleanse their peers (Finnström 2008a: 75-6). The UPDA and HSM began to turn their arms against one another and eventually the UPDA dissolved as some fighters took a government amnesty and others joined the HSM.

Meanwhile, as the HSM followed the Nile River south in a move to overthrow the Museveni government, it picked up new support along the way in Lango, Teso, and other northern and eastern regions, “testament to the political appeal [the] movement had throughout the north and east of Uganda” (Branch 2011: 67). Ultimately, as the HSM migrated south their prospects became increasingly untenable against the military superiority and numbers of the NRA. The HSM was defeated and Alice Lakwena went into exile in Kenya.

After the UPDA and HSM disbanded, the remaining fighters again joined the next available militia; this time it was the LRA led by Joseph Kony, a group that would far outlast its predecessors. A young Kony claimed a relation to Alice Lakwena as a means to build support. While Kony too used the language of “cleansing” and “purity” (Titeca 2010), these tropes were secondary to the language of a southerner vs. northerner regional war (Branch 2011: 70-1). The LRA branded those who opposed them as Museveni supporters and traitors to the north. Violent coercion became a regular tactic after public support began to wane.
Many civilians were tired of war. They shared the grievances of the LRA but were increasingly disinterested in joining a rebel group that became gradually more violent against the civilian population. Like my friend in Lira, they remained trapped between two groups who were poor representatives of their interests.

Sverker Finnström (2008a) argues that explanations of the conflict in northern Uganda have been dominated by what he terms “the official discourse,” an account of the conflict that actively disengages with the ambiguous positions of individual, state, and international actors in favor of an “irrational rebel group vs. benevolent state” narrative. This discourse paints the LRA as the irrational rebel group without a claim to legitimate grievances or a cogent agenda, and the GoU as the benevolent – albeit under-resourced – defender of human rights. The LRA, embodied in the mythico-histories of the figure of Joseph Kony, represents the barbarity of civil rebellion on the continent, a barbarity that is found beyond the rational world we inhabit (Mbembe 2001). Uganda’s position as one of Africa’s most cited “success stories” makes this narrative all the more convincing (Mwenda 2010; Tripp 2010: 2; Finnström 2008a: 63). The story very quickly, then, makes particular engagements with the conflict allowable whereas others become disallowable. The conflict is consequently understood as “humanitarian rather than political” in a move that disassociates cause and contribution from effect and consequence (Finnström 2008a: 141; Dolan 2009: 248).

This perpetuation of the “official discourse” is dangerous not only because it disengages with the conflict, but also because it paints critical readings as insensitive to the

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11 The organization that is perhaps the most oft-cited as perpetuating this discourse, American NGO Invisible Children, echoes Finnström and Dolan’s words nearly verbatim. In a promotional video leading up to the Kony 2012 campaign and in the interviews that followed, they regularly declared “this is a human issue, not a political issue.”
brutal violence that affected communities have undergone for over twenty-five years. In
effect, it silences alternative readings, removing any space for critique. A main goal of
Finnström’s work, then, is to place the LRA’s various proclamations and manifestos within
the context of the existential uncertainties of the Acholi in order to better make sense of what
is otherwise considered senseless violence.

His goal is not, he sets out early, to “disclose new information,” but is instead “about
painstakingly investigating and analyzing the common, general, mainstream, and even taken-for-granted stuff of everyday life in a particular context, rather than seeing the subversive and revolutionary” (10). Using films (Invisible Children, The Mission), popular texts (Aboke Girls), and humanitarian outreach (reports, news stories, etc…) he demonstrates how this official discourse is perpetuated upon unstable ground by often combining images of child soldiers grounded in no particular place on the continent with a decontextualized narrative of unimaginable suffering (Finnström 2008a: 108-112). However, the content of these various media cannot be the measure by which we evaluate them, he argues. Instead, like the rebel manifestos delivered to town during the war, his unit of analysis is their “meanings in use,” the multiple meanings and significations that they carry in the lived experiences of those affected by the conflict. Rather than focus on the “authenticity” or “legitimacy” of such documents, Finnström shifts our attention to the work that they do in conversation with individual lives. As the conflict leaves the 1980s, these meanings in use become increasingly informed by the dynamics of the larger region and, by the 2000s, humanitarian intervention.

In the early 1990s, the LRA began receiving support from Sudan. This was in many ways a tit-for-tat response to the GoU’s support for the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) operating in what eventually became the independent nation of South Sudan (Prunier
Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, was happy to provide support to any group that was a menace to Museveni given Museveni’s outspoken support for the SPLA insurgency in southern Sudan. Sudan’s financial and military support transformed what was then a domestic insurgency into an international conflict. It was a pivotal change in the dynamic of the conflict and provided the LRA with ready-access to training, munitions, and safe bases from which they could conduct cross-border raids. The civil war in Sudan provided the right conditions for the LRA-Khartoum partnership that would come to inform the conflict’s financial, regional, and political dynamics for years to come.

In 1996, hundreds of thousands of Ugandans were summarily ushered into internal displacement camps by the GoU under direct orders of President Yoweri Museveni. It was the culmination of a new counterinsurgency strategy. Forced encampment became an act of triage: the UPDF announced that any person found outside of the camps would be considered an LRA combatant and dealt with accordingly. If you were a civilian, you were expected to stay within the bounds of the camp. The government listed a litany of reasons for the creation of camps: “to avoid abduction; to save the properties of the innocent; to save the lives of people; to cut the communication between the masses and the rebels.” Yet, as Chris Dolan points out, “This juxtaposition of a concern with protecting peoples’ physical security and a suspicion that these very same people might be supporting the rebels – and therefore in need of containment – reflected fundamental ambiguities in the relationship between people in northern Uganda and the southern-dominated Government” (Dolan 2005: 108). By the time the LRA left Uganda and began shifting into the DRC in 2005, nearly two million people were forcibly displaced by the Ugandan government under intimidation and bombing campaigns by the UPDF.
The LRA was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2005 with Museveni’s enthusiastic support. As the arrest warrants were unveiled, the first state-referral in the tenure of the ICC, President Museveni shared the stage with then–Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo in a move that signaled where the political alliances of international justice lie in Uganda, much to the dismay of civil society groups working in the region.

The ICC has been regularly critiqued for its emphasis on potential violations of international law taking place on the African continent at the exclusion of others. Responses to the LRA arrest warrants exemplify these critiques, and add another: the political collusion of the ICC with a state known for a comparable record of violence. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the UPDF is in many ways as culpable as the LRA for the violence of the past twenty years. The arrest warrants only detail those crimes perpetrated by the LRA’s top leadership with no mention of state violence (Branch 2008, 2011: 179-215; Akhavan 2005).

At the same time, the LRA relocated to neighboring states after being routed out of Ugandan territory by the UPDF. Shortly thereafter on July 14, 2006, the LRA entered internationally-brokered peace talks with the GoU. The Juba peace talks, named after the capital city of South Sudan where they took place and brokered by the Vice President of the then–semi-autonomous government of southern Sudan, Riek Machar, marked a pivotal turning point in the history of the conflict. While there had been a handful of other peace talks of varying success over the years, this was the first set of talks to insist on addressing root causes; include monitors from civil society, government, law, and the international community; and establish an effective timeline for progressively signing on each agenda item, all the while having buy-in from all the parties involved, including an international
negotiator. The conditions were right, it seemed, for a protracted peace between the LRA and the GoU. These conditions, however, soon deteriorated through accusations from a number of sources that each side was “not serious about peace.”

Rumors occupied a central role in the dissemination and interpretation of information in Acholiland throughout the war (Finnström 2009), and the Juba peace talks were no exception. Rumors circulated throughout the duration of the peace talks that neither side was “serious about peace” and these rumors became powerful instruments for negotiating political power between both sides. Such accusations have allowed each side to shore up political support and assure onlookers that the only thing to blame for the prolongation of the conflict is the intransience of the other side. The GoU, for its part, was able to convince Moreno-Ocampo so effectively that he regularly and publicly dismissed the LRA as merely biding their time to rearm. As the Chief Prosecutor, such a public denunciation of one of the two parties engaged in ongoing peace talks can have a massive effect on their outcome (Branch 2010: 190-1). The LRA has variably been described as “religious lunatics” (Titeca 2010: 59), “bizarre,” “mad,” and “resolutely non-political” (Finnström 2008b: 120-1). So when Kony expected the forthcoming peace agreement to result in his ICC warrant being dropped, “along with money and a position in the government,” it was clear that he would get none of these demands, regardless of how poorly such thin representations of the LRA might hold up to scrutiny (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010: 18).

Kony signed on nearly every agenda item of the peace process from the LRA’s heavily fortified base in the DRC’s Garamba National Park. In the last days of negotiation, however, Kony pulled out of the talks and refused to sign the final agenda item (the final peace agreement), citing the ICC arrest warrants and what he argued was the GoU’s intent to
sabotage the peace process for political purposes. On December 14, 2008, the UPDF, supported by the militaries of the DRC and the Government of South Sudan with additional support provided by the US military, began bombing LRA camps in Garamba (Atkinson 2010). The operation failed to capture any meaningful targets and instead resulted in massive retributive attacks perpetrated by the LRA on the Congolese communities living nearby.

Many mark this as the collapse of the peace talks, citing reports that the attack had been planned well before the final agreement’s deadline as proof that the GoU was never serious about ending the war; others identify Joseph Kony’s failure to appear at the signing ceremony two weeks earlier as proof that the LRA – and Kony in particular – was only using the talks to reorganize and rearm his troops. In the end, it was certainly a combination of factors that led to the talk’s collapse. Regardless of one’s assessment of who fomented the talks’ collapse, this attack, dubbed “Operation Lightning Thunder,” was the proverbial nail in the coffin for the Juba peace talks. It remains conjecture whether either side would have signed the final agreement if the other would have acceded to this-or-that additional criteria, but by the time Operation Lighting Thunder commenced, the war entered a new phase, one that still continues at the time of writing.

Military operations continue in the region and, since the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 was signed into U.S. law, President Barack Obama has sent 100 military advisors to the region to coordinate regional troops and provide military intelligence to assist in tracking Kony’s whereabouts. The African Union has developed a Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) specific to the LRA. This task force is comprised of personnel from a number of regional African countries but is primarily led by senior UPDF officers. The LRA has since split into small, highly mobile units of a few dozen soldiers that
have spread out over a huge area of DRC, CAR, South Sudan, and, it is speculated, Sudan. Many believe that the unit Kony travels with is safely inside Sudan, an area where the AU-RTF and others do not have the mandate to patrol. A short time ago Kony was believed to be hiding in Kafia Kingi, a disputed enclave on the Sudan/South Sudan border, and these speculations have recently resurfaced. The LRA conflict is still ongoing, albeit in entirely different terrain.

In thinking about these new terrains, Finnström’s more recent work continues to confront what he calls the magical imagery that makes these depoliticized narratives possible. In his piece “Humanitarian Death and the Magic of Global War in Uganda,” he explores the ways in which “local realities are deeply entangled with larger regional – even global – warscapes,” and that what is commonly used as a trope to describe the irrationality of the LRA – “magical terror” – is more appropriately assigned to our understanding of the “emplacement of global forces on the African scene” (2012: 107). This terror produces the circumstances that allow the complexity of the conflict to be reduced to black and white images: “us versus them, victim against perpetrator, and the secularized and modern Ugandan government and its international partners in development defending the Ugandan citizenry against the primitive barbarians of the LRA” (107). These explanations are on many levels recycled colonial narratives, Finnström argues, remade for the modern age (108; 2008a: 29-61). Their magic, then, is in the reanimation of colonial narratives in the services of state and humanitarian action; it is in the excess of “humanitarian reason” (Fassin 2012).
IV. HUMANITARIAN EXCESS

In November 2003 Jan Egeland, then the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, toured IDP camps in northern Uganda. Afterwards, he dubbed the LRA conflict and the situation in northern Uganda “the biggest forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today,” no small claim just eight months after the US-led intervention of Iraq.\textsuperscript{12} The line was picked up by a plethora of news sources and international organizations and the profile of the conflict immediately escalated, producing a massive increase of international attention along with “the intervention of hundreds of state and non-state external actors” (Perrot 2010: 187).\textsuperscript{13}

An immense influx of funding followed. Funds specifically for humanitarian assistance “increased from US$19.5 million in 2000 to US$56 million in 2002, and US $119.5 million in 2007,” with “official development assistance and official aid [increasing] from US$817 million in 2000 to US$1.2 billion in 2005” (Perrot 2010: 189). The United Nations Children's Fund tripled the number of officers it employed for child protection programs between 2004-2006 and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees began piloting work in IDP camps as part of the slow expansion of the organization’s mandate to include IDPs in their otherwise refugee-focused work (Dolan and Hovil 2006: 7). As a result, a sort of parallel state developed, filling the public, emergency needs of conflict-affected populations through private, international humanitarian organizations. The heavy presence of (mostly international) NGOs allowed the state to evade providing public


\textsuperscript{13} Even before Egeland’s widely circulated remark made its rounds in 2003, NGOs involved in relief operations increased more than tenfold by 2000 as the result of the massive displacement that took place beginning in 1996 (Dolan 2009: 52).
programs that might otherwise be considered state responsibilities. A complex network of professionals, experts, and ex-pats stepped in where the state stepped back. Nearly every state function one could imagine was taken over by the NGO community in northern Uganda, from food distribution to the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants.

This is not merely the proliferation of aid, however. The entire region of northern Uganda was reconstituted as a site of conflict, defined by and through the management of civil war. What at first appears to be the retreat of the Ugandan state is in fact a much more complicated web of national, international, and non-state actors collectively transforming the very position of social relationships in the context of war. For twenty years Gulu functioned as the base for nearly every NGO working in the north; only The World Food Programme, World Vision, and Care were able to travel into rural communities during wartime, leaving the rest blocked in town. Gulu became a hub of international (largely Western) staff where internet cafés and hotels began rapidly appearing. The provision of social services were directed through this network of largely international humanitarian organizations and, especially within the context of the camp (where individuals had no freedom of movement and consequently no real access to building a livelihood that did not at some level depend upon these humanitarian structures), they became an essential part of daily life.

Adam Branch (2011) provides a useful continuation of Finnström’s work here. Branch is primarily interested in the nexus of statecraft and human rights intervention within the context of forced internal displacement in northern Uganda. Placing Finnström’s official narrative more specifically within the human rights industry that operates in northern Uganda, he argues that “human rights intervention is always open to antidemocratic political
instrumentalization and always has the possibility of undermining political autonomy among those subject to it” (9). By considering the ways in which this potential for manipulation is experienced by the subjects of and the national and international forces that circumscribe such interventions, Branch reveals a close affinity between the official discourse and humanitarian complicity in the forced displacement of northern Ugandans.

This complicity has taken a number of different forms. The Acholi Inn, the highest profile hotel operating in Gulu during the war and the host of nearly every military, political, or humanitarian delegation to visit the region, was owned by a high-ranking UPDF commander, Colonel Charles Otema (Nibbe 2010: 69-70). One Acholi civilian remarked: “We see four-by-fours going from the NGO compound to their office then back home. Why don’t they go to the camps? […] People come here, make reports, go away and we never here about the report any more. We still die here and nothing happens. People just make money out of the conflict” (cited in Perrot 2010: 203). The perspective that the war generated (and still generates) great wealth for military, political, and humanitarian agents was and continues to be widespread, and in no place was this more pronounced than in the camps.

Finnström’s official discourse, Branch would argue, is most effectively deployed by the network of international human rights organizations and Ugandan government officials that made a policy of forced displacement not only possible, but politically and financially advantageous. He explains, “Where the conditions are right, human rights interventions can become the building blocks of lasting administrative structures intended to normalize states, economies, cultures, societies, and individuals in line with given models” (2011: 36). These interventions discipline their subjects by reconstructing sociopolitical relations between state and citizen. What we see in northern Uganda is not the straightforward “retreat of the state”
that is often attributed to diffuse state power in Africa but rather the re-articulation of state
power through non-state or, perhaps more accurately, fractal-state actors. It is instead the
“continual formation of the state” (Hibou 2004).

There is a mutual dependence between the Ugandan state and the aid agencies that
manage the region, where “...the regime of state violence against the Acholi in the camps was
only possible because of the intervention of the aid agencies, and the aid agencies could only
carry out their management activities because of their direct and indirect reliance on state
violence” (Branch 2009: 478). The IDP camp is perhaps the most transparent example. It was
only by forcibly displacing nearly the entire Acholi population that the conflict became
labeled a humanitarian emergency and the majority of NGOs began their operations. This is
not to dismiss violence inflicted on the population by the LRA. However, it was the GoU
much less so than the violence of the LRA that pushed peasants into the IDP camps for
“protection,” and it was only by declaring the region a humanitarian emergency (Redfield
2010) that the international community was able to intervene with Museveni's support.

Chris Dolan, the director of Refugee Law Project at Makerere University’s School of
Law, echoes Branch when he contends, “In many instances these [international humanitarian
organizations] can be regarded as complicit bystanders; like doctors in a torture situation,
they appear to ease the suffering of victims, but in reality they enable the process to be
prolonged by keeping the victim alive for further abuse” (2009: 1-2). The aid agencies
depend on the violence of the state for their very existence just as the state depends on these
international, non-state actors to sustain the “bare life” (Agamben 1998) of the peasantry in
the camps. The bare life of an Acholi peasantry fits neatly into the official discourse, carrying
with it an appearance of inevitable need: their suffering demands action and what action
other than international intervention could possibly fulfill that need (Malkki 1996)? Branch’s analysis of human rights intervention in northern Uganda is a significant contribution to our understanding of the official discourse at work.

V. CONCLUSIONS: A RUPTURE IN JUBA

As one might imagine, the sociopolitical environment in northern Uganda continues to shift. The manner in which northern Ugandans articulate the conflict and their relationship to it is not the same as ten, five, or even just a few years ago. Even as Museveni retains power, his party is splintering through political infighting and the country is gradually shifting towards a political transition, if not by societal pressure then by Museveni’s inevitable passing. New human rights programs are replacing the old as the formerly displaced return home, transforming agendas from basic humanitarian assistance to livelihoods and skills training, capacity building and reconciliation programs.

The rush of organizations after 2003 was “unprecedented, uncoordinated, and fragmented,” and it would be difficult to see today’s state and non-state interventions in northern Uganda as any different (Perrot 2010: 188). Eleven years later, at the time of writing in 2014, there are more organizations operating in northern Uganda than during the height of the war. While many large international emergency-relief organizations have withdrawn from Uganda after the LRA migrated elsewhere, such as Médecins sans Frontières (Redfield 2010), there has been an upsurge of peace-building, education, and micro-enterprise organizations in the region, the vast majority of which continue to be based in Gulu.

Documentation and memorialization initiatives are an integral part of this transformation and are instructive of the ways in which conflict narratives are being recorded
and archived in the present-day milieu of northern Uganda. Finnström conducted the bulk of his fieldwork for his book in 1997-2003, while Branch conducted his research intermittently between 2001 and 2009. I therefore position myself in conversation with their monographs not only because my work is informed by their earlier contributions but also because it was undertaken in the subsequent time period (2009-2014), a time period marked by the collapse of the Juba peace talks and the return home of the majority of formerly displaced.

Peace in post-Juba northern Uganda has been called “uneasy” (Mwenda 2010), “relative,” “fragile” (Atkinson 2010), and “incomplete” (Schomerus and Titeca 2012). Such characterizations reflect the forms that the rupture in Juba has taken in contemporary Acholiland. By considering the Juba peace talks as a break between the expectation that peace would come from a durable political resolution and the expectation that peace would come despite the absence of a durable political resolution I draw attention to the indeterminacy of peace within the impasse of the current political moment.

A great deal of literature on northern Uganda has surfaced over the past decade. Scholarly and popular accounts of the conflict have come to cover topics as wide as mass violence (Branch 2005); internal displacement (Dolan 2009; Hovil & Okello 2008; Omach 2002); rebel dynamics (Day 2011; Prunier 2004); the International Criminal Court (Allen 2006; Akhavan 2005; Branch 2007; Brubacher 2010) and transitional justice (Allen 2010; Baines 2007; Finnström 2010; Perrot 2010); and, most recently, humanitarian complicity in the prolongation of conflict (Branch 2008, 2009, 2011; Dolan 2009; Nibbe 2010). These accounts are far-reaching and continue to emerge as the area becomes more accessible to research and recent developments locate it within major international debates.\(^{14}\) There has

\(^{14}\) I am thinking here of the recent decision made by President Obama in 2011, with the support of the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009, to deploy 100 advisory troops to “capture or kill”
been, however, little work done to account for the ways in which the conflict is put through informal mechanisms of closure that, both literally and figuratively, write the end of the conflict. Northern Uganda has seen an upsurge of mostly non-governmental projects that document and memorialize the conflict. They are constructing archives, building museums, and producing literature. These projects are constructed under and evaluated by a rubric of expectations for peace. By unearthing the “truth” of what it is that happened during the war, these projects claim, affected communities can begin to recognize their stories within a national history and move forward from over two decades of conflict into a more prosperous future.

If, as Didier Fassin (2010) has written and both Adam Branch and Sverker Finnström have shown above, “humanitarianism is founded on an inequality of lives and hierarchies of humanity,” then tracing how these hierarchies and inequalities are expressed in particular programs by particular actors is an essential component of any analysis of humanitarianism at work. Such is the goal of the remainder of this thesis.
CHAPTER TWO
INTERROGATING THE ARCHIVE

I. INTRODUCTION: “FROM WHERE DO THEY DERIVE THEIR POWER?”

“We will go to the archive in London – this will be very helpful for your research.” I had met Otim less than an hour earlier as I fiddled with the Orange modem I use every year in Uganda. It had worked without issue the year before, but couldn’t pick up a signal as I drank a cup of tea on the verandah of a small café where I had become a regular visitor since I first visited Gulu Town in 2009. The verandah is without cover and stands adjacent to one of the more regularly trafficked streets on the edge of Gulu Town. To the east is a former IDP camp, the closest one to town, one of the many remnants of the two-decade-long conflict that continues in neighboring states. Once it reaches the camp, the street turns into a narrow, unpaved path that winds through the maze of still-utilized homes and down a steep hill into the villages closest to town. It was from this path that Otim arrived at the café. Otim explained how he had “just returned from the village” and needed a rest after reaching town by trekking up this large hill. He sat in the empty chair beside me.

Otim is probably in his mid-seventies and it was clear he had been working in the fields all morning. After introducing myself as a graduate student who was conducting research in the region, he eagerly offered his assistance. “What do you want to know? I can assist you in your research. I work with an American professor, you know. Ronald.\textsuperscript{15} We do some serious work. What are you interested in: cultural anthropology, pre-colonial history,

\textsuperscript{15} As it turned out, the American named Ronald was Ronald Atkinson, perhaps the most well-known Western scholar on pre-colonial Acholiland after the publication of his text The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi in Uganda before 1800 (Atkinson 1994).
supernatural occurrences, spiritual histories? Make me a questionnaire and I will write out long responses, by hand, and if you are satisfied we will continue working together. When you return [presumably after my next trip to Uganda], we will go around the north to complete the project, we will go to Entebbe, we will go to the archive in London – this will be very helpful for your research.” I interrupted here to tell Otim that my work is actually interested in the development of the archive in northern Uganda as an object of study, particularly the new site that was being put together in Kitgum. He asked me again about an archive in London. “Do you know the archive in London?” I responded that I had never been to London, to which he insisted we must travel there together. “We will get someone to sponsor us” to travel to London to visit the archives, he declared with great confidence.

As I wondered about what Otim thinks I would find in the archive that would be so essential to my work, he began speaking about a number of seemingly disjointed topics in quick succession. He shared stories about pre-colonial Kitgum, about the arrival of European missionaries, and about the shifts in meaning that erupted through this encounter. He reflected on how Europeans “corrected” how Acholi understood supernatural “episodes” – a word he used regularly throughout our conversation to describe the singularity of phenomenal events – but insisted that he hadn’t rejected his earlier, “non-European” explanations. As an international NGO’s white land cruiser drove by, readily recognizable by the logo that adorned its side panel, Otim paused. “From where do they derive their power?” he asked.

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework that guides my thinking about the construction of the archive in northern Uganda. I would like to take Otim’s question – “From
where do [humanitarian actors] derive their power?” – and in turn ask: From where does the archive derive its power? This question is particularly relevant given that the archive of the conflict is being developed by the very organizations towards which Otim motions.

I begin by outlining Jacque Derrida’s proposition that the archive is at once a site of commencement and commandment, tracing how such power operates within the limits of archival production. From there, I suggest we think about the archive in northern Uganda as a humanitarian archive, a modifier that serves as a reminder of the impetus behind such projects along with their requisite politics. Finally, I offer a brief introduction to a few of the most prominent pre-Juba sites of memory in order to juxtapose them against my analysis of more recent, more heavily institutionalized sites in Chapter Four.

II. WHAT DOES THE ARCHIVE DO? THE ARCHIVE AS A PRODUCTIVE SPACE

Jacques Derrida, in his oft-cited etymological introduction to Archive Fever (1995: 1), writes,

“Arkhē, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle.”

These two principles, the demarcation of an originary, historical site and the ordering of a social landscape, form an archive that “produces as much as it records” (17). The stories that it houses, often mistakenly read as static representations of times past, are doubly inscribed: first by the author from which the document originates, and second by the process of

16 Here I am also invoking Achille Mbembe’s “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” (2002).
archivization itself. Documents are translated, arranged, and presented according to an institutional logic particular to the archive in which they are housed. Each document is aligned between and against the next, forming a chain of ideas at once digestible and fleeting, leaving no distinct trace of the logic that binds them together.

In order to best understand the position of the archive, then, we must shift our attention to “archiving-as-process rather than archives-as-things” (Stoler 2010: 20; 2007: 267). Derrida’s assessment of the archive encourages the same; that there is “no archive without outside” alludes both to the inexactitude with which processes of archivization attempt to draw lines around lived experiences and the exteriority with which the archive is in constant conversation (11). Part of the process of archivization is to render the document archivable, bringing an outside within its walls. This may involve truncating the sum of the original source, putting a new name to an existing title, or making transformational decisions over the mentions and silences that permeate its text (Trouillot 1995).

But the second part, the part that Derrida is more directly confronting in this oft-quoted passage, is the outside that positions the archive at each moment we take its measure, the outside that contextualizes our encounters with its content. The content of the archive is thereby inscribed a third time, by the reader who retrieves the document for future consumption. There is no archive without the conditions of the world that stand outside its walls, both at the moment of assemblage and retrieval. There exists a two-way conversation in the retrieval of archived content. In many ways this is built into the assembly of the archive itself: an archive is constructed if for no other reason than to serve as an interlocutor for future publics. Archives do productive work in the publics with which they communicate
across time; they speak for “a promise… a responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida 1995: 36). They are positioned towards the future.

We cannot therefore end an assessment of the construction of the archive with the notion that what an archivist does is simply warehouse facts (as in the now-outdated positivist reading) and statements (Foucault 1972: 128), or, even, that archivization “convey[s] authority and set[s] the rules for credibility and interdependence” (Trouillot 1995: 52). While this is indeed a partial function of the archive, it also does much more. We must also consider the archive a site of futurities, a radical refiguring that positions the archive as an emergent project in conversation with a contemporary reading of a past that is lobbied for an imagined future.

Consider South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was formed after decades of abuses that took place under apartheid. One of its primary tasks – in many ways, its only task – was to uncover and unearth an inclusive South African past as an exercise in restorative justice. The truth, it was said, would set the population free by re-appropriating the lived experiences of those who were marginalized under apartheid onto a very public, national stage.

The TRC carried the principles of both commencement and commandment; it set the moment at which South African history – a redemptive, reconciliatory history – would begin anew while constructing a new national order. The TRC redefined a new social order characterized by the “forsaking of revenge” (Wilson 2001: xix) and “a rhetorical expression of an all-inclusive rainbow nationalism” rather than a recognition of institutionalized violence (6). Testimonies were reduced to narratives of a healing nation, where individuals sought redemption for past crimes and institutional responsibility was curtailed for the sake
of national unity and strength. Wilson writes, “Popular memories of an authoritarian past are multiple, fluid, indeterminate and fragmentary, so truth commissions play a vital role in fixing memory and institutionalizing a view of the past conflict” (2002: 16). The TRC’s role in the archivization process was total: “It archived the evidence it required to support the history that it produced and, by archiving its evidence, it guaranteed the veracity of the history it produced” (B. Harris 2002: 163).

The TRC was also something more, however. It stood not only as the legitimization of the post-apartheid state (Wilson 2001) but also as a bookend on the country’s past that petitioned, ultimately, for a post-apartheid future. The TRC, from the moment of its creation through its submission of its final report on October 20, 1998, articulated its role through the lens of the past. It was presented “as coming to ‘terms with our dark past once and for all’ and as closing ‘a horrendous chapter in the life of our nation’” (B. Harris 2002: 162). The archive functioned as a site of closure from which the nation could move forward. But in that commencement, in that commandment, is a selectivity, a “selection of producers, selection of evidence, selection of themes, selection of procedures” that preclude the selection of others (Trouillot 1995: 53).

This lens of the past is misleading. The past was leveraged only insofar as the TRC could imagine and articulate a South African future. In each of the TRC’s activities—in its documentation, in its hearings, in its determinations, and in its transcriptions—there is an emergent future colored by a forthcoming rainbow-nationalism that guides it along each step of the process. Underneath the construction of the archive lies, in Derridian terms, a promise, what I in turn call an expectation, more specifically, an expectation of historical

17 And its final two subsequent volumes released on March 21, 2003.
emplacement. The expectation of the TRC was one of social order and of peaceful cohabitation. Its purpose was pointed and exact.

When archives are constructed under a pretense of humanitarian relief or political remedy they carry with them the expectation that by documenting individual and communal experiences during the period of conflict, those individuals and communities will have a voice in the historical record and consequently a stake in the nation’s trajectory. But, as we saw above, this participation cannot possibly be total; the archive does not – cannot – allow it. So whether in the case of Derrida’s archival violence (7) or Trouillot’s archival power (55), the selectivity of narratives remain ordered by an unequal – although by no means fixed – power relation. How does this unequal power relation manifest itself in the construction of humanitarian archives? How might the meeting point of the various actors that contribute to the construction of such an archive be better understood in light of their varied interests?

III. TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN ARCHIVE

“The archive, that primary site of state monumentality, was the very institution that canonized, crystallized, and classified the knowledge required by the state even as it made this knowledge available for subsequent generations in the cultural form of a neutral repository of the past.” (Dirks 2002: 61)

Archival production – especially the production with which scholars are most often concerned – is commonly a function of the state or “state-like institutions” (Doornbos 1990; Bohman 1999). Archives are public configurations of a nation’s past, such as we see in the case of the TRC; vestiges of a colonial prefecture rarely visited by anyone but professional historians (Dirks 2002; Starn 2002: 387-8); or records generated by the bureaucratic machinations of state institutions. Such institutions either house the archive or provide the
documentation being archived which leads, in both cases, to the state and its subsidiaries being the object of analysis for any scholarly account. Archives are often read as being in conversation exclusively with the state; that individuals within the contemporary nation state may have a stake in archival knowledge is already always a secondary concern.

What I write about in this thesis are not the state archives that often become the delimiters of how and when we both deploy and understand the terminology of “the archive,” but of an emergent space, both material and discursive, whereby narratives of the past are deposited in relation to and positioned against an imagined collective future that is not the product of mere state intervention.

When Nicholas Dirks (2002: 58) writes that “the archive is a discursive formation in the totalizing sense that it reflects the categories and operations of the state itself,” we can agree, but only insofar as we do not tether the archive to the operations of just the state, and instead consider it the product of a much broader network of power brokers who all have their voices impressed (Derrida 1995: 18) on its pages. “To engage in an ethnography of the archive entails going well beyond seeing it as an assemblage of texts, a depository of and for history,” but it also entails going well beyond an analysis of the state (Dirks 2002: 58).

It might be more useful to think about this sort of archival project as a humanitarian archive, that is, an archive with the expressed intent of serving victims of egregious violence, trauma, and loss in order to make peace among a broader network of individuals that includes both victims and perpetrators. A humanitarian archive emphasizes its interaction – even partnership – with a broader community. It expects participation. It does not see itself as bureaucratic recordkeeping, but as a transformative space. This sort of archive is decidedly
different from the type usually undertaken in academic analysis. While these initiatives certainly carry inflections of state policy and praxis – even if to aggressively disarm state apparatuses of their various exercises of power – they are also something else. Humanitarian archives are productive in a way that encompasses far more than “state monumentality” played out in the microcosm of bureaucratic power that is the archive. They are a form of humanitarian governance forged at the interstices of a wide array of actors.

While no records stored in an archive are ever passive objects of analysis to be read as static representations of a past moment, the records housed in humanitarian archives are perhaps even more attenuated to the circumstances of technocratic intent; the items found in humanitarian archives are, in most cases, produced with the sole intention of being housed in such an archive. An individual’s testimony of the violence they have endured is collected by a documentation team (the focus of the following chapter) in order to contribute to a collection of similar testimonies. More often than not, the production of this documentation and the construction of the sites in which it will be housed are led by the same or partner institutions. The purpose is to contrast and compare.

This is profoundly different than, say, the colonial archive which collects public records along with the personal effects of colonial bureaucrats (correspondence, personal letters, etc…). Here, the mission is colonial inscription – both as model bureaucratic practice and as a signifier of a superior intellectual order. The preservation of colonial documents is an exercise in “the taming of chance” (Stoler 2009: 42) in order to construct a more coherent colonial frame of reference. The archive thus becomes an arm of the colonial state and, while certainly not the conceptually coherent arm colonial administrators seemed to expect, its *raison d’etre* is to bolster the means of control on behalf of the structures of colonial
governance. One does not participate with the colonial archives in the way I’ve described above, nor is its content collected programmatically.

While I utilize the example of the colonial archive to better distinguish what makes the humanitarian archive unique, I don’t want to overemphasize their distinctions. The two are imbued with altogether different logics and expectations of participation, but they also both contain traces of the unevenness of their production. Stoler, for example, writes about colonial state archives as “sites of perturbations of other kinds – less monuments to the absence of ubiquity of knowledge than its piecemeal partiality, less documents to the force of reasoned judgment than to both the spasmodic and sustained currents of anxious labor that paper trails could not contain” in a way that has a great deal of resonance for humanitarian archives, particularly in northern Uganda (2009: 19).

The archives I am concerned with here take a number of forms, all of which I consider under the rubric of humanitarian archives. The types that collect and preserve physical documentation are very often called “information centers” or “documentation centers.” In most cases, they do not use the term “archive” in their own descriptors. I account for this in two ways: first, many of these projects are presented as NGO partnerships and programs that qualify as “outreach.” Directors and program assistants are more likely to describe the usefulness of the space in terms of local participation – that it serves as a convenient space providing free access to computers and a relatively fast internet connection along with a regular collection of the country’s leading daily newspapers – than highlight the records stored in-house themselves. To talk about this sort of a participatory space as an archive undermines the project’s positioning of itself in the community.
Second, NGOs in northern Uganda (and, of course, elsewhere) operate in an environment dictated by a constantly fluctuating anxiety of where the next source of funding will come. Constructing monuments and memorials infused with the language of “peace-building” sells in a way that constructing archives does not, even if the material project carries no distinction. In both cases, taking on the name of an archive is more burdensome than useful.

The same recurring joke would surface every time I discussed my research on archives with scholars of the region: that the archives were built for “us” (international, largely white, Western graduate students and researchers) to serve a continuously growing—and profitable—economy of conflict research. Many had never heard of these projects prior to our conversation and seemed certain that all one would find in such a space were empty rooms and forgotten documents with a single foreign researcher huddled in the corner over his/her laptop and high-speed modem. It was not the first time I had heard this. “Barlonyo is a research center. All of these researchers come through, take pictures of the graves, and then leave. They return home to get their Ph.D.’s, but the town sees no change. These researchers are never actually present.” Here the same sentiment is expressed in terms of visitors to a mass grave. So began my visit to Barlonyo, the town that shares its name with one of the most well-known massacres during the LRA insurgency and houses the largest memorial site in the region.
IV. MONUMENTS AND MEMORY IN NORTHERN UGANDA

1. Sign directing visitors to the site of monument in Atiak along the main road, 2012.


Prominent sites of memory in northern Uganda began appearing at least as early as 1996 when a monument stone was built to commemorate the victims of the Atiak massacre.
that occurred just one year earlier on April 20, 1995.\textsuperscript{18} It is largely understood that Vincent Otti, himself born in Atiak, is responsible for planning the attack. Otti was the former second-in-command in the LRA who was reportedly killed by Joseph Kony in 2007 because Otti had been too eager to engage in the Juba peace talks. Individuals travel to the site every year for commemoration prayers which have become relatively large events since their first occurrence in 2005.\textsuperscript{19} One resident recalls:

\begin{quote}
It was the Rwot Moo [the anointed, hereditary clan chief] who first thought about organizing this memorial service. He was of the view that after we lost very many people in Atiak, something should be done in their memory. He also thought that since children of many tribes were killed in the massacre, this could make them annoyed with the people of Atiak. They would think that since Otti was from Atiak, they would blame the people of Atiak for the massacre. We needed to invite these people so that we were able to explain to them what happened on the day of the massacre. That is the reason that we invite all these people who lost their children in the massacre, so that they are able to learn exactly what happened and know that it was not in our wish that these things happened. That is why we invite survivors of the massacre to recount to them the story of the massacre so that they can know exactly what happened. . . . At the start the Atiak people feared the Madi people but today they are free. The Madi people have now confessed that they shall never look at the Acholi people as enemies anymore. We brought survivors of the massacre to recount to them the story of the massacre and this made them clearly understand that the Acholi people also suffered the same way as they did.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

The monument itself is not a mass grave – the grave lies elsewhere. One hundred and seventy people are said to have been killed on-site, with another two hundred and ninety executed after being taken a short distance across the river from the site of the initial attack. The attack was in some ways retributive; the LRA had been attempting to recruit from the burgeoning camp but its residents were refusing to join. The LRA sought to punish those living in the camp for “cooperating” with government orders of camp life. However, the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Figures 1 and 2
\textsuperscript{19} Hopwood 2011: 10. On April 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2012, Justice and Reconciliation Project, an organization based in Gulu, traveled to Atiak to document the event. It is now a public record. Footage of the event can be found online at http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2012/04/attiak-massacre-memorial-prayers-04202012-parts-1-2/.
\end{flushright}
attack was also politically strategic. Like the attack in Barlonyo nine years later, this was an attack on a “protected village.” Residents lived in extremely tight quarters across a limited patch of land. A UPDF barracks stood directly next to the camp. The ease with which the LRA was able to massacre well over four hundred people as the UPDF was housed literally next door is a vivid reminder of its inability – even its unwillingness – to protect civilians.

In 1997 St. Mary’s College Aboke renovated the grotto that stood in the center of the compound’s courtyard in order to memorialize the abduction and rescue of the “Aboke girls,” 139 young women whom the LRA abducted from the boarding school one year earlier. The statue of Mary had been there well before 1996, when one of the most infamous LRA abductions took place, but it was not until after the abduction and rescue that it was reimagined as a site of remembrance for the war. It is compulsory that every day at lunchtime

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21 Figure 3
and again between six and seven in the evening every student meets at the monument to recite the Holy Rosary. The monument belongs to a daily routine.

The face of the monument contains six prominent images: a statue of Jesus Christ; a statue of Mary; a plaque dedicated by Pope John Paul II, which reads “St. Mary’s Secondary School – Aboke, We implore God’s blessing on your children, your families and your country Uganda and we pray for the gift of peace and reconciliation”; an engraving that memorializes the general suffering wrought by the conflict; a mosaic of Sister Rachele Fassera, the deputy head mistress at the school, pleading with the LRA to release the remaining 30 girls; and an image of Jesus on the cross behind a map of Uganda that depicts the abduction of youth from their homes and recognizing other massacres in the country, including the one in Atiak just a year earlier. Two pieces hang next to the larger centerpiece: on one side, a memorial plaque dedicated to Maria Alba Burlo, the mother superior in 1996, and on the other, a list of five names of young women considered to have been killed by the LRA. “Our weapon of achieving peace is prayer,” I was often told at St. Mary’s.
On February 21, 2004, a large cohort of LRA combatants crossed the River Moroto from Pader District into Barlonyo IDP camp. They split into at least three separate groups. Two of them circled the perimeter while the third went directly to attack the defense detach. The camp’s residents were routed from the edges of the camp inward in order to cut off their means of escape. Many of the IDP homes were burned or had their walls smashed with residents still inside (Hopwood 2011: 16).

The number of lives lost in Barlonyo is fiercely debated. The engraving on the monument reads, “R.I.P. HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF 121 INNOCENT UGANDANS WHO WERE MASSACRED BY LRA TERRORISTS ON 21.02.04. THE BURIAL CEREMONY WAS PRESIDED OVER BY H.E. YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA ON SATURDAY 27.03.04. MAY THEIR SOULS REST IN PEACE.” Residents frequently offer a corrective: “307 were killed officially, but even that is not the real number,” it is repeated. “Many others fled into the

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22 Part of the contentiousness of counting the number of dead described below stems from the fact that the UPDF detachment “was withdrawn shortly before the massacre.” See Hopwood 2011: n68.
bush and died or were taken by the rebels but killed on their way.” Many consider the low number engraved on the monument to be deliberate, going so far as to claim that “efforts to determine the true number of those killed in Barlonyo were deliberately hampered” by the UPDF and the GoU in order to limit the political claims its residents could make (Hopwood 2011: 16).

The monuments in Atiak, St. Mary’s College Aboke, and Barlonyo are typical of the sites of memory in northern Uganda that were constructed before the collapse of the Juba peace talks in 2008. Nearly all of these early sites take the form of monuments that attest to incidents of past trauma experienced by the community that constructed them. They are concrete structures engraved with a line of remembrance. Two such examples are:

“IN MEMORY
OF THE GREAT
SUFFERINGS THE
UGANDAN PEOPLE
WENT THROUGH
PEOPLE WHO
WERE BRUTALISED
MAIMED AND KILLED
CHILDREN WHO
WERE ABDUCTED
AND TAKEN AWAY
FROM THEIR HOMES
NEVER TO RETURN
TO THEIR LOVED
ONES”

“IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR
SONS AND DAUGHTERS
MASSACRED IN ATTIK
ON 20-4-1995
MAY THEIR SOUL REST IN ETERNAL PEACE
(WEK TIPO GI OYWEE I KABEDO ME KUC)”

These engravings speak to a local concern of well-being and coming to terms with the past. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and Erin Baines speak about such “civil society initiatives as potential
supplements or correctives to national processes” (2011: 4). Given that Uganda has seen no such national justice process, we might instead consider such projects as supplements or correctives not to a national process, but to the absence of one. For example, by refuting the official numbers sanctioned by the GoU on the memorial in Barlonyo, personified by President Museveni presiding over the marking of the mass grave on its site, community members respond to an absent reconciliation by elevating a very serious dispute to the level of public speech. The repetition of their claim bolsters their unrest. Visitors remember one thing above all else: the discrepancy of body counts.

Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, through a reading of James Scott (1990), consider such enunciations an example of “embodied practices of documentation” or “emplaced witnessing” that “preserve threatened memories in a hidden transcript” (19), what Scott has called “a backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power” (xii). The memorialization of the longue durée of the conflict make such emplacement increasingly difficult, a sign of the changing form of archiving the past in a post-Juba northern Uganda.
CHAPTER THREE

WRITING (PRECARIOUS) LIVES

“Documents are artifacts of modern knowledge practices, and, in particular, knowledge practices that define ethnography itself. Therefore, the ethnography of documentary practices... affords an opportunity to reflect and work upon ethnographic practice in a particular way – not straight on, in the guise of critique or self-reflexivity, but laterally, that is, ethnographically. To study documents, then, is by definition also to study how ethnographers themselves know. The document becomes at once an ethnographic object, an analytical category, and a methodological orientation.” (Riles 2006: 7)

I. INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES

“Are you a researcher? I’d like to tell you my story.” It had been less than ten minutes since I first met Ocen on the outskirts of Gulu Town. The question was mundane in its delivery and I was caught off guard by the directness with which it confronted me. I was, after all, a graduate student whose research project had for years centered on the region. It would not have been inaccurate to simply respond in the positive. This was, however, the first time I had returned to Gulu in two years, not long after the collapse of the Juba peace talks and amidst the rapid changes in the region that followed, and my focus was, for the time, elsewhere.

This visit was not a “research trip.” I was wrapping up a needs assessment I had begun years prior with a local organization and was on my way to find the new market. The original market at the center of town was being renovated by a grant from the World Bank, part of a larger project to revamp the markets in a dozen different towns throughout Uganda to resemble what can best be identified as outdoor shopping malls, standing in stark contrast to what one would expect in a town the size of Gulu. This, many of my friends in Gulu would tell me, is the beginning of development; it is a sign of the end of the war.
Ocen intercepted me as I walked down Acholi Road in what I would learn later was the wrong direction. Two years away had affected my memory more than I had thought. I was struck by Océn’s inquiry. How does one respond when an individual requests that their biography be made known to a complete stranger, when intimacy is no longer a prerequisite for sharing the most traumatic moments of an individual’s life? How does the expediency with which lives are shared reconfigure our understandings of research that is rooted in ethnographic methods? Even more importantly, and perhaps in some ways less methodologically, how do the social worlds we occupy configure the ways in which we represent both ourselves and others? I fumbled at Océn’s question, although it was not until the conversation concluded nearly three hours later that his initial request bore its full weight.

This chapter has two primary tasks: first, to outline the various ways in which humanitarian networks in northern Uganda document the lived experiences of individuals affected by violent civil conflict and, second, to reflect on the complicity of ethnographic writing as part of this very same social milieu. Documentary practices are more than the mere collection of raw data in the form of victim/witness testimony; such collections consist of a series of political choices. Ethnographic writings – and ethnographic “witnessing” – produce “systems, or economies, of truth,” and “power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control” (Clifford 1986: 7). By situating my analysis on these two propositions, we can begin to see how sites of memory – the objects of analysis in the following chapter – are produced through the collection and curation of personal narratives by documentation teams.
A documentarian, archivist, or curator does not merely collect stories, I argue, but also “bends [each] sentence into a particular shape” (Scarry 1994: 3). It is these shapes and their contingent forms that are the focus of this chapter. This is not to say that this bending is in some way deliberate, pre-mediated, or otherwise calculated by those collecting or presenting testimony. Following Matthew Hull, I demonstrate that, while “bureaucratic writing is commonly seen as a mechanism of state control over people, places, processes, and things… the political function of documents is much more ambiguous” (2012: 5). In the context of the construction of humanitarian archives that are the result of an untidy assemblage of both state and non-state actors, then, this political function is even less assured. How, then, are we to understand the transformation of violent civil conflict into technocratic exercises of document acquisition, storage, and presentation?

I begin this chapter by providing an archaeology of documentary practices in northern Uganda. Such an archaeology outlines three implicit components of these practices: who is afforded the epistemological authority to speak, from which institutional sites this speaker “derive[s] its legitimate source and point of application,” and how the positions of the subject (and consequently also the author) are assembled through this speech (Foucault 1972: 50-55). From here, I return to the ethnographic encounter that opened this chapter as a way to reflect on the sometimes unexpected forms of ethnographic practice and, consequently, the complicity of the ethnographer within the wider social world of documentary practices in northern Uganda. Finally, I conclude by thinking about the distance between testimony and its retrieval in order to point to the limits in the production of archival knowledge.
II. TYPOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE

“All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings.” (Sontag 2003: 86)

Documentation projects in northern Uganda employ a number of different strategies for collecting testimony of conflict. Some rely on secondary sources by collecting newspaper accounts, photographs, and found objects to narrate the trajectory of the war. Others collect primary data by visiting affected villages – or villages that are suspected to have been affected – but whose experiences are not yet represented on a regional or national stage.

Documentation teams are often formed by the organizations that plan to later house the testimonies that are collected. With few exceptions, they are led by university-educated Acholi men and women who come to the position with experience working for a number of other organizations in northern Uganda throughout the duration of the conflict. For example, one such documentarian first worked for an organization which documented transitional justice mechanisms after the ICC arrived in northern Uganda; another first worked as a program assistant for a project that provided “victim advocacy” around questions of government reparations.

Among the organizations I researched, documentation teams included both men and women. Some teams had an even number of men and women on their teams while others had more men than women. I did not encounter any documentation teams that employ more women than men. I cannot speak to whether more men than women hold these positions on the whole, but it is likely that this is the case given broader employment trends among Acholi working in the NGO-world; although there are many exceptions, women tend to be employed by programs that focus on education, gender, health, and/or child protection. Of course, the
gender dynamic between those providing and those recording testimony have a profound effect on the form and content of that testimony, especially in the case of taboo subjects such as rape.

These team members usually begin their work with a specific community in one of two ways: either they approach communities known to have experienced specific incidents such as massacres or other well-recognized events, or communities reach out to them in pursuit of being documented. Interviews are conducted in Acholi and notes are taken in both Acholi and English when working in Acholiland. When teams travel to LRA-affected districts outside of Acholiland, such as Soroti or Arua, they use simultaneous English translation by hiring a translator from the immediate community or, if such a translator is unavailable, by identifying a suitable translator from a surrounding community. Regardless of the language being used, teams often audio-record documentation sessions so that a full transcription can be produced after they return from the field to their offices.

As funding has become increasingly scarce, however, many of these teams are instead utilizing volunteers for both the documentation of incidents and the transcription of the recordings collected in the field. These volunteers typically come from Gulu University or another university with a substantial Acholi population. The paid employees in the documentation programs, then, shift into managerial roles and become responsible for writing final reports, returning these reports to each community represented in these reports, and disseminating the collected information among various stakeholders which include government officials, partner organizations, and community leaders.

When I asked some of these employees how they train the volunteers, they told me that the most important qualities to instill in their young volunteers are flexibility in their
methods and fidelity in their transcriptions. The first points to the recognition that a strict typology of an event will not provide much insight into the affective forms of memory that such violent events generate. The second, I was told, addresses the need to “take out [the] interpretation” of data and “document the incident verbatim, which requires writing the question and answer exactly as they were said.” It is important to call attention to the ways in which the explanations of each quality seem to contradict the other. The volunteer needs to be inter-subjective in testimony collection but objective in that testimony’s transcription, attuned to the vagaries of memory but insistent on the veracity of narrative recollection.

Some projects take an entirely different approach to collecting testimony, instead working through existing political hierarchies. One project trains representatives at the various levels of local government to collect testimony on its behalf. Local government has five levels in Uganda: district, county, sub-county, parish, and village, and each representative (Local Councilperson [LC]) is referred to as the LC5, LC4, LC3, LC2, and LC1, respectively. The organization’s employees develop a methodology and the various forms, charts, and other typologies for data collection but do not collect the documentation themselves. Instead, the LC1 is trained to collect the data on the organization’s behalf. Organizations choose to work through the LC1 because the LC1 is the “most local” representative in Uganda and therefore the most in-tune with local histories, it is thought. Since LC1s are also residents in the village that they are collecting testimony, they are also thought to have a stake in their communities and consequently will produce better work. Because these organizations strive for consistency across LC1 documentary practices, these forms, charts, and other tools for collecting data are strictly uniform. While these documents are regularly re-conceptualized and developed as they gain continued use, the categories they
use remain largely intact. LC3s are trained to oversee the methodological consistency of LC1s in their sub-counties. While they do not collect the testimony themselves, they nevertheless play an integral role in the constitution of acceptable practices through regular managerial trainings led by the organization in charge of the project.

Documentary practices can be categorized into two main types, although the two types are often combined within the same project depending on their objectives. The first practice consists of recording data onto pre-made templates or charts which designate the different “types” of data desired by the project. The second practice consists of formal and informal interviews, focus groups, and community dialogue. Each will be detailed below.

Some documentation teams transcribe testimony using pre-formed templates. These teams utilize a chart consisting of the constituent elements of violent events the team deems most relevant. Some such categories include: event description; date of event; time of event; parish; village; description of location; name of event; weapon used; number abducted – male (adult), female (adult), boys, girls; number injured - male (adult), female (adult), boys, girls; number killed - male (adult), female (adult), boys, girls; armed group responsible; names of victims; properties destroyed; etc… Based on discussions in the previous chapters, these categories should already point to two simultaneous considerations: first, there is a data classification for the name of the “armed group responsible.” This category alone opens up the possibility of “bearing witness” to atrocities committed by actors other than those recognized by the official national discourse, an important corrective to many of the narratives we have already reviewed. Second, while these indicators are always malleable to the needs of the individuals collecting testimony – new indicators could certainly be made during data collection if particular testimony is recognized as asymmetrical to the already-
named categories – they nevertheless conscript particular forms of information while
impeding other forms that are less conducive to the limited typology offered. The
transcription, then, consists of both possibilities and limitations in the production of new
knowledge about the conflict.

This strategy is often used as a means to collect data from as many community
members as possible in order to corroborate the multiple accounts provided by different
individuals. One representative insists that the number of atrocities that took place during the
war has been “grossly underestimated.” By reaching a “critical mass” of testimony, these
projects hope to produce an inclusive history that is representative of all of the conflict-
related events in their informants’ lives. Yet, these categories severely delimit both what can
be said and the material trace of that speech. It is unclear how “the event” is isolated from a
much longer trajectory of violent encounters and prolonged inactivity. Richard Wilson
(2001) shares a relevant anecdote about the limitations of the technologies of documentation
employed by the TRC in South Africa: “…all killings by shooting are the same as all others,
regardless of the person pulling the trigger” if that data point is not accounted for in the chart
(47). Accordingly, we can only understand the testimony being collected as that which fits
within the confines of a set number of categories and their corresponding shapes.

Other teams use semi-structured interviews to collect testimonies. These teams situate
broad questions such as what occurred and who was involved alongside more specific
inquiries about community members’ individual experiences. These personal narratives
supplement the limited information available in the abovementioned categories. This
methodological position is well known to social scientists and indeed orchestrated much of
my own research on this project. As is to be anticipated, this method is quite a bit more
flexible than using the pre-formulated charts described above, but decidedly more time consuming than using a template as it typically takes an extended period of time to arrive at the information sought by these teams.

Whether testimony is collected using a pre-formulated chart or semi-structured interviews, the narration of traumatic life histories is transformed into a technocratic act. This is not to say that somehow these organizations should reformulate their practices to better remedy their possible shortcomings. Such practices are always conditioned by the organizational logics, constraints, and desirable outcomes that press upon them. While the second type of project is primarily interested in producing reports that feature community testimony, the first is primarily interested in mapping, coding, and developing indexical databases of testimony – goals more akin to constructing an archive. These expectant forms of participation generate the forms such participation can take; as Susan Sontag has argued, memory alters the image “according to memory’s needs” (2003: 30).

Documents and documentary practices “elicit particular kinds of responses” (Riles 2006: 22), although those responses may not always be anticipated. In the case of the documentary practices outlined above, they condemn the acts they document. In their collection, storage, and (re)presentation(s) of testimony, these programs denounce the experience on which they depend. Documentation, here, is an act of both communication and of condemnation (James 2010: 199). More often than not, however, the circumstantiality of documentation produces inter-subjective experiences that transcend such straight-forward judgments. Let us return, then, to my encounter with Ocen that opened this chapter.
III. “ARE YOU A RESEARCHER? I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU MY STORY”

Ocen immediately identified himself to me as a former commander of the LRA. “I have amnesty,” he assured me, as if he was responding to a question that I did not ask. It was very likely that he wanted to ease the anxieties he anticipated a foreigner would feel speaking to a former commander who had recently returned. Northern Uganda has been at the center of many of the “peace vs. justice” debates because of the open amnesty law Uganda enacted in 2000 as the result of heavy pressure put on the central government by civil society groups in the north. The amnesty law set no stringent criteria to meet in order to benefit from the law; even your surrender was not required. So long as you renounced your past, current, and future affiliations with any rebellion aimed at overturning the government simply by stating so – even if your reintegration came as a consequence of being captured – you were still eligible to be processed by a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program which included what, by northern Uganda standards, was a generous return package.

The only individuals who did not qualify were those indicted by the International Criminal Court in 2005, the top commanders including Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti (now deceased after a falling out with Kony), Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Raska Lukwiya (also presumed to be deceased). It should be noted that significant sections of the amnesty law were allowed to expire in May of 2012, before being reinstated for a two-year term beginning in early May 2013. At the time of my conversation with Ocen, however, it was still an active and indeed highly publicized program without any sign of fading, and Ocen certainly qualified.
For three hours I sat in what functioned as a bar, but was really a small grass thatched-roof home as Ocen, without provocation, began to share a life history.\(^{23}\) He was quiet but forthcoming, his voice timid but he was forward in his desire to speak. His English rivaled anyone you meet in Gulu Town, although I would later learn that he was educated nearly exclusively in the bush. We were a twenty minute walk from the market, in the direction opposite the town. He insisted we talk somewhere private.

“I was arrested [during the Juba peace talks]” he explained, “and taken to South Sudan where I learned English. Students from Gulu were arrested to teach us English, they were forced to teach. I did not complete my schooling. My last year was P3 [third year of primary school]. I went with the LRA from Uganda to Sudan to Congo and to Central African Republic. I was selected by Kony to work in Darfur – do you know Darfur? I was selected to command 200 men. Kony found me in Juba and selected me to do this. Later I was in Chad, but I had to leave. These innocent civilians [in DRC, CAR, etc…] did not know the LRA – they did not know Uganda – but we were killing them. I could not stay.”

Ocen made a point here to share the moment at which he decided he could no longer believe in the LRA cause. In 2008, during what would become the disintegration of the Juba peace talks, Ocen was in Garamba National Park, a national park in northeastern DRC that functioned as the LRA’s base at the time. The area is remote and can only be traversed on foot. It was a safe space for the LRA largely because any attempt to eradicate them proved feckless as a result of the area’s inaccessibility. In fact, Ocen had spoken recently with a

\(^{23}\) I say “a” life history and not “his” life history in order to stay attuned to the relationship through which this life story was being shared. Ocen did not know me, had no good reason to trust me as a repository of any personal details of his life, and our interaction was heavily informed by confines that far transcended our own personal biographies. The way in which he narrated his own life, then, carried these inflections, even if I could never put words to them.
friend who remained in the bush. Upon word of the American deployment of one hundred advisors to eradicate the LRA in November 2011, his friend scoffed, “They cannot catch us, it is like trying to catch a fish in water.”

Kony, Ocen explained, told everyone in Garamba, from commanders like Ocen to the lowest ranking foot soldier, that the ICC would come for them if they defected. Defection would mean certain imprisonment and even death. This was, however, of course not the case. Not only were the Juba peace talks about to bring an end to the then twenty-two-year-old conflict, amnesty was still in full swing, of which Ocen would later take full advantage. “We prayed all day that Saturday,” he explained, and it was here, for him, that the rationalization of rebellion came apart. He couldn’t understand how the LRA could find itself undertaking an all-day prayer session on a Saturday in northeastern DRC, a prayer session focused exclusively on remaining elusive to the ICC, and then raze a village on that following Monday. This cognitive dissonance, understood through a religious lens, was too much for him to take. He insisted that he had to leave.

My conversation with Ocen continued without pause. I listened attentively, rarely finding a moment to clarify a point or inquire further. Ocen spoke for the entire three hours. I’m not sure I muttered more than a few sentences; my voice was relegated to a continual affirmation that I was listening – the “mmmm” one gets used to employing to carry the tone of a typical Acholi conversation.

He told me about the LRA’s “favorite place to kill” while they were still active in Uganda, a forest just outside of Gulu. There were crocodiles in the water source there, he explained, which would take care of the bodies after they were done with them. He spoke about his own troubles focusing in school. Demons would come into his head while he tried
to study, he explained, and made it impossible to concentrate. This is why he couldn’t complete his primary education, and only learned English after he arrived in South Sudan with the LRA. His sister was sick in the hospital, one of many in the region to suffer from both HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. His mother remains in the IDP camp he and his family were forced into in the mid-90s. She is in failing health. He was in town to try to support them. Perhaps this has more to do with our interaction than I’m capable of recognizing.24

Yet in all of these instances Ocen’s personal culpability remained unspoken. His stories about the time he spent in the forest, the “LRA’s favorite place to kill,” were accompanied with a modifier: Ocen came up with a clever way to avoid harming civilians without getting himself killed for a failure to obey his orders. He would shoot the trees instead of the people, the bullet striking the bark producing a noise he likened to that of flesh, allowing the targets to escape. The crocodiles, here, became the explanation for why there was no proof of Ocen’s service to the LRA. “They must have eaten the bodies already,” he would tell his superiors.

IV. ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPLICITIES

“The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse; he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted.” (Geertz 1977: 19)

I use these small excerpts from my conversation with Ocen not to reveal sensational details of violent conflict, abduction, and forced displacement, but to begin to explore the confines of our interaction, the conditions of possibility that made room for the exchange we

24 I purchased posho and beans to be delivered to the hospital where Ocen’s sister was currently under care before the conversation detailed here.
shared. These conditions are multifaceted, overlapping, and often contradictory, and my goal here is not to attempt to delineate his potential motivations for such an interaction. A deterministic model that would allow our interaction to “make sense” has no place here. What is clear is that my relationship with Océn challenges traditional notions of ethnographic production, both in the immediacy Océn brought to our interaction and the labor he underwent to find a researcher, a process that stands in stark opposition to the long-standing assumption that the researcher finds his/her consultants – not the other way around – and builds a relationship over time.

Kimberly Armstrong (2008) argues that “suffering is the means through which the people in northern Uganda develop links and bonds with the larger world and manage to overcome their otherwise isolated and marginalized condition,” framing the narration of a suffering self as an exercise in individuated agency (3). “Speaking about the suffering,” then, becomes a political act that “is specifically meant to incite action in others,” namely, the international actors who are believed to be either more able or more willing to “chase [the rebels] away” than the state, as one of Armstrong’s interlocutors asserts (20). Humanitarian activity in northern Uganda has in many ways re-ordered the social landscape of northern Uganda, especially around Gulu Town where I first met Océn, and it is important that we recognize that the position of a munu (white person) in such an environment shares a weighty co-presence with humanitarian aid workers and NGO employees. Each of these positions carry what George E. Marcus has called “ever-present markers of ‘outsideness’” (1997: 97).

What I am more interested in, however, rather than whether a reading of our interaction conforms appropriately to an economy of sharing individual suffering, is the product of such sharing, that is, how the specificity of Océn’s individual experience may be
translated to make particular political claims (which, we should not forget, is what I am doing by relaying his account here). As in the case of one of the top commanders of the LRA indicted by the ICC, Dominic Ongwen, who is at once victim (abducted into the LRA as a young child) and perpetrator (in charge of some of the most notorious massacres carried out by the LRA), life histories do not easily conform to typologies of characterization (Baines 2009). How could Ongwen’s life possibly be documented as either participant-category? How, too, could Ocen’s life be documented?

The unprompted disclosure of personal, traumatic moments is not unique to my encounter with Ocen. Two years later, as I was taking a boda (motorcycle taxi) home late one night, the driver turned to me and began to speak: “During the war we would never drive like this here – this late at night. We would find them [the rebels] here. One day they came and I slept here, in the grass. They were walking so nearby but couldn’t see me. They almost stepped on me, but I was safe. One day they came to the village. It was me and one other guy in the hut. They came but the wall to the compound had many locks on it – three locks – and a chain around it. They brought axe and panga [machete] but couldn’t get it. They decided they were wasting too much time so left. When we got up in the morning, we found everyone killed outside their compounds. We were the only ones who survived.”

Returning to Marcus (1997), we might think about my ethnographic “complicity” on two fronts. The first is expressed in my interactions with Ocen and the boda driver above. Marcus writes: “What ethnographers in this changed mise-en-scène want from subjects is not so much local knowledge as an articulation of the forms of anxiety that are generated by the awareness of being affected by what is elsewhere without knowing what the particular connections to that elsewhere might be. The ethnographer on the scene in this sense makes
that elsewhere present” (97). The knowledge I obtain/collect from Ocen is prefaced upon my “elsewhere-ness,” an “elsewhere-ness” that conditions the forms our encounter may take. I am not somehow disconnected from the histories I present as problematic (89, 100). I am both a product of and subject to the discourses that inform the social life I participate in, including that of the foreign researcher and his former combatant informant.

The second is implicit in the majority of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis. In some ways – and especially in this chapter – I am conducting an ethnography of documentary practices by utilizing the very methodologies and techniques those documentarians use with their subjects. The irony of such an undertaking should not be lost as we consider the ambiguous place of the documentarian in the larger humanitarian enterprise in northern Uganda. The researcher, too, shares such an ambiguous position in this “changing mise-en-scène of fieldwork.” Writing lives is not a vocation exclusively reserved for academia. In the context of northern Uganda, archives are being actively constructed to feature the voices of people like Ocen. Documentation and memorialization projects are largely run by NGOs employing what would be difficult to call anything but ethnographic research methods, no matter how much we may critique their methodological awareness or rigor.

We should approach this notion of writing lives, then, not only as a question we ask ourselves as researchers – How do we inscribe the lived experience of others into our research? – but also as a process that takes place well outside of academia, that is, how lives are written in non-academic contexts in ways that have significant import to our own work. The question, then, should not only be self-reflective, but also critically engaged with the broader social networks that make the narration of the self both possible and, in many
contexts – such as the one I outline here – anticipated. If we take seriously the notion that the context is not exterior to the narration of the self, recognizing that it “conditions the form…it will take,” we must also engage with the ways in which lives are written as part of broader social processes (Butler 2005, 6).

Our presence, as far as many of our informants are concerned, has little to do with academia. We are instantly imbricated in the networks of meaning that long predate our arrival. If ethnography is to be cherished for its demand to be concerned with the everyday, with the stuff of life that is not staged for academic consumption, then its reflexivity must also be prepared to take count of the way in which lives are written when we are not present. The vocation of writing lives transcends scholarly pursuits. It is, in fact, an event of the everyday

V. CONCLUSIONS: DISTANCE AND DOCUMENTATION

Documentary practices, like ethnographic research, are “procedures of intervention” (Foucault 1972: 58). They rewrite, transcribe, approximate, delimit, transfer, and systematize information to produce new forms of knowledge (58-9). The document is at once both artifact and artifice; it is both the remnant of a past event and the undoing of that same event. By highlighting “the way moments of document creation anticipate future moments in which documents will be received, circulated, instrumentalized and taken apart again,” we can stay attuned to the documentary abyss that stands between the event and its reproductions (Riles 2006: 18).

In the representation of violent events, an individual is not present to respond to inquiries, elucidate what remains unspoken, or clarify aspects of their written testimony. As in the case of the resident of Barlonyo who insists on reiterating the numerical discrepancy of
those who lost their lives in the 2004 attack in that camp, documentation cannot, inherently, communicate “what happened.” For one, the subtleties of affective life make such documentation impossible. As Francis Blouin Jr. and William Rosenberg have written, “in important ways experience cannot be documented at all, only transcribed from its visceral impressions into some reproducible linguistic form” (2007: 1). The experience of this resident could not possibly be encapsulated in the marking on a grave or his presence in a report even if “the numbers” were agreeable.

But more in the line with the argument of this chapter, the expectation that testimony will be productive in the future publics with which it engages is prefaced upon an immense distance between the testimony-provider and the future testimony-witness. Above all, public spaces “select” (Segall 2002: 619) particular forms of violence premised upon their legibility and the ease with which they can be read within the institutional form that produces that public space. Such are the “invisible technologies of bureaucratic truth production” (Wilson 2001: 33) that underlie documentary practices in northern Uganda as elsewhere. We should not somehow presume that testimony is “raw data,” excavated and displayed in its original form. Its collection is a political act which includes particular practices of narrating the self which are themselves prefaced upon the typologies of violence employed by documentation teams. As I spoke about my research, one young Acholi man told me, “I don’t trust documents and data; they do not tell an accurate story.” The collection and storage of testimony produces “a mutable and virtually infinite survival,” but it is only in one’s mutability that one is given such a promise of infinite survival (Agamben 1999b, 155).
CHAPTER FOUR

INDICES OF A POST-JUBA MEMORY

“The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability.”
(Foucault 1972: 129)

I. INTRODUCTION: “WHERE IS THE STORY OF HOW WE ARRIVED?”

“But what about the violence that brought us to the camp?” someone in the group asked, visibly agitated at the exclusion of an experience that they considered tremendously personal, “Where is the story of how we arrived?”

It was 2013 and I was meeting groups of community leaders in and around Pabbo, a town whose identity is now deeply intertwined with its experience of hosting the first and largest IDP camp in northern Uganda. We spent a great deal of time discussing the plan to memorialize the camps and what such a memorialization means in the contemporary lives of its former occupants. Our conversation was a magnet for all of the most salient and enduring debates in the region – about the cause and consequence of humanitarian intervention, the limits of international and more “localized” forms of justice, the status of land in the lives of the formerly displaced, the difficulty of constructing sites of memory, and the contentiousness of conflict narratives offered by the GoU. This one project, in this one town, came to represent the intractability of memorialization in a way that few others had.

This chapter sets out to interrogate the position of the archive and other sites of memory in northern Uganda and the various processes through which they are constructed. It considers how knowledge of the war is being produced after the collapse of the Juba peace
talks and since the war has left northern Uganda for other, peripheral spaces. It does so by focusing on one particular method of knowledge production: the construction of humanitarian archives in northern Uganda. I invoke the terminology of “the archive” here in three ways: first, as a physical collection of documents housed in brick and mortar institutions, second, as those institutions themselves, and third, as a measure of the collective body of judgments of an originary past, a sort of epistemological reservoir where considerations of the past find a resting place (Stoler 2010: 45).  

Some organizations are constructing archives in the first and second sense. These projects entail building physical sites by collecting and housing various forms of documentation related to the LRA insurgency and community responses. But these brick and mortar institutions are only a part of a much broader attempt to develop a repository of seemingly authentic conflict narratives. As discussed at length earlier in Chapter Two, an archive is constructed not only by the collection of written records stored within the confines of these particular sites, but also by the discursive space that is invoked through their presence. The materiality of that presence makes particular claims of who can deploy legitimate forms of violence (and who cannot), to what extent that violence is permissible (and to what extent it is not), and how that violence is to be understood in retrospect (and how it is not). Thus, even sites that do not house documents may still be considered archives in that their presence attempts to mark a historical moment in a larger public discourse of the conflict.

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25 Stoler writes: “One could argue that ‘the archive’ for historians and ‘the Archive’ for cultural theorists have been wholly different analytic objects: for the former, a body of documents and the institutions that house them, for the latter a metaphoric invocation for any corpus of selective collections and the longings that the acquisitive quests for the primary, originary, and the untouched entail.”

26 Such records may also be audio or video recordings, as the K/NMPDC is attempting to do.
The humanitarian archive carries with it an expectation of historical emplacement, that is, an expectation that by filing individual life histories into the stacks of documents in sites of memory, those individuals can consequently identify themselves within an anticipated historical trajectory of active war to prosperous peace. It asserts that their stories are heard, and therefore will never be forgotten. It declares that they are given a voice in the future of their communities, and that that voice matters. In this chapter, I explore the contingencies of these voices and the durability of their production.

In the previous chapter, we saw the ways in which life-histories and life-moments are being actively documented by NGOs of various stripes. This chapter asks: What happens to this documentation after it is produced? Towards what aims is it leveraged? It does so by focusing on two sites in detail: The Kitgum/National Memory Peace and Documentation Center (K/NMPDC) and the Pabbo Memorial IDP Camp and Information Centre.
II. THE NATIONAL MEMORY PEACE AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE, KITGUM

5. The Kitgum/National Memory Peace and Documentation Center (K/NMPDC). Program offices and the archive itself are found in the building on the right, while the cement foundation on the left is the beginning of the outdoor, guided-walk museum. 2012.

It was not long before reading the *New Vision* article proposing the IDP camp as tourist attraction that I had come across another, equally compelling announcement: a “peace and documentation centre” was being built in Kitgum to “collect and preserve artifacts about war” (Oboi 2011). The Kitgum Peace and Documentation Centre (K/NMPDC)\(^{27}\) was the first of its kind in the north. There were many sites of memory built across the region but most

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\(^{27}\) This site was originally named the Kitgum Peace and Documentation Centre (KPDC) and kept that name for a few years as it developed as a center. When I returned to the site in 2012, however, I noticed that the name had been changed to the National Memory Peace and Documentation Center (NMPDC) and all of the signage, publications, and any other remnants of the center’s former name had been hastily removed. The road-side sign still sat in a corner inside the office. This was part of a broader re-imaging process the center underwent to position itself as a nationally-representative project, rather than one exclusively focused on the LRA and northern Uganda. The site now goes exclusively by the name NMPDC, although I have adopted the admittedly somewhat clumsy acronym K/NMPDC and will use it throughout in order to stay attuned to the organization’s name change, an important moment in the history of the site.
took the form of monuments to commemorate particular atrocities. For example, the sites in Barlonyo, Atiak, and Mucwini,\(^{28}\) to name just a few. These sites were particular in their orientation and leaned significantly on the communities in which they were constructed. The sites were instigated by community leaders at the most local level. Building such sites lent less on international or even national ideologies of transitional justice than on a particular community’s wish to memorialize those they have lost. They became sites of communal memory, where civil, religious, and other commemorations took place on each anniversary of the event.

The K/NMPDC is something very different. The project itself is run by Refugee Law Project, a center that is operated through the School of Law at Makerere University in Kampala. Its goal is to serve as a comprehensive site of memorialization for the entire region and, as I would find out later, perhaps also eventually the country-at-large. Rather than act as a reminder of a particular incident in the war, it hopes to act as a more central resource for community members, tourists, and researchers to learn about the events that took place in the region during the conflict but also earlier. The mandate set for itself is large and its projects are numerous. It was funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and the Northern Uganda Transition Initiative, itself an arm of the United States Agency for International Development (Oboi 2011; Klosterboer 2013). It was built in collaboration with the local government. In fact, the physical location of the site is its most striking feature.

The land it was built upon is state-owned – it stands directly behind Kitgum District’s government headquarters. It is difficult to enter the premises without first walking between two of the headquarter’s administrative buildings. On your way, you pass lines of Kitgum

\(^{28}\) A smaller monument in Kitgum district.
residents waiting on this or that paper, license, or other administrative document disbursed by local government. The narrow space between the two buildings opens to a plot of land occupied by a brand new building, impeccably clean and reminiscent of the most recently designed structures in northern Uganda. The queues quickly disappear as you face the building and the ongoing construction to its side. Aside from an occasional passerby on their way to use the latrines shared between the center and the administrative offices of local government, few bodies pass back and forth. At the moment, visitors to the center usually fall within four general categories: local community members (usually to read the newspaper or use the internet), community service organization representatives, peace-building partners, and researchers (usually foreign, such as myself). Although the center is officially open, it has yet to launch many of its public programs.

On the occasion of the center’s formation, it received praise from cultural, religious, and civil stakeholders. Kenneth Oketta, a representative of the leading Acholi cultural authority organization Ker Kwaro Acholi, congratulated the center on its mission to “preserve aspects of the Acholi culture” and “help in the transition and resettlement process.” Macleod Baker Ochola II, a retired bishop of the Kitgum Diocese, “described the centre as a divine and inspirational vision, which would benefit the world.” The most senior Kitgum government official, the LC5 chairman John Komakech Ogwok, “said the centre would benefit the learned and the illiterate,” unifying a commitment to learn from the past and, as the Uganda Law Commission chairman Professor Joseph Kakooza said presiding over the center’s commissioning, it will “act as a reminder to avoid another conflict in the country in future” (Oboi 2011).
Reading the announcement when I was still in the States, I presumed such a space, while an intriguing development, was likely a benign institution that, no matter its intentions, would end up being another instance of a non-governmental space paralyzed by the official discourse of the state and its partners. I imagined a collection of documents detailing the grave abuses of the LRA and celebrating a resilient Acholi citizenry. Here too, though, the K/NMPDC is something different. The space conforms neither to a state-centric reading of the conflict nor a trenchant critique. Like the examples found earlier in the chapter, the many stakeholders in the construction of sites of memory have their voices impressed in the walls of the center. The site is neither an international nor a local construction; it carries the resonances of each while retaining the clarity of neither.

The modes and forms of social, political, and economic organization that shape the various practices of memorialization in the region are multiple and coalescent. This rearticulation of sovereign power into less easily identifiable institutions is in some ways what Charles Piot is referring to when he speaks of the “emergent forms of power” of the contemporary world’s “new sovereignties,” although I diverge from him on the role of the state (2010: 8). Whereas Piot argues that the drying up of Cold War funds that once allowed Togo’s elite to exert a near monopoly of power over the country and organize the state vertically to facilitate their accumulation of wealth is producing a sovereignty crisis where the state is withdrawing from its periphery (“graying” its hinterland [12]) and new sovereignties are beginning to stand in its place (albeit in distinct formations), I would argue that while new sovereignties are indeed emerging, they are often doing so parallel to, rather than in place of, the state. This is not quite the same Beatrice Hibou’s argument that

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29 This could of course change as the site develops beyond its early years.
privatization schemes in Africa only serve as a new space for state formation (2004).

Certainly the Ugandan state owns a monopoly on the permissibilities of memorializing the conflict, but that is not to say that sites like the K/NMPDC do not carve out a vocalized space for themselves at times, even if in stark opposition to the state.

The K/NMPDC has eight primary goals which make up its programmatic agenda:

1) To provide a platform to display community memories and voice their concerns,
2) To facilitate the community’s right to information,
3) To acknowledge past atrocities, especially those that are less known or remain unresolved,
4) To assist the transitional justice process in order to enhance transparency,
5) To foster national reconciliation by developing a mutual understanding between the many actors involved,
6) To challenge the one-sided explanation of conflict advanced by most NGOs and the GoU,
7) To analyze documentation in order to construct early warning systems based on macro-level data, and
8) To create the archives that are necessary for national truth-telling.

The sort of space we see emerge in the K/NMPDC is indicative of post-Juba memorializations. Its focus on writing holistic, inclusive histories – irrespective of any judgment to its success – through the collection and storage of life histories for the purposes of sharing those collections with the outside world leverages the site for larger, national conversations. It is through this process that life histories are historically emplaced, catapulted onto a national stage of reconciliation and truth-telling, even when no such transitional justice mechanisms exist at the state or international level.\textsuperscript{30} They serve as mechanisms of closure for an ongoing conflict. The materiality of these sites of memory evoke the relative peace enjoyed by Ugandans since the beginning of the now-defunct peace process, their structures allude to a past that is not quite anterior. And it is through the

\textsuperscript{30} Although this is changing, as we shall see in the conclusion.
archivization of the contemporary *mise-en-scène* in northern Uganda that the past becomes constructed for an expectant future.

III. THE MEMORIAL IDP CAMP AND INFORMATION CENTRE, PABBO

The camp, which carried the same name, housed between 50,000 (Nibbe 2010: 165) and 75,000 individuals at its peak and became the model for humanitarian camp relief elsewhere. For its sheer scope and size, it became the most effective space for NGOs to launch their programs. If an organization was “working in the camps,” Pabbo was certainly at the top of their programmatic agenda. Interventions ranged from massive food distribution programs by the WFP to supplying bed nets to avoid contracting malaria, from establishing micro-enterprises for women living in the camp to supporting educational programs for their children. Even agricultural training programs were included.

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31 Please note: this name is pulled from a collection of literature on the project developed by the Uganda National Museum and its implementing partners. It is not, however, an official name, and instead serves to unclutter the language necessary to refer to the project.
32 Uganda Department of Museum and Monuments, Pabbo Internal Displaced People’s Camp (IDP) Memorial Landscape: Prevention Plan 2011: 5.
The Acholi are mostly peasants who have depended upon agricultural production for subsistence and income for generations. Yet, in the camps, agricultural training programs became quite popular. Chris Dolan explains, “The implicit message was clear; people’s impoverishment is their own fault – if only they knew how to farm properly they would be self-reliant. The perversity of making people in camps, who were themselves recipients of food aid, and whose problem was lack of access to land rather than lack of agricultural skills, produce food for donation to people in refugee camps elsewhere, was not alluded to” (2009, 128). This was with a backdrop where, by early 2004, the WFP provided the main source of food for over 1.5 million internally displaced people in northern Uganda (56). The programs were not only politically disconnected from the circumstances that they operated within (internal displacement), but also the very schemes that they themselves operated.

Prior to this visit, my relationship with Pabbo had been limited at best. Much of my work at that point kept me mostly in Gulu and Kitgum, two much larger regional towns that served as launching points to the “field sites” of the many NGOs who have constructed their offices in these two towns, with the vast majority in Gulu (e.g. Nibbe 2010: 59-82). It was an appropriate choice to follow these projects from their central hub and witness the way in which they traveled into more distant villages for their work. Yet it was to Pabbo that many of these organizations traveled on a regular basis. It is an important node in a much larger network of humanitarian intervention.

The IDP memorial in Pabbo is one site of a four part project. In fact, it is precisely the project Tourism Minister Egunyu was referring to in the New Vision article that opened the introduction to this thesis. The project’s roots run back as far as 2008, in the shadows of the
collapse of the Juba peace talks. At its inception, the project was not interested in memories of war or the life in the camps that it generated. Instead, it was meant to strengthen cultural ties across generations. Many consider the war a breaking point between generations, the literal fracturing of cultural heritage from their youth. This was illustrated most clearly for me when I spoke with older men who were often leaders in their communities. “You see this boy, he does not know,” I was told as a young man stood peering around a wall just behind us, listening intently to a conversation I was having with an elder from Kitgum. The young man, despite his demonstrated interest in the content of our exchange, was presumed to have no bearing to engage in the history we were discussing. He was written off as being concerned with “other things.” Yet, after our conversation, the young man approached me eager to learn about the colonial memories of Acholiland the man had shared.

The construction of the memorial in Pabbo is intimately tied to an older generation’s growing concern that its youth are unable to connect to either a historical or cultural knowledge base. Communities often seek support in documenting cultural objects, ceremonies, and histories. There are some museums whose entire purpose rests on such a practice.\(^\text{34}\) In 2008 when twelve \textit{rwodi} (chiefs) met to discuss how to instill a strong sense of Acholi culture and pride in future generations, a topic that had become somewhat of a recurring concern for many members of the older generations of Acholi, they too concluded that the solution was to document Acholi culture. Document the culture, it was thought, and the youth will reconnect with their roots.

In 2009, shortly after this discussion of how to maintain cultural knowledge across Acholi generations, Ker Kwaro Acholi, the paramount cultural authority of the Acholi,

\(^{34}\) The Peace Museum in Gulu run by Human Rights Focus-Gulu is a good example of this.
approached the Ugandan National Museum, a division of the Ministry of Tourism under the Department of Museums and Monuments, with a proposal to document Acholi cultural history through various sites scattered throughout the north. Through a thorough documentation of the sites in Acholiland it was thought that youth – and by extension others lacking a strong connection to their cultural roots – could take better hold of their past. But it became clear that cultural knowledge was not enough. “We all had one mind, but didn’t want to leave it on paper without having a sign of what happened [during the war],” one representative told me. The effort needed to instead focus on the war.

Shortly thereafter the project was launched in partnership with and funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Riksantikvaren, an agency of the Norwegian government that promotes cultural heritage. The four part project includes the renovation of the damaged mass grave site in Barlonyo; the rehabilitation of a single girls’ dormitory in order to replicate the design of the building at the time of the infamous LRA attack at St. Mary’s College Aboke; the organization of a management committee and assembly of an information center in Lukodi; and, finally, the construction of a replicate IDP camp to serve as an information center and monument in Pabbo. For the common visitor, each site stands as a signifier of a distinct though interrelated violent event during the war that together form a multi-sited landscape of a traumatic history.

As might already be clear from the overview of monuments in Uganda in Chapter Two, however, Pabbo is in uneasy company with the others for at least two reasons. First, the incidents in Barlonyo, St. Mary’s College Aboke, and Lukodi were all singular events, experienced and defined by the momentary nature of the attack and the losses that it immediately inflicted. Two of these sites are mass graves that serve to memorialize those lost
in a particular massacre (Barlonyo and Lukodi). The other, while not a grave itself, serves a similar function. By rehabilitating only one of the many girls’ dormitories at St. Mary’s College Aboke, the out-of-place aesthetic invokes the exceptional moment 136 young women were forcibly taken from their school. Visitors to these sites are asked to remember one particular event of many, to mourn the losses of a particular day rather than the ongoing struggle that many of their kin continued to realize long after their passing. Memorializing the camp experience in Pabbo, on the other hand, requires a much broader delimitation of a historical moment. Many residents stayed in the camp for well over a decade, from 1996 until as late as 2011. Memories of life in the camp are protracted and include the events of the everyday in a way that has profound implications for the way they are remembered. Second, unlike the others, the Pabbo proposal elicits a new site. In Lukodi, Barlonyo, and Aboke, adjustments are being made to existing memorials. In this way, Pabbo is by far the largest undertaking by the National Museum.

Visiting the site brought these difficulties to the fore. “It is an ongoing project” was a regular refrain despite the generation of a report sharing the results of these four finished projects. The language used to describe the site is always forward-looking. I was told about a proposal to construct bigger structures including a school, health center, and even a café to generate revenue for the site, all done in the name of memory. By overseeing and maintaining these spaces, the income from fees “would likely go back to the community in terms of offering services.” By commodifying the historical memory of the camp local government could ensure timely and thorough service delivery. There is also a circular logic to these proposals. By enjoining life histories with sites of memory, revenue could be

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35 Of course, for visitors who are intimately tied to the marked atrocity, the sites invoke broader memories of “life during the war” that transcend the single event they are meant to mark.
generated in order to generate additional structures and new sites of memory, presumably to
generate even more.

The site attempts to tell two simultaneous stories, although neither is in full effect at the
moment. First, it aims to tell a history of the war period from the perspective of the
displaced. “Now that there is prevailing peace, we must build this thing here so next time we
don’t again fall into the problem.” The site should “serve as a reminder of the period we have
really gone through from the point of view of reconciliation, harmony, and peace.” “We very
much need that,” I was told, “we need to be reconciled.” “Who is being reconciled?” I asked,
“and over what is this reconciliation taking place?” “Between those feuding over land and
other issues from the war.” The reconciliation he spoke of was between civilians, he
confirmed. It would be more important to settle on interpersonal conflict than discuss
reconciliation between the displaced and those that forced them there.

Even at the level of the proposal, dissent was evident. “For those in Pabbo, the whole
place is a memorial. Why a center? What will it say? What are they going to memorialize?
Forced displacement? Those people, they know. They did not go voluntarily. Even us, the
helicopters bombed villages, the soldiers came with their guns and demanded we leave. If we
stayed, we would be killed. So what is there to remember? The LRA? No, the atrocity of
forced displacement… the atrocity of the government.” Another resident declared, “It upsets
me so. First, someone can get sent all the way from America coming thinking they are going
to see a museum in Pabbo and when they come here and they find nothing, they are going to
go with a bad record in Pabbo.”

It is no secret that the project has not met its mark, but rather than consider the project
to memorialize the experience of forced displacement in terms of success and failure – the
sort of language deployed by the mix of organizations that operate such sites – we might instead think about its indeterminacy an indicator of the way in which contentious histories maneuver within archivization projects in contemporary northern Uganda.

We might turn to James Ferguson’s landmark work on what he calls “the anti-politics machine” here (1994). Ferguson argues that the goal is not to “rectify or to correct 'development' thinking” in search of some truth of “best practices” (xv). Instead, he takes the Thaba-Tseka Development Project in Lesotho as a case study of the ways in which discursive trends manifest themselves in a demonstrable project, albeit in often unintended forms. The development discourse has certain guidelines, expectations, and demands that, not for lack of talent or “experts,” paint a caricature of Lesotho as “a suitable target for intervention” (73). Similarly, we can think of archivization as a process by which particular acts of violence become suitable for memorialization in very particular ways, such as we see in Pabbo.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: TEMPORARY APPEARANCES

The construction of sites of memory in northern Uganda is an uneven process, informed more by the unpredictability of programmatic implementation, the contingency of relationships formed to execute the project, and the arbitrariness of donor funds than the structured, pragmatic concerns of the project itself. As Akhil Gupta (2012) has demonstrated in the case of poverty alleviation schemes in India, it would be wrongheaded to consider the seemingly contradictory – even at times harmful – outcomes as evidence of malicious intent. The officials put in charge of memorialization projects are every bit as interested in constructing an inclusionary peace as the communities they intend to serve. How, then, might we come to terms with the contentiousness of memorial praxis in northern Uganda? In what
ways does the uneven implementation of such projects affect the way in which they produce knowledge about the war, the way they attempt to represent “what happened”?

As I traveled between these sites, I began to consider what place they have in a community’s repertoire for political claims making. Many residents in villages that have suffered the worst tragedies are actively petitioning for redress. By placing the onus of responsibility on the state they are making a political claim that has the potential to demand state culpability amidst a conflict whose existing narratives are predisposed to reject. Unlike the well-known ICC indictment demanding that top LRA commanders be arrested and sent to The Hague, their political claims are squarely focused on the GoU rather than LRA leadership.

Contradictions are inherent to the act of documentation. As one archivist put it, “We need these histories – these things have happened. We said, ‘We will do it,’ but it is a delicate issue. Everybody has different experiences and we cannot document all of this. It was beyond us, beyond our capacity.” Contradictions in lived experiences and the narrative voice that is appended to their content to construct an archivable form are not somehow exterior to discourse. The expectation that humanitarian archives will somehow manage to collect the voices of everyone affected by the conflict, regardless of the forms their participation has taken, is of course a distant fantasy. But this expectation of historical emplacement operates within a larger discourse of peace-after-war, an expectation that after war comes a more productive, participatory future characterized by peace. It is in this impasse of not-war/not-peace that the The Memorial IDP Camp and Information Centre in Pabbo makes its temporary appearance.

Michel Foucault (1972: 151) writes:
“…a contradiction, far from being an appearance or accident of discourse, far from being that from which it must be freed if its truth is at last to be revealed, constitutes the very law of its existence: it is on the basis of such a contradiction that discourse emerges, and it is in order both to translate it and to overcome it that discourse begins to speak… To analyse discourse is to hide and reveal contradictions; it is to show the play that they set up within it; it is to manifest how it can express them, embody them, or give them a temporary appearance.”
CONCLUSION

ARCHIVAL FUTURES

“This archival technique has commanded that which in the past even instituted and constituted whatever there was as anticipation of the future.”
(Derrida 1996: 18)

After twenty-six years of war, peace in contemporary northern Uganda remains “inconclusive” (Schomerus and Titeca 2012). I have argued that amidst this “inconclusive” peace, documentation, memorialization, and archivization projects are attempting to write the end of a conflict that has not yet come. In this thesis I have set out to demonstrate how projects aimed to document, memorialize, and archive the conflict are undertaken through a lens of a very particular expectation: an expectation of peace. While this may at first appeared a seemingly innocuous claim – these are, after all, often caught under the larger rubric of “peace-building” projects – I have hoped to enliven a much more complicated second face to this argument. These projects operate on (at least) two terrains: first, as a solidification of a contentious past into coherent, broad-based histories that favor “peace,” and, second, as a fomenting of a peaceful future. Between these two terrains, however, stands an increasingly precarious present.

The present moment is one in which “peace in northern Uganda [has] been purchased through increased conflict elsewhere” (Branch 2010: 190). But, in the case of Uganda, “conflict elsewhere” is still very much “conflict here.” As has been shown throughout this thesis, the LRA conflict continues to condition everyday life in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. This is not to pathologize the region as a site of trauma (Fassin 2008; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; James 2004, 2012) or to somehow insist that conversations about the
conflict are the conversations most worth having in northern Uganda, but, rather, to consider how the past finds its ways into everyday life. In the case of northern Uganda, these everyday practices are intimately tied up in an ongoing presence of an assemblage of humanitarian actors.

I have further argued that the projects these actors undertake, particularly the construction of sites of memory, do more than simply recall past events; they disturb and reify already circulating meanings as a means of producing their own. I have traced a broad history of the conflict from colonial writings in Acholiland to contemporary forms of humanitarian intervention alongside the most prominent literature on the conflict. I have interrogated the position of the archive in the production of knowledge, particularly testimonial knowledge of “what happened” during the war. I have provided a detailed account of some of the forms that documentary practices may take while accounting for my own ethnographic complicities in such practices. Finally, I have identified two emergent sites as productive spaces for thinking about how post-Juba sites make particular discursive frames of the conflict more legible than others.

“The final destination of the archive is… always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that makes it possible” (Mbembe 2002: 21). What stories, then, make the northern Ugandan archive possible? The stories that sustain its emergence are multiple, to be sure, and this thesis has only touched on a few. Future studies might further consider the ways in which such stories are generated, but also the new forms of engagement that are produced alongside this generation. The archive in northern Uganda is being produced “for

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36 It is difficult to find work on or in northern Uganda – both academic and otherwise – that does not take the conflict as its object of analysis. While this thesis has in many ways been an attempt to disturb such certainties, it, too, nevertheless uses conflict as a means to think about the contingent forms of archival knowledge.
the future,” I was told many times at many different sites throughout my research: for the future of justice in Uganda, for the future of political compromise after the forthcoming political transition, and for the future of those youth towards whom many of these projects are directed. It is in these youth that these projects are meant to gain traction, produce engagement, and consequently forge a new, positive peace in northern Uganda. The future of northern Uganda is in the archive, they claim, and that future begins now.

For much of the four years working on this project I was intent on identifying the limits of the archive within the realm of political claims making, that is, the parameters of the inclusion of archival knowledge in political demands such as seeking redress or establishing mechanisms for broad-based national truth-telling programs. I imagined if I could identify the potential the archival sliver (V. Harris 2002), however limited, could have in foregrounding national reconciliation efforts I could draw timely parallels between the emergence of such sites of memory and of the swell for political redress at the highest level.

As this project comes to a close, however, it has become clear that rather than being instrumental to making political claims, it is the sites themselves that stand as indicators of the limits of such claims. Through the archivization of civil conflict in northern Uganda the boundaries of permissible discourse are drawn, what Foucault calls the limits of enunciative permissabilities (1972: 155).

The most visceral knot in the permissible narrative – the official discourse as Finnström has named it – is the IDP camp. A site not borne of LRA violence, but of GoU and UPDF atrocity, it unnerves and appeals to popularized narratives of the conflict. And yet, it too has become a site of memorialization. It, too, stands to say “never again.” In a chapter
written for a 2010 edited volume on the LRA, Sandrine Perrot recalls a conversation she once had with a Ugandan journalist while conducting research on the influx of humanitarian action in northern Uganda in the mid-2000s. She writes, “The flow of international personalities and diplomats visiting IDP camps was such that a Ugandan journalist cynically suggested the IDP camps ‘be handed over to the Ministry of Tourism’” (Perrot 2010: 192). Today, this is precisely what has happened in Pabbo. The contradictions of such a project permeate its seams, but it remains intact. The inherent tension within the project is expressed and then absorbed back into popularized narratives of the conflict. Daily life in the camp can be denounced only insofar as it is dehistoricized from its origin, only so long as it is depoliticized as a scene of social suffering without a past.

Here we run into the limits of thinking about narratives of the conflict in terms of a seemingly totalizing state-sponsored discourse. I do not take issue with Finnström’s argument, only insisting that we also listen to the ways in which narratives are produced through this complex “emplacement of global forces” (2012: 107) in contemporary northern Uganda in ways that do not always afford much credence to the official discourse. As in the case of the IDP camp being repurposed as a site of remembrance to be curated by the state, the official discourse is certainly still alive and well. One does not have to look very far to see the ways in which this narrative gets played out in non-governmental spaces as well. *Kony 2012*, the viral video Invisible Children released in March 2012 that was eventually seen by over one hundred million viewers, repeats this script almost verbatim.

The archive, on the other hand, is less sure of itself. While this official discourse still permeates many accounts of the conflict and conditions what is and is not possible to say about its violence, on-the-ground initiatives operate in a much more nuanced environment.
The sites of memory that have emerged in northern Uganda do not neatly conform to either a reading of the conflict through the lens of this official discourse nor one of local liberation. Instead, they are often fortuitous forms of material memory. Where one expects to find strict adherence to government narratives, one finds something else entirely.

Taken together, sites of memory in northern Uganda map the availability of political claims in contemporary northern Uganda. Contradictions in memorialization projects are localized “at the level of assertions” (Foucault 1972: 153) – my word against theirs, state and opposition assertions of culpability – while the discourse of an expectant peace remains.
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