



CONJUGAL SLAVERY IN WAR  
ESCLAVAGE CONJUGAL EN TEMPS DE GUERRE

## “Ododo Wa” African Launch, Uganda

December 6 to 12, 2019: Kampala, Kitgum, Gulu and Aboke

By: Annie Bunting, CSiW Project Director, with Isabelle Masson and Véronique Bourget

After a successful launch of “[Ododo Wa](#)” at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in [Winnipeg in October](#), the traveling exhibit had its launch in Uganda in early December 2019. Conjugal Slavery in War (CSiW) Coordinator Véronique Bourget, CMHR Curator Isabelle Masson, and myself traveled to Uganda to coordinate the events with [Refugee Law Project](#) (RLP), Grace Acan and Evelyn Amony. Over one week, we held four community dialogues: at the Uganda National Museum, the National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre (Kitgum), TAKs Art Centre in Gulu, and St. Mary’s College in Aboke.

It was striking during the African launch of “Ododo Wa” in Uganda that the exhibit became grounded in each place it visited. Each community that welcomed Grace Acan and Evelyn Amony, their stories, and the team around them seemed to connect with the exhibit. In Kampala, we had an impactful launch with family and friends of Grace and Evelyn and our Ugandan partner Refugee Law Project (RLP). In Kitgum, it was a true community dialogue with representatives from affected communities, families, District government and traditional leaders. Gulu brought together women from the [Women’s Advocacy Network](#) (WAN) who shared how their stories, drawings and healing process are reflected in the exhibit. Media was present at these three events. And finally, in Aboke - at St. Mary’s College - we saw how Grace’s storytelling encouraged youth to also share their experiences for support, healing and advocacy. They were touched by her generosity of spirit and stories.

Evelyn and Grace, and their multi-generational families present at the launches (from Evelyn’s newborn baby and 92-year-old grandmother to Grace’s siblings and parents), demonstrated outstanding commitment to the events and indeed remarkable eloquence, solidarity and kindness. They shared their stories, some parts of which their family members were hearing for the first time, in order to document theirs and others’ experiences, challenge misconceptions, and hold government accountable for meaningful reparations designed to meet the holistic needs of abductees and their children. In this way, the exhibit was a catalyst to talk about national reconciliation and effective reparations programs, an instrument to push the state agenda.

Watching the families, RLP staff and general public interact with the exhibit was very gratifying and indeed affirming of all the hard work of Grace and Evelyn, Veronique Bourget (CSiW Coordinator) and Isabelle Masson (CMHR Curator) and the CSiW team. Isabelle’s vision, inspired by the memoirs written by Grace and Evelyn, the drawings from WAN women, and the research from the CSiW project, coupled with Veronique’s sensitivity to the context, details and politics of their stories were integral to the creation and success of the exhibit. The visitors who



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saw the exhibit appreciated its many dimensions, including the original animated films. We noticed how younger visitors were drawn to the iPads and then looked at the panels while adults tended to read the panels and then view the videos, huddled around the iPads.

As the Vice District Head said in Kitgum, thanks are due to Evelyn and Grace to bravely bring their stories back to Kitgum, for “a society without history is a society that cannot succeed. We need documentation”. Evelyn added that “our children should learn this history, not from afar but from close-by”, from us. “We cannot die with these stories”, Grace noted, but rather the younger generation “must know the problems and avoid violence. The guns are silent but the impacts are still very present” even so many years later. There were also more immediate impacts such as the moment a staff member at the [Uganda National Museum](#), unfurled the first panel on constructing the exhibit and realized he recognized Grace, as he had been abducted just a month before her and was part of the group ordered to attack St. Mary’s College. He had never met one of the women from the school until he met Grace. It is these personal and community conversations, sparked by the traveling exhibit, that we heard in Uganda and hope to continue in and across Uganda, Sierra Leone, DRC, Canada and online.

The community dialogues will continue in 2020. The stories are traveling. As Chris Dolan, Director of RLP, said at the launch in Kampala, “the seed was planted” and now we look forward to watching it grow and to the future conversations. Thanks to CMHR curator Isabelle Masson who met with our partners over three years ago and then joined us again in Toronto and in Kigali to work with the team. Thanks to Veronique Bourget, CSiW Coordinator, who worked very closely with Isabelle and partners on this project in conducting interviews and researching artefacts since 2017. You cannot underestimate the time and effort required to produce such a nuanced and respectful piece as we see in “Ododo Wa”. And, most especially, thanks are due to Grace Acan and Evelyn Amony.

Next stop, Freetown!