

Ododo Wa Community Dialogues Scalar Project

By Sarah York-Bertram, with contributions by Zhi Ming Sim & Andrea González

Since 2019, CSiW, project partners, and [York University Library's](#) (YUL) [Digital Scholarship Centre](#) (DSC) have been collaborating to develop a Scalar project tracking responses to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) exhibit, and its traveling counterpart, "[Ododo Wa: Stories of Girls in War.](#)"



Scalar is an open-source web platform developed by the [Alliance for Networking Visual Culture](#).

"Ododo Wa," which means "our stories" in Acholi, centres the stories of Grace Acan and Evelyn Amony. Grace and Evelyn were both abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army when they were girls. Now, as activists and researchers, Grace and Evelyn advocate for justice and reparations for survivors of conjugal slavery and children born of war. Their memoirs, [I am Evelyn Amony](#) and [Not Yet Sunset](#), are foundational texts from which the exhibits and Scalar project flow.

Véronique Bourget, CSiW Project Coordinator, Grace, Evelyn, CMHR curator Isabelle Masson, and CSiW project director Professor Annie Bunting worked closely together for years to develop the exhibit.

[The exhibit launched October 2019](#) and a traveling version, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connection and Partnership Grants, [launched in Uganda in December 2019](#).

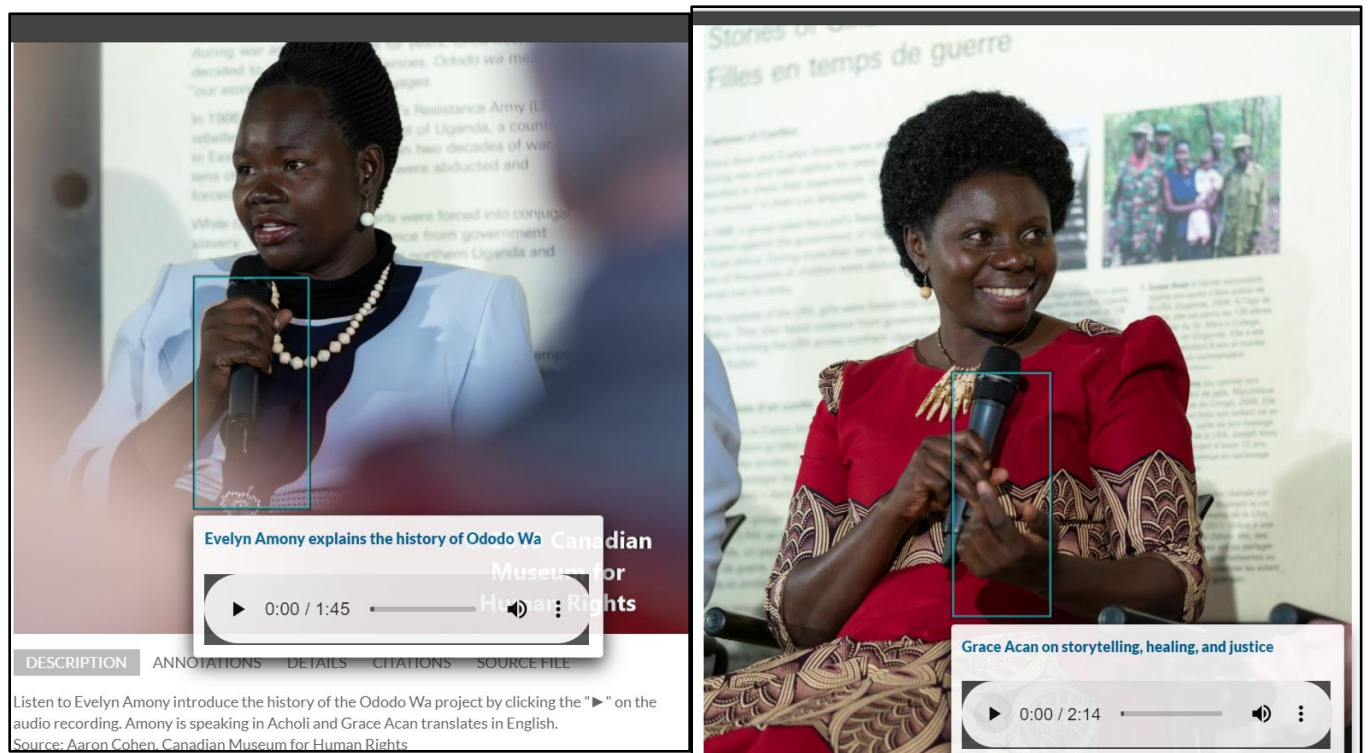
As the above photo shows, the traveling exhibit includes two iPads on stands to house the Scalar project for the exhibit audience and for screening original short films about Grace's and Evelyn's stories. The traveling exhibit's tour events are paired with facilitated community dialogues.

Sarah York-Bertram, a YU PhD candidate, received a Graduate Assistant placement to lead the Scalar project with the support of YUL's DSC and YU PhD candidate and digital humanities advisor Denise Challenger. Denise has developed a Scalar exhibit titled [Playin' Mas, Play and Mas: A pedagogical journey of children and Caribana, 1970-1974](#).

Those involved with the Scalar project knew voice would be central to the project, that the project would continue the established survivor-centred approach that directed the exhibit's development, and that it would continue to prioritize Grace's and Evelyn's narrative ownership.

Following the launches, Sarah reviewed content documenting the events and responses to the exhibit. The photos, recordings, and news media reports were all rich with potential, but what stood out most was the high-quality audio recording the CMHR developed during the exhibit launch. Scalar supports a unique media annotation feature that allows users to develop relationships between different types of media content. The "Ododo Wa" Scalar project leverages this feature to meet the project's needs.

For example, on the project's [Background: "Ododo Wa" means "Our Stories" \(yorku.ca\)](#) page, Sarah created relationships between CMHR photographer Aaron Cohen's images and audio clips from the CMHR's recording of the exhibit launch.



As shown above, the media annotations appear embedded on the page and viewers can click the audio “play” icon.

Sarah also made [a map](#) to demonstrate the exhibit’s travels using Northwestern University’s Knight Lab’s free, open source StoryMapJS.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck Toronto shortly before the traveling exhibit was scheduled to land in Sierra Leone.

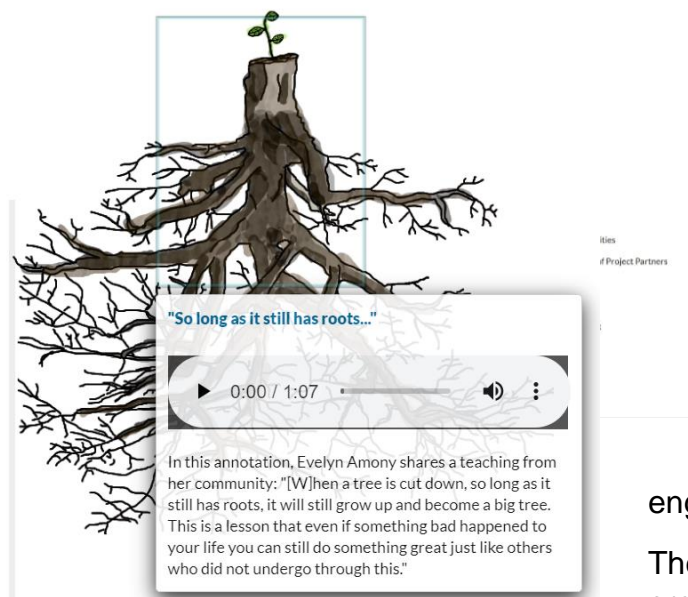
In the weeks and months that followed, the possibilities of the “Ododo Wa” Scalar project expanded. Although CSiW, project partners, and traveling exhibit host organizations and communities could not meet as planned, the Scalar project offered a digital space for distant collaboration. As a result, the Scalar team grew to include YU master’s student Andrea González and PhD student Zhi Ming Sim.

With increased capacity, the Scalar team was able to expand the workload for the project. Following direction from Véronique, who has acted as the research and content advisor since the exhibit’s inception, the team began a news media analysis of the exhibit. After conducting the analysis, sharing our findings with other CSiW student researchers, Annie, Véronique, Grace, Evelyn, Denise, and the digital librarians, we created [a summarized version for the Scalar project](#).

Among Ming’s important contributions to the project, including an interactive Timeline, she also suggested that the project hold space for Grace and Evelyn’s reflections on interacting with news media. Ming writes: *Our analysis of news media was incomplete without Grace and Evelyn’s personal reflections and perspectives on their experiences with journalists and press media -- especially given our findings that survivor-centeredness is integral to news media representations of “Ododo Wa”. They wrote about the importance of ethical reporting on survivors’ experiences and how to accurately amplify their voices to benefit survivors’ movements and their communities.*



Their reflections are central parts of the “Ododo Wa Community dialogues” Scalar project.



This illustration shows a tree that has been cut down. It still has strong roots and continues to grow. This illustration reflects comments emerging from the exhibit events.

Source: Lorenzo Serravalle

Through media analysis of news reports, we learned that perspectives on and responses to the “Ododo Wa: Stories of Girls in War” exhibit flows in a strategic direction reflecting its survivor-centred approach and pedagogy. Perspectives on and responses to the exhibit flow from survivors, to affected communities, project partners, news media, and to the public. The findings offered a framework for organizing the Scalar project and created space for engaging its audience further.

The significance of the Ododo Wa Scalar project and its survivor-centred pedagogy continued to develop as Grace and Evelyn co-authored original reflections about their experiences presenting the exhibit in Uganda, which [viewers can read](#).

Collaborating over WhatsApp and email, Grace and Evelyn weighed in on the content and selected featured images. Following review of transcripts from exhibit events and community dialogues in Canada and Uganda, Grace and Evelyn visited their parents to obtain permission to be quoted as both their parents shared their perspectives and experiences during these events. Grace’s and Evelyn’s willingness to seek permission, and their parents’ willingness to give it, [created more space on the Scalar project for dialogues among generations and to reflect on the intergenerational impacts of conjugal slavery in war](#).

In addition to facilitating collaboration between partners and the CSiW Scalar team, Annie connected CSiW student researchers with the Scalar team to enhance the project’s content. During the summer of 2021, YU undergraduate student Lorenzo Serravalle designed the project’s cover, background, and two digital drawings that emerge from [“place-based” perspectives](#) that anchor the exhibit in its regional context.

Collaboration with CSiW project partners, and the forging of new partnerships, has been integral to the exhibit’s development and travels. The [Refugee Law Project](#) (School of Law, Makerere University, Uganda) has been an indispensable partner in both the exhibit launch in Uganda and in the Scalar project’s development. Thanks are owed to RLP director Dr. Chris Dolan, Gilbert Nuwagira, Patrick Otim, Diana Ajok, Grace Acan, and

Juliet Adoch. Juliet facilitated community dialogues that paired with the traveling exhibit's launch in Uganda. [Her original reflection on that work is featured on the Scalar project.](#)

CSiW's partnership with YUL's DSC was founded on a commitment to building a community of practice around open access digital projects at YU. In that spirit, the CSiW Scalar team, Denise Challenger, and the DSC are hosting two workshops, funded by the Faculty of Graduate Studies Graduate Events Fund, about the "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues" project, and Challenger's Scalar exhibit, during YU's Open Access Week (October 25-29, 2021).

Andrea has been developing content for the workshops. She writes: *Preparation for the workshops surrounding the "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues" project began in Spring 2020, as the CSiW Scalar team prepared an application for the FGS Graduate Events Fund, detailing the need to support, engage and promote digital humanities and scholarship at York, focusing on open access platforms - Scalar and Knight Lab's TimelineJS and StoryMapJS. The workshops underscore the novel uses of the tools, noting how the community-facing uses of "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues" encourages knowledge mobilization towards policy change.*

In the spirit of building a community of practice around digital humanities, rendering these platforms accessible and easy-to-use for participants, the CSiW Scalar team has worked to develop a PressBook that will support the workshops. The development of the PressBook, similar to the workshops, has been thanks to CSiW's partnership with YUL's DSC. This PressBook will be available to participants during and after the workshops, as well as CSiW project partners, so they can explore the innovative uses featured in the "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues" project and in Denise Challenger's project. The PressBook will contain tutorials for Scalar and the Knight Lab's tools, TimelineJS and StoryMapJS, as well as reflective questions and resources to guide a community-facing project.

If all goes according to plan, the traveling exhibit will continue its journey in November 2021 and the "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues" Scalar project will continue to grow.

In the meantime, we invite you to join us for the free online workshops hosted by YUL's DSC where we will share how we developed the "Ododo Wa Community Dialogues"



Scalar project and discuss the potential for community-engaged and community-facing open access projects. We look forward to seeing you there!

Graduate Researchers from The Conjugal Slavery in War Partnership Project & York University Library's Digital Scholarship Centre present:

 Creating Story Maps and Timelines with free Knight Lab tools

Date: 26 October 2021
Time: 10AM - 12PM
Learn more at: 

Graduate Researchers from the Conjugal Slavery in War Partnership Project & York University Library's Digital Scholarship Centre presents:

Creating Digital Online Publications with Scalar

Date: 29 October 2021
Time: 10AM - 12PM
Learn more at: 

