INTERTEXT BETWEEN OKOT'S *SONG OF LAWINO* AND ACOLI ORAL SONGS

Charles Nelson Okumu

Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda

Introduction: Influences in Okot p'Bitek's Poetry

As Cloete and Madadzhe observe, "a cursory glance at some of the oral poetry exposes the close connection between the past and present as revealed in, for example, some of Okot p'Bitek's poetry. The late p'Bitek may be regarded as one of the most important literary figures in the field of oral literature … *and its inclusion in African literature in general and his poetry in particular."* (Cloete and Madadzhe 31, emphasis mine). This article explores how Okot creatively used Acoli oral songs as intertext in his poetry, particularly in *Song of Lawino*. Since the publication of *Song of Lawino* in 1966, a number of scholarly studies and publications of Okot's poetry were published, beginning with a full study of Okot's poetry, *The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek* **(**George Heron 1976); scholarly articles such as "The Tradition and Modern Influences in Okot p'Bitek's Poetry" (Ogo Ofuani 1985); "The Form of Okot p'Bitek's Poetry: Literary Borrowings from Acoli Oral Poetry" (Okumu 1992). More recent studies include "Lateral texts and circuits of value: Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Wer pa Lawino*" (Garuba and Benge-Okot 2017) and "Okot p'Bitek Diagnostic Poetics and the Quest for African Revolution" (Kahyana 2017). Besides these examples, there are other important articles and theses on the poetry of Okot that establish Okot as an important African writer whose poetry is influenced by oral literature, as Cloete and Madadzhe note.

In *Forum of Poetics* Ewa Kraskowska discusses the importance of influence and its aesthetic relationship to *imitatio/imitation/mimesis.* She argues that imitation is the case where the imitator makes "conscious references to previous works considered to be exemplary, not copying them" (Kraskowska 70). The creator-imitator draws material for his or her own works from models, harmoniously joining together borrowed elements from them in a new artistic context. The "creator-imitator is not plagiarizing the master but is influenced by his/her exemplary work" (Kraskowska 70). In Acoli society, the composer-singer is influenced by earlier/elder composer-singers who are masters. There is no copyright or ownership of a particular sub-genre of the sung or narrative genres. For example, in *Horn of My Love* Okot states:

"The famous *nanga* players have a large repertoire of original compositions. They also learn other men's songs and transform them so that they sound almost original" (*Horn of My Love* 13). Kraskowska refers to this as "recontextualization of source material" (Kraskowska 71).

> When Lee Nicholas asked Okot in 1981 what elements in his family background may have influenced his becoming the kind of writer he became, his response was:
>
> Well both my parents were fantastic performers. I think from my father I learnt a lot of stories and style of telling stories. But from my mother I learnt a great deal about poetry, song and dance. And she was always very naughty, you know and teasing me all the time. Whenever she produced a new song, she would call me and say, "Listen to this new one." And the next week the song would be known throughout the village and danced and performed (243).

Okot's response to Nicholas is similar to that which he gave to Bernth Lindfors in 1976 when asked about literary influence. Referring to *Wer pa Lawino*, he confirmed his mother's influence and even the use of her "other name, Lawino." Her disappointment was that Okot's composition was not singable, though very good. Okot claims that 34 of the songs in *Horn of My Love* were her compositions, but he does not identify them.[1] Okot admits that he was influenced by other great Acoli oral poets, including members of the Nanga party, whose names are listed in both *Wer pa Lawino* and *Song of Lawino*.[2] He particularly thanked them for "their deep friendship among us and giving me courage as well as helping me write *Wer pa Lawino*" (p. iii).

I contend that Okot was first and foremost influenced by the Acoli traditional culture in which he grew up and around which he based his research during his literary studies at Oxford, thus making him an auto-ethnographer of the Acoli culture, like myself. His education beyond Gulu, especially at Budo, introduced him to European Literature and Music, and he admits that he loved Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* as well as the "Songs of Solomon." George Heron, in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* (3-10), and Ogo Ofuani, in "The traditional and Modern Influences in Okot p'Bitek's Poetry" (87-99), discuss both the traditional and modern influences in Okot's poetry at great length. Their conclusion is best summed up in the words of Ogo Ofuani: "The influences under which a poet writes are often so complicated that they cannot be easily pinned down. These influences are not mutually exclusive, and without contradistinctions we may choose to label p'Bitek a traditional modern poet" (97). Ofuani's conclusion is further crystallized in Garuba and Benge's "Lateral texts and circuits of value: Okot's *Song of Lawino* and *Wer pa Lawino*" (312-327). Their conclusion is twofold—that *Wer pa Lawino* and *Song of Lawino* are lateral texts and that each is inserted into a specific circuit of values, largely different from the other.[3] My interpretation is that the circuit of values for *Song of Lawino* is largely

the modern English reader; hence, Okot includes modern ideas that appeal to them, whereas *Wer pa Lawino* is better understood by the Acoli readership conversant with the traditional elements. This makes Okot a traditional-modern poet. This twin label would be contested by Taban lo Liyong who was discontented with Okot's translation of *Wer pa Lawino* into *Song of Lawino.* He first voiced this in "On Translating the 'Untranslated': Chapter 14 of *Wer pa Lawino*."[4] He subsequently translated *Wer pa Lawino*, including Chapter 14 as *Defense of Lawino* (2001).

Intertextuality and Okot p'Bitek's Poetry

There has been a shift in literary studies in the 20th century that shifted the focus away from the author to the text, marking the "death of the author," according to Roland Barthes, who also acknowledges that in pre-industrialized societies, "narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker whose performance may be admired (that is his mastery of the narrative code) but not his genius." Ayo Kehinde agrees with Barthes, stating "rather, oral literature is conceived as a communal artifact" (274). It is communally owned and transmitted from generation to generation. Ruth Finnegan differs in that she acknowledges "… group authorship" (36). I agree with Finnegan that someone or a group in the community creates a narrative or song that is then passed into the public domain through a performance by the individual or group. In *Horn of My Love*, Okot states that there were great composer-singers, and that they or lesser-known artists (what Harold Bloom calls "precursor' –originator and 'adept' lesser/imitator)[5] could also "learn other men's songs and transform them so that they sound *almost* original" (13). The validity of Barthes' argument is acceptable if we agree with him that:

> … the text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message") of the Author-God but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of cultures (4).

He concludes his argument by pointing out that the space vacated by the (dead) author is occupied by the reader.

The term intertextuality, first coined by Julia Kristeva, was intended "to synthesize Saussure's semiotics and Bakhtin's dialogism." Kristeva's definition of intertextuality echoes that of Barthes since both of them view any text as a "construct of mosaic of quotations … the absorption and transformation of another."[6] The writer can use intertextuality as obligatory, optional, or accidentally. In my discussion of the intertext between Okot's *Song of Lawino* and Acoli oral songs, I argue that Okot's use of intertextuality is obligatory, but that a non-

Acoli reader would not easily connect the text with "the tissues of citations" of Acoli oral songs and other cultures. *Song of Lawino* is rich in intertext from Acoli oral songs, including those in *Horn of My Love.* Although Ofuani (94-6) and lo Liyong (134) have discussed Okot's study of Literature at Secondary School (especially Okot's love of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha),* the intertextuality between *Song of Hiawatha* and Okot's *Song of Lawino* are limited to the English language in which they were written, the structure of the long narrative poem, and the lament form which Hiawatha and Lawino share as both of them suffer loss of their loved ones at the end of each respective poem.

In the discussion of the intertext between Okot's *Song of Lawino* and Acoli oral songs, it is important to restate Barthes' argument that the text is best understood as "consisting of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody and contestations" (Barthes 4). Okot's *Song of Lawino* consists of multiple writings drawn from Acoli culture, colonial and postcolonial periods with their appendices, including education, culture, the religious split between the Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries, and party politics which fractured the fabric of Acoli family. The contestations rely on the language of the persona that is drawn from the Acoli oral song form, and the linguistic signs are the colonial written form. The multiple writings are linked by the proverb, "Let no one uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead." Many scholars of the poem have discussed the centrality of this proverb, including David Rubadiri (155); George Heron (7); Okumu (1992); and Okon (2013) who asks, "what are the African values that Lawino celebrates? These are: African aesthetics, African concepts of religion, death, education and medicine among others which are contrasted with their European counterparts … For this reason, the poet-persona keeps repeating the refrain: 'Let no one uproot the pumpkin from the old homestead'" (13-14). Cliff Lubwa p'Chong, in "Okot p'Bitek: The Cultural Matrix of the Acholi in his Writings," identifies five matrices: the Acholi (Acoli) world view; the Acholi concept of beauty; the Acholi belief systems; the Acholi song form; and the Acholi heritage (94). He concludes: "what Okot p'Bitek has given us in graphic form in all his writings, both creative and non-creative are only part of the total Acholi culture concerning the concept of identity … " (95).

Acoli satirical songs as intertext in *Song of Lawino*

The origin of satire in *Song of Lawino* is traceable to the colonial education and culture. Ayo Kehinde, in "Intertextuality and the Contemporary African Novel" (372-386), argues that the theory of intertextuality in African literature is:

> … employed by critics and historians to examine the issues of cultural difference and diversity in literature. The historical circumstances of slavery, colonialism and imperialism have made the African people experience cultural hybridity or cultural polyvalency. … that of the colonizer (Euro-Western) which the people imbibed through a colonial school system, religion, mass media and the like. Secondly … the Africans' own culture, which they acquire through local or oral traditions (374).

It is the effect of the 'imbibed' colonial education and culture on the colonized that Lawino satirizes. Robert C Elliot defines satire as:

> artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuse or shortcomings are held up to censure by ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.[7]

The satirist determines when a satirical song can best articulate the message to reform an individual who has deviated from the cultural norms. Horace's contention is similar to that of the Acoli satirist when he states that "the satirist's verse, should be easy and unpretentious, sharp, when necessary, but flexible enough to vary from grave to gay."[8] Acoli practices, oral artists, and Okot use comical and grave satire depending on the content and context.

Satire is best illustrated in Chapters Two, Three, Nine and Twelve. Lawino uses gay (comic) and grave (tragic) satire to expose Ocol and Clementine (Tina) who have "only recently acquired" modernism through imbibing colonial education and culture. Lawino's satire against Tina is grave and sometimes judgmental because she is Ocol's concubine who "… aspires/ To look like a white woman" (*Song* 40; Ch.2). Her satire is underpinned by oral songs in which the women singers lambast their husband's concubines. In Acoli society, co-wives respect each other, though there may be rivalry, but concubines are not tolerated.

Lawino satirizes Ocol in moderation in the hope of rekindling the love he had for her before his 'testicles/ were smashed/ With large books!' (*Song* 120; ch. 12). In Chapter Thirteen, she wishfully pleads:

> Here is my bow-harp [*adungu*]
> Let me sing greetings to you,
> Let me play for you one song only
> Let me play and sing
> The song of my youth:
>
> *She has taken the road to Nimule*
>
> She will come back tomorrow
> His eyes are fixed on the road
> Saying Bring Alyeka to me
> That I may see her
> The daughter of the Bull
> Has stayed away too long
> His eyes are fixed on the road**.**

(*Horn of My Love* 42)

Lawino subverts this song about a young man longing for his lover, as it is reminiscent of the love Ocol once had for her. She, like most Acoli women, remains in the marriage even without the peace that love brings. The oral song, *"*We women will never have peace," is the intertext:

> We will never prosper; the troubles from men are ceaseless,
> …
> My man hurls insults at my mother;
> At night they are worse.
> He drinks to his full,
> And vomits on me;
> When shall we have peace?
> …
> My house is spotlessly clean
> My husband does not see it.
> …
>
> (*Horn of My Love* 60)

Lines 3, 8 and 9 of the oral song are paraphrased in *Song*: *"*My man hurls insults at my mother" [1:38]; "My house is spotlessly clean/ My husband does not see it" (59-63). Marriages only break up when there are irresolvable issues. Then, the clansmen from both sides dissolve the marriage, and the bridewealth is returned. An example is that of Okot's first marriage to Mary Anek, which broke down. Mary returned the bridewealth in the form of a cheque. Okot captured this action in the poem, "Return the bridewealth."[9]

Although the marriage between Ocol and Lawino is in limbo, throughout her *Song*, Lawino uses the apostrophe "my husband":

> But oh! Ocol
> You are my master and my husband
> You are the father of these children
> You are a man,
> You are you!
>
> (*Song* 118; ch. 12)

Through the mocking satire, she hopes he will conform to the social norms of the Acoli and stop "Behaving like another man's dog." Here, she repeats the insult he used when he compared her "with a little dog, / A puppy" (*Song* 37, ch. 1)

The satire changes from comic to grave due to his sexual dysfunction:

> Beg forgiveness from them [ancestors]
> Ask them to give you
> A new spear
> A new spear with a sharp and hard point.
> A spear that will crack the rock.
> Ask for a spear that you will trust
> One that does not bend easily

Like the earth worm.
Ask them to restore your manhood!
For I am sick
Of sharing a bed with a woman!
(Song 122, ch. 13)

Lines 4-7 are direct intertext from a 'spirit possession' dance-song:

The spear with the hard point
The spear with the hard point
Let it split the granite rock;
The spear that I trust,
Let it split the granite rock

(*Horn of My Love* 91)

Here, the singer laments the death of the great hunter who will never use his spear for procreation unlike Ocol, who is impotent because his "testicles were smashed / With large books" (*Song* 120, ch. 12). The oral song "Last night I slept alone" is the intertext of the last three lines in *Song.* The singer satirizes the impotence of her "man":

Mother, last night I slept alone,
My man was totally drunk
He would not touch me
(*Horn of My Love* 63)

The sexual failures of the drunkards are symptomatic of sexual impotence, as in the second intertext "The man is drunk":

The man is drunk
He is troubling me for nothing
Labelebelebe lubu kor anga?
His penis is flabby and shrunken, who is he following?

(*Horn of My Love* 64)

I included one line in Acoli language because of the onomatopoeic expression '*lebelebelebe*' (a triple alliteration), which sums up the impotence of the man.

Lawino's satire directed at Clementine, Ocol's concubine.

Lawino's satire of Ocol was meant to correct his social deviancy and sexual dysfunction. Chapter Two is devoted to an unprecedented grave satirical attack on Tina. Lawino begins her satirical reduction of Tina by focusing on her physique using a concentration of Acoli color similes:

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,
Her mouth is like a raw yaw
It looks like an open ulcer,
Like the mouth of a field!
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for midnight dance
[*Song,* 2:40]

Is Lawino so insensitive as to reduce Tina to a wizard? She further compares her to a white woman for whom the cosmetics were made:

I do not like dusting myself with powder
The thing is good on pink skin
Because it is already pale
But when a black woman has used it
She looks as if she has dysentery,
Tina looks sickly
And she is slow moving,
She is a piteous sight.
(*Song* 40; ch. 2)

Next, she mocks Tina's anorexia:

She walks as if
She has been ill for a long time!
Actually she is starving
She does not eat,
She says she fears getting fat,
…
She says a beautiful woman
Must be slim like a white woman,
…
The beautiful one is dead dry
Like a stump,
She is meatless
Like a shell
On a dry river bed.
(*Song* 43; ch. 2)

Looking at the anorexic Tina who resembles a wizard, I agree with Lawino that Ocol needs his head examined. Okot recounts, in an interview with Lindfors (1976), how one of Tina's flesh and blood sisters attacked him in Gulu:

> One day I was in a pub in Gulu drinking with my friends at midday. A woman walked in and I could see that she was trying to find out who was who in our group? Somebody pointed at me, and she walked up peacefully, took a bottle and hit me on the head. I said 'why.' She answered, 'You insult me in your book' … This is the best possible review of my book.

The woman identified herself as the fictional Clementine because of Okot's concentrated and appropriate use of the simile. Clive Scott defines the simile as "… a pointed rationalized perception whose function is explanatory or illustrative." He notes that similes are usually used by poets who do not want to use metaphor, and so the similes are used as a "repository for their inventive boldness."[10] In *Song*, Okot used the simile in its "alleviatory roles and inventive boldness" to suit Lawino's charged emotional state. The oral song that is the intertext for Lawino's grave satire is "Here I am:"

> Here I am
> Looking after my home
> The burden is killing me, oh
> And the suckers are sucking, lying on their beds
> The prostitutes treat me badly (*Horn of My Love* 61)

This is one of Lawino's general complaints throughout her *Song*. Ocol no longer comes home because he is either with Tina (the sucker/ concubine) or busy politicking or barking as "his master's voice" (*Song*: 11:106). The singer in "We women will never have peace" also says, "My house is spotlessly clean/ My man does not see it." Like Ocol and the other husbands, the husband referenced in the song is busy with the "suckers." Lawino and her fellow women are justified in lambasting these husbands in their satirical songs.

Lawino's satire becomes speculative when she delves into Tina's past:

> Perhaps she has aborted many!
> Perhaps she has thrown her twins
> In the pit latrine!
> Is it the vengeance ghosts?
> Of the many smashed eggs
> That has captured her head?
> How young is this age-mate of my mother?(*Song* 42; ch. 2)

The oral song "This old woman when she sees young men" is the intertext of Lawino's satire:

> This old woman when she sees young men
> She jumps; she jumps like a bull wizard
> She jumps oh;
> This old woman when she hears about men,
> She jumps and throws her smoking pipe in the hole in the anthill
> *Tude do*/She jumps oh. (*Horn of My Love* 71)

We laugh at the old woman who, in her attempt to look young, even "throws away her smoking pipe." Is Tina's attempt to look young different from the old woman's efforts? Lawino might be right in her judgment of Tina, though she admits that jealousy partially contributed to her grave satire. In her brief discussion of satire in *Song of Lawino,*

Monica Mwseseli notes that David Rubadiri, in his opinion and that of other critics, look at the entire poem as satire:

> Okot's theme is one of alienation which occurs when individuals try to emulate the appearance of Western societies. This form is what some people call satire, others call it symbolism; this is achieved by means of a long-sustained poem of 'search.' Lawino is the unwesternized village girl, as the critic would call her … She is actually an extremely complex woman compared to the stock definition of a village girl (148).

I have limited my discussion to the oral songs as intertext in Okot's poetry, but I agree with Rubadiri's assertion. There are elements of satire which ridicule a vast spectrum of human behaviors and social institutions in all of the 13 Chapters.

Acoli oral praise songs as intertext in *Song of Lawino*

When Lawino realized the futility of her attempt to correct Ocol's cultural waywardness through satire, she turned to praise songs about her own beauty. This poetic device is used by the oral poets whose subjects are mostly women. Lawino is a symbol of Acoli beauty, the village *belle*, and leader of the girls. She begins by appealing to Ocol's royalty:

> Listen Ocol, you are the son of a Chief
> Leave foolish behavior to little children.
> It is not right that you should be laughed at in a song!
> Songs about you should be songs of praise!
> (*Song* 37, ch. 1)

The third line refers to the satirical songs that failed. The fourth line refers to *songs of praise* she now wants to sing. Her hope is that she can rekindle Ocol's love as she displays her beauty and prowess as an Acoli girl, thus breaking Tina's stronghold on him. She devotes Chapters 4 and 5 to contrasting her natural beauty with Tina's cosmetic, superficial beauty (Chapter 2). She summarizes her former beauty in the first four stanzas of Chapter 4:47-8:

> "My Name Blew Like a Horn among the Payira"
>
> I was made chief of the girls
> Because I was lively,
> I was bright,
> I was not clumsy or untidy
> …
> My skin is smooth
> It still shines smoothly in the moonlight.
>
> When Ocol was wooing me
> My breasts were erect
> And they shook
> As I walked briskly. (Song 50-51; ch. 4)

The intertext of title of the Chapter is from the oral song: "I heard the horn of my love." The intertext of the stanza is from the oral song, "When I see the beauty on my beloved's face" (*Horn of My Love* 41).

In Chapter 8 she recalls why she ran away from the "evening speakers' school" when she heard the dancers singing her song:

> O! Lawino
> Come let me see you
> Daughter of Lenga-moi
> Who has just shot-up
> Young woman come home!
> O Lawino!
> Chief of the girls
> My love
> That I may elope with you
> Daughter of the Bull
> Come that I may touch you (*Song* 79; ch. 8)

The oral song intertext of the above praise song is "The daughter of Lekamoi"

> Oh, mother,
> Behold the daughter of Lekamoi
> Who has just grown up
> Young woman, when will she come back?
> When does my love come back?
> Daughter of the Bull,
> Woman, come let me see you, listen,
> Daughter of Lekamoi,
> Leader of the girls
> When does my own (Loved one) arrive?
> Oh, Abul, Chief of women. (*Horn of My Love* 43)

Okot subverts the praise oral song as the intertext of his poem throughout Chapter 4. For example, when Lawino tells Ocol "And you were very fond/ Of the gap in my teeth," the oral intertext is from "Behold daughter of Lekamoi/ The gap in her teeth/ Her teeth are like ash" (*Horn of My Love* 43). Another praise song is "Daughter of Ruka" (Okumu: *Song Collection*). Here it is her long, graceful neck that makes her stand out as the leader of the girls. Lawino tells us that as they "entered" the arena, there was another song "… about ourselves." This time it is the young man who is the subject, and he demands bridewealth from his father so that he can marry "The woman of his bosom:"

Song of Lawino (8:82)	*Horn of My Love* (p. 48)
Father bring the bridewealth	Oh father/gather the bridewealth
Let me bring my love home;	That I may bring a woman home;
I am sad;	Oh the woman of my bosom
My heart is on fire for her	The beautiful one
The woman of my bosom, oh	----------
Born of the mother of Owiny,	----------
Keeps my eyes from sleep	Prevents me from sleeping,

Woman of my bosom	The woman of my bosom
If anybody touches my beloved,	If anyone troubles my beloved
He will be struck by lightning,	I shall shed tears of blood
Oh, oh my heart is on fire for her	----------
Woman of my bosom,	The woman of my bosom
Confuses my head	Prevents me from sleeping
Father should I die	O father/If I die
I shall become a fierce vengeance	I will become a vengeance ghost and kill you

Okot is the translator of the original song, and he only selectively extracted lines which convey Lawino's mood. There are no repetitions of lines in *Song* whereas in *Horn*, there is room for that. Using oral praise songs as intertext, Okot describes Lawino as the most beautiful and attractive girl in the clan who attracts educated men like Ocol, "a prince of an ancient chiefdom." To invoke jealousy in Ocol, she bluntly tells him:

> Ocol, my friend
> Look at my skin
> It is smooth and black
> And my boy friend
> Who plays the *nanga*
> Sings praises to it. (Song 59; ch. 5)

A possible intertext for the "boyfriend" could be the song, "When I see the beauty on my beloved's face":

> When I see the beauty of my beloved's face,
> …
> The beauty of my beloved's face
>
> Her neck is long, when I see it,
> I cannot sleep a wink,
> Oh, the daughter of my mother-in-law,
> Her neck is like the shaft of a spear
>
> When I touch the tattoos on her back (waist)
> I die
> Oh, sister of the young man, listen
> The tattoos on my beloved's waist
>
> When I see the gap in my beloved's teeth
> Her teeth are white like dry season *simsim*,
> Oh daughter of my father in-law listen
> The gap in my beloved teeth.
>
> (*Horn of My Love* 41)

The young man who is praising his beloved's beauty expresses the same sentimental feeling Ocol had for Lawino when he was courting her:

> Ocol, my husband,
> My friend,

What are you talking?
You saw me when I was young.
In my mother's house
  This man crawled on the floor!
The son of the Bull wept
For me with tears.
  …
  You trembled
When you saw the tattoos
On my breasts
And the tattoos below my belly button;
And you were fond
Of the gap in my teeth!
My man what are you talking? (*Song* 51; ch. 4)

The last stanza in *Song* has lines that are extracted directly from the oral song stanzas 3, 4, and 5. For Ocol and the love-sick young man, what attracted them most in the two women were the 'gap in their teeth –*kere*, the tattoos on the belly button," although Okot adds the tattoos on Lawino's breasts and below her belly button as details that come from another oral song Okot discussed in *Artist, the Ruler* (32-4). The lines are therefore almost identical, uniting them intertextually:

Song	*Oral text*
You trembled When you saw the tattoos On my breasts	When I see the tattoos on her back, I die
And you were fond Of the gap in my teeth!	When I see the gap in my beloved's teeth,
And the tattoos on my belly button	Adulla has tattoos below her belly button.

The conclusion I can draw from the oral praise songs that are intertext in *Song* is that Okot's use of intertextuality was meant to contrast Lawino's beauty against the synthetic beauty of the colonized Tina and those who participate in colonial beauty practices. Lawino's own conclusion is that Ocol rejects her because of a paradigm shift in his perception of what constitutes beauty. Her beauty was suitable before he imbibed the colonizer's education and culture but after that, native beauty is inadequate for him just as his status as a royal prince counts less than his new status as an educated political leader. Lawino conveys her rejection through the lamentation and implorations using apostrophe in reference to Ocol, her clansmen, or the reader.

Acoli oral songs of lament and implorations as intertext in S*ong*

In the discussion of the lamentation oral songs as intertext in *Song*, I begin by looking at "those who suffer to 'buy' Christian names by joining the catechists' 'evening speakers'" class in Chapter 8 of *Song*. A similar theme is central in two African novels. In Mongo Beti's *The*

Poor Christ of Bomba (1971), the young female catechists who are being prepared for marriage as Christian wives live in the women's camps where they are routinely sexually abused by the same Christian men who are their mentors. Some, like Lawino, run away prematurely. In *Houseboy* (1966) by Ferdinand Oyono, a similar physical and sexual abuse of the village women who live in dormitories is carried out by their male mentors, including the priest who is the "Spiritual Director." Lawino does not talk about sexual abuse, although she says that the catechumen girls are old enough to be co-wives of the cruel wives of the Protestant missionaries. She castigates the Padres (priests), Nuns, and the Black teachers at the Roman Catholic Mission for their cruelty.

She begins her lamentation by exposing the abuse of the Protestant catechists exemplified by her emaciated sister: "And her loin beads/ No longer fitted her:"

Oh how young girls
Labour to buy a name!
You break your back
Drawing water
For the wives
Of the teachers,
The skin of your hand
Hardens and peels off
Grinding millet and *simsim.*
…
And girls gather
Wild sweet potatoes
And eat them raw
As if there is a famine
And they are so thin
They look like
Cattle that have dysentery! (*Song* 77; ch. 8)

The stanza can be read both as a lamentation for the suffering girls but also satire directed at the missionaries who behave contrary to the traditional norm of hospitality. The suffering of the orphan in "I am squatting on a tree" is the intertext of this stanza:

I am squatting on a tree
Like a bird;
I am like a monkey
Squatting on a tree.
Oh, mother,
Fate has knelt on me;
What can I say?
Ee fate has crushed me completely;
Suffering has sunk deeply in my flesh, ee!
(*Horn of My Love* 132)

The last line of the oral song projects in our minds a picture of the emaciated bodies of the girls and Tina, all seeking a piece of foreign culture.

The boys, too, suffer the same fate as the girls as they are consigned to a life of forced celibacy, locked in cold halls. Lawino laments their fate:

> And the young men
> Sleep alone
> Cold, like knives
> Without handle.
>
> And the spears
> Of the lone hunters,
> The trusted right-hand spears
> Of young bulls
> Rust in the dewy cold
> Of the night. (*Song* 80; ch. 8)

The second stanza in *Song* is a good example of intertextual borrowing of lines 3-5 from the dirge "The Hippopotamus Spear":

> Bull of men, son of my father
> The people have left the
> Hippopotamus spear in the cold;
> They have left the hippopotamus spear to sleep outside
> The hippopotamus spear has been eaten by rust;
> …
>
> (*Horn of My Love* 128)

Okot's intertextual borrowings from the two oral songs elevate the suffering of the young men from individual to the communal level. My conclusion is that the catechumens suffered a lot at the hands of missionaries in the process of acquiring Christian names which Lawino dismisses as meaningless in comparison to Acoli names which are meaningful (*Song* 84-7; ch. 8).

In contrast to the harshness of the colonial missionaries in the three texts, Somniso, in "Intertextuality shapes the poetry of Xhosa poet" (139-155), concludes that "emphasis has been placed on the interplay between Christianity and poems composed on the grounds of Xhosa traditions. Praises which deal with death, health, and social issues are discussed in relation to Christianity …" (153). This phenomenon may have resulted from the harmony that the colonial missionaries established with the natives. Conversely, the Acoli oral songs we have described as intertext in *Song of Lawino* have no Christian elements in them. Christianity only appears in the text through negative portrayals.

In Chapter 12, Lawino's diagnosis of Ocol's cultural death is drawn from studying the gradual change in him from alienation to total negation of Acoli culture. Danson Sylvester Kahyana, in "Okot

p'Bitek's Diagnostic Poetics and the Quest for an African Revolution in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*" (17-47), uses the medical approach in analyzing Ocol's sickness from what Ngũgĩ said in the introduction to Okot's *Africa's Cultural Revolution* (xiii): "… p'Bitek is one of 'East Africa's foremost surgeons' who is concerned with 'the psychological wound inflicted on a whole generation of us by colonialism and Christianity.'" Kahyana, borrowing from medical practice, diagnoses Ocol's sickness, and his conclusion is not far from Lawino's—Ocol's and Tina's sickness are rooted in colonialism and its effect on the "African's psyche and sense of identity" (Kahyana 41). His conclusion echoes Lubwa (95), emphasizing how Okot's writings focus on the sense of African identity and how Africans themselves imagine the future trajectory of their societies. Kahyana approves of Lawino's traditional remedy for Ocol, and he argues that she qualifies in practicing and administering these remedies since she is deeply knowledgeable in Acoli medicines and cultural rituals.

Lawino's lament in Chapter 12, "My Husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books," is appropriate. To bring the evil nature of Ocol's house to the fore, Lawino reverts to the simile combined with the apostrophe:

> Listen, my clansmen,
> I cry over my husband
> Whose head is lost.
> Ocol has lost his head
> In the forest of books.
>
> When my husband
> Was still wooing me
> His eyes were still alive,
> His ears were still unblocked,
> Ocol had not yet become a fool
> My friend was a man then!
> …
> And the reading
> Has killed my man
> In the ways of his people. (*Song* 116; ch. 12)

Lawino believes that ghosts of the dead come back either to bless the living or to avenge themselves. She therefore warns her clansmen that the ghosts of authors who are "… angry revengeful-looking people" have taken vengeance on Ocol, and the ghosts might do the same to Lawino's relatives.

> …
> If you stay
> In my husband's house long,
> The ghosts of the dead men
> That people this dark forest,
> The ghost of the many white men
> And white women
> That scream whenever you touch any book,
> The deadly vengeance ghosts

Of the writers
Will capture your head,
And like my husband
You will become
A walking corpse.
(*Song* 118; ch. 12)

The stanza is key in understanding Lawino's lamentation, which is tempered by the hope that Ocol's "captured head" can be cured. Lawino therefore asked her clansmen in Chapter 13 to "prepare the *malakwang* dish" as part of the remedy. The intertext for this process is found in the spirit possession dance songs and some of the dirges. Take for example, the song, "Lapul in its anger:**"**

Lapul in its anger
Possesses even maternal uncles;
This Spirit is an angry one,
It possesses even paternal uncles;
Lapul in its impertinence,
Possesses even the children of sisters.
(*Horn of My Love* 85)

The relatives the composer-singer mentioned are the same relatives that Lawino warned earlier against staying long among Ocol's "dark forest of books." Lawino's hope is that Ocol is not yet "a stone-cold corpse" ready for the grave. She screams mournfully:

You are a man
You are you
Do you not feel ashamed?
Behaving like another man's dog
Before your own wife and children?
(*Song* 118; ch. 12)

Since there is no response from "the walking corpse," Lawino thunders:

Has the Fire produced Ash?
Has the Bull died without a Head?
Aaa! A certain man
Has no millet field
He lives on borrowed food (*Song* 119; ch. 12)

Lawino wonders aloud as to what happened to the "bull" gene that produced men like Ocol's grandfather and father but appears not to have been replicated in Ocol. She uses two contrasting proverbs that she turns into rhetorical questions to differentiate between father and son:

Has the Fire produced Ash?
Has the Bull died without a Head? (*Song* 119; ch. 12)

The "Ash" and "Head" refer to Ocol, who has failed to inherit the chieftainship that might, at worse, pass to a male slave as implied in the 4th last stanza of *Song*: 12:120. Despite Ocol's failure as an "heir," Lawino uses the apostrophe 'Prince' up to the very end of her *Song*. Thus, she ends her lament addressed to her clansmen:

> Oh my clansmen
> Let's all cry together!
> Come,
> Let's mourn the death of my husband,
> The Ash that was produced
> By a great Fire!
> O, this homestead is utterly dead,
> Close the gates
> With *lacari* thorns
> For the Prince
> The heir to the Stool is lost!
> …
>
> (*Song* 119-120; ch. 12)

Lawino's conclusion is that:

> There is not one single true son left,
> The entire village
> Has fallen into the hands
> Of war captives and slaves! (Song 120; ch. 12)

The intertextuality to the stanza is the oral song, "The slave I brought home"

> The slave I brought home,
> He has taken over the control of the homestead.
> The captive I bought,
> The slaves I brought home,
> They have taken over the women.
>
> (Okumu *Song Collection*)

The intertextuality is in Solomon's Book of Lamentation 5:1-2, which is not an Acoli oral song:

> Remember, O Lord, what has happened to us;
> Look, and see our disgrace,
> Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,
> Our homes to foreigners.[11]

Though the future of Ocol's clan seems bleak, there is still hope in Lawino's speculative imploration:

> Perhaps one of our boys
> Escaped with his life!
> Perhaps he is hiding in the bush

Waiting for the sun to set!

But will he come
Before the next morning
Will he arrive in time? (*Song* 117; ch. 12)

Writing about "Themes in Acoli Dirges," Okot classifies this type of songs as "Songs of the pathways." He notes that these songs "are characterized by a kind of ambivalence as to whether the dead one is really gone forever."[12] Lawino's ambivalence is clear in the use of "perhaps" and "but," indicating doubt. It is this confusion that makes "Bile burn(s) my inside/ I feel like vomiting!" This reflex causes her to lament:

For all our young men
Were finished in the forest,
Their manhood was finished
In the class-rooms
Their testicles
Were smashed
With large books! (*Song* 117; ch. 12)

For the first time, Lawino's eloquence deserts her, as indicated in the structure of the last three lines, which are reminiscent of the staccato war songs. If Ocol had been a witch she would have asked the elders to "Touch his penis, see if it is cold and soft" as in the oral song, "The witch is dead and is good news" (*Horn of my Love* 138).

Realizing that Ocol is still "a walking corpse," the elders perform a ritual cleansing ceremony and then lead him to the family shrine where he should:

Beg forgiveness from them [ancestors]
And ask them to give you
A new spear
A new spear with a sharp and hard point
A spear that will crack the rock.

Ask for a spear that you will trust
One that does not bend easily
Like earth-worm
Ask them to restore your manhood!
For I am sick
Of sharing a bed with a woman!
(*Song* 122; ch. 13)

The intertextuality of the first stanza is the oral song, "The spear with the hard point":

The spear with the hard point
Let it split the granite rock,
The spear that I trust,
Let it split the granite rock. (*Horn of My Love* 91)

The intertextuality of the second stanza of *Song* is a combination of the two oral songs, "Last night I slept alone" and "The man is drunk" which is discussed as satire.

When Ocol has fully recovered, Lawino pleads:

> All I ask
> Is that you give me one chance,
> Let me praise you
> Son of the chief!
> …
> Let me dance before you,
> My love,
> Let me show you
> The wealth in your house,
> Ocol my husband
> Son of the Bull,
> Let no one uproot the Pumpkin.
> (*Song* 123; ch. 13)

Conclusion

In this article, I set out to explore the intertext between Okot's *Song of Lawino* and Acoli oral songs. In the introduction I discussed the literary movement from influence to intertextuality with reference to African literature and Okot's poetry in particular. This therefore situates my article within the growing study of intertextuality in post-colonial African literature. The main written source in the intertextuality between *Song of Lawino* and Acoli oral songs is *Horn of My Love*, a title which is also derived from a song of lament, "I Heard the Horn of My Love" (p.119). Focusing on Acoli oral songs, I identified four sub-genres: satire, praise, lament/implorations, and spirit possession songs. Ocol's desertion of Lawino and her attempt to dissuade him to return to her takes different forms. She starts with satirical songs whose main role was to expose Ocol and Tina's infatuation and later the obsession with colonial education and culture. When she realized that Ocol is so embedded in his newly acquired culture, she changes her tactics and tries the praise mode, but her praises of Ocol yield no positive results. She turns to self-praise to bring out her former natural beauty in contrast to Tina's cosmetic beauty. By so doing, she hopes that Ocol will leave Tina and come back to her. She also derides the colonized women represented by the figure of Tina as well as modern dances, dress codes, missionaries, and political leaders through extensive use of poetic devices such as the simile, hyperbole, and symbols to expose inherent colonial sicknesses (Kahyana 38-39), including Ocol's mental illness, which leads him to insult Black people in general and his and Lawino's relatives in particular. She moves from satire to praise to lament in the course of

the thirteen chapters of her *Song.* She ends only when she realizes that she cannot change the status quo as Ocol is culturally dead and best left with Tina, since both hunger after foreign culture and not the African culture symbolized in the Pumpkin, which Ocol threatened to uproot. Throughout the article, I have exemplified Okot's intertextuality in Acoli oral songs using my auto-ethnographic knowledge and study of Acoli culture and orality. The purpose of the article is to contribute to the understanding of the intertext between Okot's *Song of Lawino* and Acoli oral songs.

Notes

1. See Okot p'Bitek, interviewed by Kristen Petersen's class in Aarhus University, Denmark, published in *Kunapipi*, vol. 1, no. 1,1979, 89-93.

2. Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*. See also the 1969 edition of *Wer pa Lawino*, particularly the preface on p. iii.

3. See Garuba and Benge Okot, "Lateral texts and circuits of value: Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino and Wer pa Lawino" (312-327).

4. See lo Liyong 1993.

5. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry.*

6. See Clayton and Rothstein 1991.

7. See Elliot 1960.

8. See Justus's translation of *The Satires of Horace.*

9. See Cook and Rubadiri 1971.

10. See Scott 1973.

11. See *Holy Bible* 1984.

12. See *Horn of My Love* (144).

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B Leitch, *et al*., W.W. Norton and Company, 2001, pp. 1466-1470.

Clayton, J. and Rothstein, E. *Figures in the corpus: theories of influence and intertextuality in Literary History.* The U of Wisconsin P, 1991.

Cook, David and David Rubadiri. *Poems from East Africa.* East African Educational Publishers, 1971.

Elliot, Robert C. *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual*, *Art*. Princeton UP, 1960.

Heron, George. *The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek.* Heinemann, 1976.

Holy Bible, NIV: Ultra-Thin Reference Edition, 1984.

Horatius, Flacus Q, and A.M. Juster. *The Satires of Horace.* U of Pennsylvania P, 2008.

Kraskowska, Ewa. "Influence." *Forum of Poetics.* Translated by Timothy Williams, Fall 2015, pp. 70-75.

Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S. Roudiez. *Desire in Language*. Blackwell, 1980.

Lo Liyong, Taban. "On translating the "Untranslatable," Chapter 14 of Wer pa Lawino by Okot p'Bitek." *Research in African Literature,* vol.24, no 3, 1993, pp. 87-92.

Mweseli, Monica N. W. *A Study of Okot P'Bitek's Poetry*. Africawide Network, 2004.

Okot, p'Bitek. *Song of Lawino.* Heinemann, 1984.

—. “Return the bridewealth.”*Poems from East Africa*, edited by David Cook and David Rubadiri, East African Educational Publishers, 1971, pp. 130-131.

—. *Wer pa Lawino*: Te Okono Obur Bong’luputu. East African Publishing House, 1969.

—. *Horn of My Love.* Heinemann, 1974.

—. *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture, and Values, Including Extracts from Song of Soldier and White Teeth Make People Laugh on Earth*. East African Educational Publishers, 1994.

Scott, Clive. “Simile.” *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, edited by Roger Fowler. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 173.