

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Reuben Stephen Anywar: An Acholi Intellectual and the Production of Knowledge in Colonial Acholiland

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## Abstract

In a posthumous publication in 1954, seven years after his death, Reuben Anywar became the second Acholi to publish a book. *Acholi ki Ker Megi* was released one year after Lacito Okech's *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi*. Unlike Okech, who received little education, Anywar was among the first northern Ugandan graduates of Makerere College. He became one of the first Black teachers at the prestigious Gulu High School and was the founder and original editor of *Acholi Magazine*. By the mid-1940s, Anywar was arguably the most towering intellectual in northern Uganda. Yet, existing works overlook his significance in knowledge production. This article seeks to rectify this oversight.

## Résumé

Dans une publication posthume datant de 1954, sept ans après sa mort, Reuben Anywar est devenu le deuxième Acholi à publier un livre. *Acholi ki Ker Megi* parut un an après *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi* de Lacito Okech. Contrairement à Okech, qui avait reçu peu d'instruction, Anywar fut parmi les premiers diplômés du nord de l'Ouganda du Makerere College. Il devint l'un des premiers enseignants noirs du prestigieux lycée de Gulu et fut le fondateur et le premier rédacteur en chef de l'*Acholi Magazine*. Au milieu des années 1940, Anywar était sans doute l'intellectuel le plus influent du nord de l'Ouganda. Pourtant, les travaux existants négligent son rôle essentiel dans la production du savoir. Cet article vise à combler cette lacune.

**Keywords:** Gulu; Uganda; intellectual history; colonial education; indigenous languages

## Introduction

On 13 November 1948, John Opiyo, a primary (or elementary) school teacher, began a ride of over 50 miles, from Awere, east of modern-day Gulu City, to St. Philip's, an Anglican cathedral in the west, to say a memorial prayer for Reuben Anywar. One of the first graduates of Makerere College from northern Uganda, Anywar had been Opiyo's teacher, mentor, and close friend at Gulu High School from 1945 to 1946. Upon graduating and relocating to Awere in January 1947, Opiyo had lost contact with his teacher, and, given the distance between them, he had not heard of Anywar's untimely demise on 13 November 1947. On 12 November 1948, when the news eventually reached Opiyo, he was informed there would be a memorial prayer the next day at 3:00 P.M. The news flummoxed Opiyo, and he put everything on hold. He left Awere the following morning and arrived just an hour before the memorial service.

What Opiyo found outside the cathedral overwhelmed him. He saw the largest crowd he had ever witnessed in the churchyard. It was made up of European missionaries, colonial officials, and his own Acholi people from all walks of life. Seeing the crowd outside, Opiyo rushed inside, hoping to get a seat where he could follow the memorial service closely. However, when he entered the church, he saw all the seats had been reserved except for one at the back, which he took, begrudgingly.

The service was short, and afterward, Opiyo visited his old school library, about a block from the cathedral. There, he encountered works of Anywar he had neither seen nor heard of. He saw a book manuscript titled *Acholi ki Ker Megi* (Acholi and Their Chiefdoms). Before seeing the name of the author, Opiyo wondered who had written it. Then, he saw his former teacher's name: Reuben S. Anywar. Next to the book, there was a journal article, "The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich," published in the *Uganda Journal* in March 1948, a premier colonial journal.<sup>1</sup> After that, he saw three copies of *Acholi Magazine*, which Anywar had edited, and three incomplete biographical articles on Acholi chiefs that Anywar had been working on. Seeing these works, "I wondered how many books Anywar would have written if God had not taken his life at just the age of 23," wrote Opiyo. "He would have filled the Library of Gulu High School," he concluded.<sup>2</sup>

Opiyo's recollection, intended for publication in *Acholi Magazine*, captures both the significance of Anywar and his major works; however, it did not mention everything Anywar had done up to the time of his death and what was in the pipeline. For example, we know that Anywar had translated countless prayer books.<sup>3</sup> He had translated a book about commercial banks intended to give information to local people.<sup>4</sup> He had translated St. John's Gospel.<sup>5</sup> At the time of his death, Anywar had been working on four projects: revising his book

<sup>1</sup> Comboni Missionary House Library, Gulu, Uganda (CMHLG)/2/"Remembering Reuben S. Anywar"; for the article, see Reuben Anywar, "The Life of Rwot Iburaim Awich," *Uganda Journal* 12, no. 1 (1948): 72–81.

<sup>2</sup> CMHLG/2/"Remembering Reuben S. Anywar," translation by author.

<sup>3</sup> CMHLG/A/"Some Information on Reuben Anywar."

<sup>4</sup> CMHLG/A/"Some Information on Reuben Anywar."

<sup>5</sup> CMHLG/A/"Some Information on Reuben Anywar."

manuscript, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, which Opiyo had seen in the school's library; revising his article on the biography of Chief Lagara of Patiko Chieftdom; working with Nekodemo Latigo, another founding member of the Acholi Association, on an article on war in precolonial Acholiland for *Acholi Magazine*; and working with a team of linguists, led by Professor A. N. Tucker of the School of Oriental and African Studies, to produce a standard Acholi orthography. Anywar had also embarked on a lecture career in Acholiland, speaking on history and culture to his people.<sup>6</sup>

Before his death, Anywar had arguably become the most prolific local writer and sought-after intellectual in colonial Acholiland. In fact, he and Lacito Okech became the first Acholi to produce knowledge by collecting and publishing ethnographical and historical texts.<sup>7</sup> Yet, despite Anywar's astonishing achievements, no scholar has paid any keen interest to his life and works.

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Anywar attracted the interest of the History of Uganda Project, an initiative of Makerere University's History Department.<sup>8</sup> The project collected many local histories from northern Uganda, including Anywar's magnum opus, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, and translated it into English.<sup>9</sup> The project, however, never published the translation. This was due largely to the project's interruption during the turbulent decade of President Idi Amin (1971–79). The failure to publish the English translation of *Acoli ki Ker Megi* in part accounts for the book's relative absence, though not complete invisibility, among scholars.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1990s, some students and a lecturer at Makerere University attempted to resurrect interest in Anywar, wondering why he and his book had mostly been forgotten by scholars. In 1992, Denis Opiyo and Peter Okello, history majors, argued that Anywar's death led people to forget his work, writing that it doomed the author's book and made it impossible for people to know Anywar and his works.<sup>11</sup> In 1999, Louis Otika, a lecturer at the Institute of Languages, argued that the publication of *Lok pa Acoli Macon* (Precolonial History of the Acholi) – by Vincenzo Pellegrini, a Verona Father – also sent Anywar's book into obscurity. He explained that when Pellegrini published his book, he printed over 34,000 copies, distributed them free, and fought hard to make his book become a primary school textbook.<sup>12</sup> These things, Otika claimed, immensely contributed to

<sup>6</sup> Reuben S. Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi* [Acholi and Their Chieftdoms] (Eagle Press, 1954), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Lacito Okech, *Tekwaro Ki Ker Lobo Acholi* (Eagle Press, 1953); see also Patrick W. Otim, "Local Intellectuals: Lacito Okech and the Production of Knowledge in Colonial Acholiland," *History in Africa* 45 (2018): 275–305.

<sup>8</sup> On the Uganda History Project, see Ronald R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 23–45.

<sup>9</sup> N. E. Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi* [Acholi and Their Chieftdoms], trans. Reuben S. Anywar (Eagle Press, 1954).

<sup>10</sup> Scholars working on a wide range of topics have continued to cite *Acoli ki Ker Megi*.

<sup>11</sup> Notes on Symposium on Acholi History, the Department of History, Makerere University, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Notes on Symposium on Acholi History, the Department of History, Makerere University, 1999; see also Vincenzo Pellegrini, *Lok pa Acoli Macon* [Precolonial History of the Acholi] (Catholic Mission Press, 1949). According to Sverker Finnström, by 1960, Pellegrini had printed "45,000" copies of his book and distributed them free; see *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (Duke University Press, 2008), 39.

obfuscating any other book that would come after. He contended that Anywar did not just write *Acoli ki Ker Megi* but also played an influential role in fostering literary culture and creating a platform for debate in colonial Acholiland through *Acholi Magazine*. Otika called on scholars to examine Anywar's life and work to understand his contributions to Acholi public life.<sup>13</sup>

Otika's call, however, was not taken seriously. Today, over two decades later, there is neither a scholarly biography nor a close scrutiny of Anywar's writings, especially of his most important work, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*. Ironically, Anywar continues to flourish among local historians, inspiring many to write histories of their chiefdoms. In 2008, local historians began a campaign to republish the works of Anywar and Lacito Okech. Using radio announcements, they raised about a thousand dollars – a lot of money, considering the donors were not wealthy but were “fellow elders and market women who know the value of our history and culture.”<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, they failed to reprint the books because they could not afford the cost, but they used the money they had collected to organize a workshop, which they called “Keeping Our Culture: Remembering Lacito Okech and Reuben Anywar.”<sup>15</sup>

This article, therefore, is the first scholarly study on Reuben Anywar. It explores Anywar's life and closely scrutinizes his magnum opus for the first time. It draws on many scattered bits of information from different places, including local histories, mission archives, Anywar's own works, and the author's conversations with informants between 2013 and 2023.<sup>16</sup> We argue that Anywar was arguably the most important intellectual in colonial Acholiland in terms of the impact he made. He contributed significantly to not only the writing of Acholi history and culture but also the establishment of the Acholi Association and *Acholi Magazine*, through which “the Acholi congealed not only as an administrative, but also as a cultural unit.”<sup>17</sup>

This article is divided into two parts. The first part explores Anywar's early life and career in Acholiland, Buganda, and Langoland. The second part begins with his work with the Acholi Association before turning attention to his most important work. Unlike other Acholi intellectuals before him, such as Lacito Okech, Nekodem Latigo, and Mattayo Ojok, who had roles in their chiefdoms in the late precolonial era, Anywar's rise is tied exclusively to the work of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and it is vital we begin by exploring the CMS's work in Acholiland.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Notes on Symposium on Acholi History, the Department of History, Makerere University, 1999.

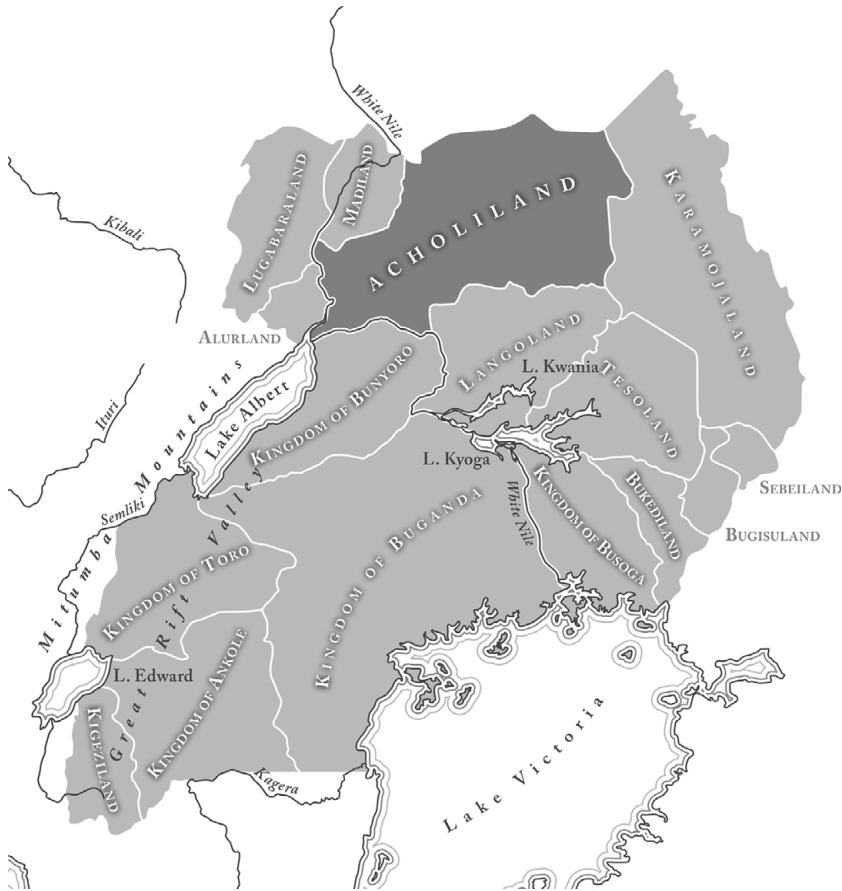
<sup>14</sup> Peter Okello, unpublished paper, Gulu, 2014, translation by author.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Okello, unpublished paper, Gulu, 2014, translation by author.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Alier interviewed Reuben Anywar's son, James Opoka, and daughter, Celia Racigala, in 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1984–97* (Ohio University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>18</sup> See Patrick W. Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, and the Making of Colonial Northern Uganda* (Ohio University Press, 2024); see also M. Louise Pirouet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda, 1891–1914* (Collings, 1978), 145–167; M. Louise Pirouet, “The Expansion of the Church of Uganda, from Buganda into Northern and Western Uganda Between 1891 and 1914, with Special Reference to the Work of African Teachers and Evangelists” (PhD diss., University of East Africa, 1968); and Tom Watson, “A History of Church Missionary Society High Schools in Uganda, 1900–1924: The Education of a Protestant Elite” (PhD diss., University of East Africa, 1968).



**Figure 1.** Map of Uganda, showing the location of Acholiland.

### Mission education and the rise of mission intellectuals

The CMS established its first church in Acholiland, northern Uganda, in 1904, after touring the region in 1903 and early 1904 (Figure 1). CMS missionaries A. B. Lloyd, A. L. Kitching, and, later, A. E. Pleydell also established the first school in Acholiland. The school was intended to produce competent and literate converts to carry on the missionaries' evangelization work. Before receiving baptism, missionaries expected their catechumens to show mastery of the tenets of Christianity and demonstrate the ability to read and write. To fill their new school, missionaries initially turned to chiefs, asking every one of them they could find to send two sons.<sup>19</sup> Lloyd and Kitching saw chiefs' sons as the ideal young men to take Christianity to "all their people."<sup>20</sup> This strategy, however, limited the kind of people who could access early education.

<sup>19</sup> Okech, *Tekwaro*, 25; see also Pirouet, *Black Evangelists*, 156.

<sup>20</sup> CMHLG/002: "A. B. Lloyd in Patiko," 1904–1908.

In November 1905, almost two years after opening the school, the CMS baptized two people, but they were not sons of chiefs. Rather, they were both sons of court officials. The biographies of these two men have been detailed elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note here that, initially, many chiefs had reservations about the CMS's work, and they refused to send their sons, sending court officials and court officials' sons instead. In 1906, the missionaries baptized twelve more converts in Acholiland. Of the twelve, two were sons of chiefs, eight were sons of court officials, and two were from outside Acholiland – they were Alur brought to facilitate communication between the CMS and Acholi, as the Alur and Acholi spoke a mutually intelligible language.

In 1907, according to CMS records, there were no baptisms because of increased tension between Acholi and missionaries, which stemmed from a barrage of reasons. For example, the CMS missionaries were increasing their use of audiovisual machines, which caused confusion in the area around the church, making locals wonder whether CMS missionaries were witches. Additionally, Pleydell had shot and killed a woman near the church, sending fear into the community. Finally, in 1906, lightning struck the church three times. In Acholiland, a lightning strike was momentous and understood as a punishment from spirits, called *jogi* (singular *jok*), which governed people's lives. Specifically, the Acholi believed that when lightning struck anyone or their property, *jogi* were punishing that person for the wrong they had done in the community and that the person should be evicted or killed. This caused concern in the community, making people distance themselves from the missionaries. These incidents explain why there were no baptisms in 1907. However, in January 1908, despite the tension in the community, the CMS baptized another five people – but this did not mean relations between the Acholi and CMS had stabilized. In February 1908, the CMS withdrew from Acholiland, bringing their work to an abrupt end, at least for a while.<sup>22</sup>

From February 1908 to June 1910, no European lived in Acholiland. In July 1910, however, the Verona Fathers arrived in Acholiland from West Nile and established their Catholic church in Gulu. In 1911, the British colonial state also established its office in Gulu, and formal colonial rule began in Acholiland. The beginning of colonial rule increased demand for literate Acholi to implement indirect rule, and, because the colonial state did not have a budget for education, colonial officials invited the CMS back to Acholiland in 1911.<sup>23</sup> The CMS, however, did not return immediately. They made only occasional visits to assess the readiness of Acholiland for another mission. The CMS did not resume its work in Acholiland until February 1913, when A. B. Fisher was sent to open a new church.

By August 1913, Fisher had completed building a new church and school in Acholiland that would significantly open educational opportunities for many Acholi. That same month, Gulu District Commissioner P. T. Hannington officially opened the new school. The building, as Fisher reported, was intended to “accommodate 400 pupils.” Like the colonial officials before him, Hannington

<sup>21</sup> Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> For exhaustive discussion of the problems the CMS faced, see Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals*, 115–124.

<sup>23</sup> CMHLG/002: “A. B. Lloyd in Patiko,” 1904–1908.

“urged the Chiefs to send their sons to the Gulu Boarding School so that in time they may be able to assist them [the colonial officials] and later succeed them in the Government and control of the district.”<sup>24</sup> This call, like the earlier call, influenced the kind of learners who joined the school at the early stage: children from royal backgrounds. Colonial officials did not consider commoners appropriate for implementing indirect rule. Although state officials and missionaries again targeted only chiefs and sons of chiefs, court officials and their sons also ended up attending the school. Thus, the earliest students in the newly established CMS school, just like before 1908, came almost exclusively from chiefly and courtier circles.

In 1914, the CMS school expanded considerably, with students coming from as far away as Chua District. This was largely the work of colonial officials – they brought children of chiefs in Chua to the school, hoping they would return with valuable skills to help them implement colonial rule there.<sup>25</sup> Because of the rapid expansion, the CMS installed P. H. Lees, an experienced missionary and teacher, as its first principal. The success of this school encouraged missionaries to open many schools in Acholiland. By 1918, there were as many as fifteen schools for Anglicans and twelve for Catholics in Acholiland.<sup>26</sup>

The growing demand for education encouraged Father Audisio, one of the Verona Fathers, to establish the first teacher training school in 1919.<sup>27</sup> This school began producing teachers for the mission school that same year. By 1923, access to mission education had widened considerably in Acholiland, and both the CMS and Verona Fathers were providing educational opportunities to all Acholi, irrespective of their backgrounds. However, the CMS and the Verona Fathers had somewhat different views regarding education. The CMS focused on students’ ability to read and write. Meanwhile, the Verona Fathers “attached great importance to technical education.”<sup>28</sup>

The CMS’s emphasis on producing literate graduates for themselves and the colonial state led them to overhaul Gulu High School, which had opened in 1921. They brought Mr. Davis, another experienced teacher and school administrator, from Buganda and made him the first headmaster. Additionally, “the curriculum” at this new school “was broadened to include English among the subjects taught.” Lastly, the CMS changed the “status of the school” from “a four-years Elementary Vernacular,” adding “a two-year intermediate.” This school became the primary training ground for the colonial state. “Many of the people turned out by this school,” as Andrew Adimola explained, became “nursing orderlies, teachers, interpreters and clerks.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Mario Cisternino, *Passion for Africa: Missionary and Imperial Papers on the Evangelisations of Uganda and Sudan, 1848–1923* (Fountain Publishers, 2004), 397. See also Pirouet, *Black Evangelists*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew B. Adimola, *The Development of Primary Education in Acholi* (East African Literature Bureau, 1962), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Adimola, *Development of Primary Education*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Adimola, *Development of Primary Education*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Adimola, *Development of Primary Education*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Adimola, *Development of Primary Education*, 11.

Up until 1923, both the CMS and Verona Fathers had provided educational opportunities exclusively to Acholi male children. This was largely because they did not think women were capable of working for them and the colonial state. However, in 1924, Mrs. T. L. Lawrance, an Australian CMS missionary, along with her husband, opened the first school for women in Acholiland. Mrs. Lawrance said she opened the school to “rescue girls from ignorance” and give them gender-specific skills. Classes focused on tailoring – or dressmaking, as they called it – cooking, laundry, music, and physical education. By 1927, missionaries said the school had exceeded their expectations, with girls flocking to the mission to receive education in numbers that far exceeded the school’s capacity.

By the early 1930s, the spread of Christianity and Western education had transformed northern Uganda, especially Acholiland. Many young people, irrespective of their backgrounds, had attained some form of Western education. They were able to read and write and demonstrate technical skills learned from the vocational schools. More importantly, those who could read and write English became even more marketable, especially to the colonial state. Men, however, continued to receive more educational opportunities than women, despite the opening of the first school for women. The educated Acholi men emerged as a distinct group, *joo mukwano*, or “people who are well read.” They had also embraced the European lifestyle. They flocked to church every Sunday, played soccer, organized parties with dress codes, formed debating clubs, began writing their own histories, and adopted the English language in most of their activities.

By the mid-1930s, the activities of some of these men, who had begun organizing themselves into clubs and associations, started to worry the colonial officials.<sup>30</sup> And in the 1940s, when they formed the Acholi Association, the state warned them against engaging in politics.<sup>31</sup> Reuben Anywar, who emerged as one of the most powerful intellectuals in the 1940s, was a product of the changes that had begun happening in the first decade of the twentieth century. His rise to prominence, and the role he played in the Acholi Association, are now what we turn to.

### Reuben Anywar: Background and education

Reuben Anywar was born in Gulu, the headquarters of the missionaries and colonial administration in Acholiland, on 7 February 1924. There is not much information on his father, Sitefano Opok, especially his early life; however, we do know that Opok was from Payira Chiefdom. He encountered the CMS in 1921. Thereafter, Opok left his chiefdom and settled in Mican, near the church. There, he became an active member of the congregation and was appointed deputy choir master.<sup>32</sup> He served for about two years, until this role became untenable because he was neither baptized nor married.

<sup>30</sup> Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals*, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals*, 180.

<sup>32</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar.”

In 1923, Opok married Locira Kipwola from Bwobo Chiefdom, who like Opok, had left her chiefdom and settled in Mican.<sup>33</sup> They registered their marriage with the Gulu district commissioner – but not with the CMS – in July 1923.<sup>34</sup> In September of that same year, when Opok and Kipwola approached the CMS for baptism and a wedding, their church – for undisclosed reasons – denied them.<sup>35</sup> We can speculate this denial was because Kipwola was pregnant before their wedding.

In February 1924, their marriage bore fruit with the birth of their only child. They named him Anywar, which meant “a fetus that disturbed the parents during pregnancy.” It was perhaps because of challenges they encountered during pregnancy that Anywar was the couple’s only child. In 1926, with the church’s approval, Opok and Kipwola were baptized. But the church still denied them a wedding. In 1927, at age three, Anywar was also baptized and acquired his two other names, Reuben Stephen, which were likely selected by his parents.<sup>36</sup> Back then, parents were tasked with selecting Christian names “either from the Bible or the prayer book.”<sup>37</sup>

That Anywar was baptized when he was only three is significant. It reveals a major reversal in CMS policy, which had once required that all baptism candidates demonstrate mastery of religious facts and prayers as well as an ability to read the Bible. There is no explanation for this change, but we can speculate it was a result of the competition for converts that emerged between the CMS and the Verona Fathers in the late 1910s. Anywar grew up during this time of intense competition between the Anglican and Catholic churches.

Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about Anywar’s life before age eight. When he began school at age nine, he was introduced to a traditional CMS education, where children familiarized themselves with Anglican prayers and hymns. It was not until age ten that Anywar joined lower primary at Gulu Primary School, a school also founded and run by the CMS. There, he continued with the CMS education, began to read and write, and was brought up in a strict religious spirit. In 1936, Anywar joined upper primary at the same school, and he excelled, quickly learning English from the missionaries and Luganda from the teachers the CMS brought from Buganda Kingdom. In 1938, at age fourteen, Anywar graduated at the top of his class.

By the time of his graduation, missionaries already had plans for Anywar. They immediately awarded him a bursary and sent him to the prestigious King’s College, Budo, in Buganda Kingdom. Founded in 1905 by the CMS, “King’s College, Budo, was a public school in the British sense – a place for the next generation’s leadership to acquire the academic, social, political and intellectual skills they would need” to support the church and the colonial state. The school had a British headmaster and teaching faculty “not simply from Britain,

<sup>33</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar”; Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar”; see also Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar.”

<sup>36</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> J. K. Russell, *Men Without God? A Study of the Impact of the Christian Message in the North of Uganda* (Highway Press, 1966), 31.

but from elsewhere in the protectorate.” They taught British-oriented curriculum to their students. The student body was composed of “both Baganda [students from Buganda kingdom] and those from outside the kingdom” who showed extraordinary abilities like Anywar. According to Carol Summer, these students “lived in houses, were guided by house-masters and ruled by prefects. They competed in sports, organized clubs and concerts, attended chapel, threw parties and sometimes went to class.” By the late 1910s, Budo became Uganda’s “principal training ground for the men who would rule as chiefs, interpreters and bureaucrat[s].”<sup>38</sup>

Joining King’s College was an extraordinary achievement for Anywar and his family. It was the first time Anywar had left Acholiland. The Budo education paved his way to join Makerere College in 1940, at age sixteen. The college had been founded as a vocational school in 1922. In 1937, Makerere began offering post-high school certificates, and Anywar joined it to study a certificate in “ethnology.”<sup>39</sup>

One of Anywar’s teachers, identified only as Mr. Soundy, described Anywar in 1941 as “a very thoughtful, curious,” and well-liked “young man by his teachers and students.” Outside the classroom, Anywar played active roles in clubs and activities. In 1941, he was elected secretary of the writers’ club, where he perhaps polished his writing skills. At the end of that same year, Anywar was elected vice chairman of the school’s debating society. There, he excelled. In fact, Anywar’s success as a debater was reported by the student newspaper, *The Makerere College Magazine*, on 6 March 1942, which noted that R. S. Anywar was the best debater for April. Additionally, Anywar gave public lectures to Makerere teachers and students on “the history of the Luo peoples.” These lectures inspired Mr. Soundy to visit Gulu.<sup>40</sup>

On 4 November 1942, Anywar graduated with a certificate in ethnology. He left Makerere for another learning institution: Boroboro Teachers Training School. Established in 1926 by the CMS, Boroboro was the first teacher training institution in northern Uganda. There, Anywar spent many months honing his teaching skills. In June 1943, after completing his training, Anywar returned to Gulu. Straightaway, the CMS employed him at Gulu High School, by then one of the most prestigious schools in northern Uganda.<sup>41</sup> The transition was seamless. Anywar joined an intellectual community that consisted of Mrs. Callon Moore, who had been Anywar’s teacher in elementary school but had been promoted to Gulu High School; Erisa Lakor, who was the first graduate of Makerere Vocational School in 1927; and Alipayo Latigo, the first Acholi the CMS had ordained a reverend.<sup>42</sup>

In 1943, at age nineteen, Anywar married Rosa Oyela, the daughter of Petero To, a sub-county chief in Payira Chiefdom.<sup>43</sup> In 1943, about a year into their

<sup>38</sup> Carol Summers, “‘Subterranean Evil’ and ‘Tumultuous Riot’ in Buganda: Authority and Alienation at King’s College, Budo, 1942,” *Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 95.

<sup>39</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar.”

<sup>41</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> CMHLG/A/“Some Information on Reuben Anywar.”

<sup>43</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 3.

marriage, Anywar welcomed his first child. Thereafter, he experienced many ups and downs. In 1944, his child died of an unknown disease. In 1945, Anywar welcomed another son, whom he named James Opoka.<sup>44</sup> James narrowly survived his infant years before getting polio, which left him paralyzed.<sup>45</sup> That same year, 1945, Anywar buried Opok, his father, who had died of an unknown illness.<sup>46</sup> These deaths, according to Moore, who seemed to downplay their impact, did not affect Anywar's work at the school, to which he remained dedicated. It was during these years, Moore continued, that Anywar took on even more roles in the school and outside.<sup>47</sup>

Moore reported that, in 1944, besides teaching, Anywar was revising his book manuscript. He also took on the catechism duties at the school, covering for the school chaplain. In 1945, Anywar prepared eighty Gulu High School students for baptism. This work, according to Moore, made Anywar "very popular with parents." "Every parent," she wrote, "wanted to send their son to the school to be under the guidance of Master R. S. Anywar."<sup>48</sup>

Outside the school, Anywar worked closely with three other men to found the Acholi Association, after which he started *Acholi Magazine*, the association's mouthpiece. He became the first editor of the magazine, which aimed to educate the Acholi people. This publication drew both literate and illiterate Acholi into serious debates. Literates read their published articles and letters loudly for the illiterate, sparking discussions on history and current issues in Acholiland.

In July 1947, Anywar and his wife welcomed another child. They named her Celia Racigala.<sup>49</sup> From that time until his death on 13 November 1947, Anywar embarked on revising his manuscript, editing articles and letters for the magazine, and giving public lectures on Acholi history. His work, especially with the Acholi Association, is crucial for understanding the growth of local print culture, and it is important that we examine his role with the association in detail.

### **Acholi Association and Acholi Magazine**

The Acholi Association was the brainchild of three elderly Acholi men: Lacito Okech, Nekodemo Latigo, and Matayo Ojok. The biographies of these three men have been chronicled in detail elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> In January 1944, these men came up with the idea to form this association. What is significant about these men is that they were all born in the decades preceding colonialism in Acholiland. When the CMS established its first school in Acholiland, they joined the CMS at different times, became literate, turned themselves into local evangelists, and later joined the colonial state as translators, clerks, and chiefs. But they were not highly educated. They received no more than fragments of mission education.

<sup>44</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> CMHLG/A/"Some Information on Reuben Anywar."

<sup>46</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>48</sup> CMHLG/4/5/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>49</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the Acholi Association, see Otim, *Acholi Intellectuals*, 180–181.

By the late 1920s, these men began using their bits of mission education to access new ideas. They started reading the works of other local historians, such as Apollo Kagwa, the most influential Ugandan intellectual in the early twentieth century, and they began composing their own histories. More importantly, they began reading local newspapers, especially Luganda newspapers, and they learned other ethnic groups had already formed associations, which those groups were using to advance their interests to the colonial state and missionaries.<sup>51</sup>

The three men copied what they were reading about elsewhere and formed an association of their own. They named it Acholi Association and called all men, irrespective of their ages, to join it. They agreed on four objectives for the association: to bring Acholi together; to solve “all the problems” of the members; to keep members informed of developments in Acholiland; and to popularize indigenous education through cultural festivals, which, according to the three men, were disappearing.<sup>52</sup> Lacito Okech, who was by then the native financial assistance, the highest position a native could attain at the time in the colonial state, was elected the Acholi Association’s first president.<sup>53</sup> Following his election, Okech began to expand the association’s work. In March 1944, J. V. Wild, a colonial official, reported that Okech had contacted his office, requesting to use the district courier service to transport Luganda newspapers from Kampala to Gulu.<sup>54</sup>

The founding members’ charisma attracted more members, as did the association’s objectives. Perhaps the most important factors driving people to the Acholi Association were postwar issues such as booming prostitution, increasing bride prices, and high food prices, which the association positioned itself to address. In so doing, it appealed to many people, both literate and illiterate. In April 1944, the three founders, who had already seen remarkable growth in the association, contacted the Anglican Church and asked Bishop Lucian Charles Usher-Wilson for financial assistance to begin their own newspaper, copying what they had seen in Buganda.<sup>55</sup>

Publicly, Usher-Wilson supported the idea because he had seen his converts’ yearning for news and information. For example, on 4 April 1944, Usher-Wilson wrote that he had, on numerous occasions, seen hundreds of people seated around the cathedral listening to Lacito Okech and Matayo Ojok after the Sunday service as they read a Luganda newspaper they had translated into Acholi.<sup>56</sup> Privately, the Bishop had some concerns with the founding members.<sup>57</sup> Quite simply, he considered the three men incompetent.

<sup>51</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>52</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*. See also Behrend, Alice Lakwena, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Twaddle, “Towards an Early History of the East African Interior,” *History in Africa* 2 (1975): 181.

<sup>54</sup> Gulu District Archives (GDA), Box 524: J. V. Wild.

<sup>55</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*; Lacito Okech seems to have been influenced by organizations of other ethnic groups in Uganda and Kenya, especially the Luo; on these ethnic organizations see, for example, Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935–1972* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Matthew Paul Carotenuto, “Cultivating an African Community: The Luo Union in 20th Century East Africa” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>57</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

To allay the bishop's doubt, and possibly the doubts of other Europeans, the three founders identified and recruited Reuben Anywar, who was not only highly educated by the standards of the time, but also was well known and respected among the missionaries and colonial officials, as he was one of the few products of Makerere College in Acholiland.<sup>58</sup> In July 1944, the three founders had convinced Anywar to serve as the secretary-general and editor and had appointed him as such. However, they abandoned the idea of starting a newspaper and instead decided to begin a biannual magazine, which they named *Acholi Magazine*. This magazine was "modelled on the *Uganda Journal*, but written in the Acholi language, and confined to matters of direct interest to the Acholi people and their neighbours."<sup>59</sup> The shift from a newspaper to a magazine seems to have been Anywar's idea, as he had been introduced to the *Uganda Journal* while at Makerere.

Following the recruitment of Anywar, the association received funding from the CMS.<sup>60</sup> Usher-Wilson gave the association financial resources, stationery, and a typewriter.<sup>61</sup> In August 1944, Okech announced that the magazine would give members news and information on development, education, culture, and history. He also encouraged members to contribute articles.<sup>62</sup> The colonial state did not give the association any material assistance but appeared to support the magazine.<sup>63</sup> J. W. Steil, the acting district officer, also welcomed the idea of the magazine because he believed it would "inform" and bring "unity among the people." However, he warned Anywar that he did not want the publication to voice anti-colonial sentiments.<sup>64</sup>

In 1945, the first issue of *Acholi Magazine* came out. In 1946, another issue appeared. That same year, Anywar completed a play – *Lokke pa Gang me Kafiri Nodoko* [Nidoko] *Gang me Dini* (Conversion of Nonconverts to Converts) – which he had begun writing in 1945. Anywar explained that he wrote this play to educate his people about the value of Christianity.<sup>65</sup> In May 1946, he selected the cast among the students of Gulu High School and trained them. The play debuted on 5 October 1946, in Gulu High School and was later performed in St. Philip's Cathedral, before Anywar took it to the villages around the school.

From October 1946, when the play debuted, to May 1947, Anywar and his students performed sixteen shows. In June 1946, Petero Otema, in an unpublished letter perhaps intended for *Acholi Magazine*, wrote that the play taught them many benefits of becoming a Christian.<sup>66</sup> On 17 August 1947, Marko Ocen called the play "good for entertaining as well as the benefits of becoming a Christian."<sup>67</sup> Moore summarized it best: "The play was very successful in and around our school. ... At

<sup>58</sup> See Okech, *Tekwaro*, for other graduates of Makerere College.

<sup>59</sup> John Vernon Wild and Marjorie Lovatt Smith, "Uganda of Long Ago," *British Empire*, 8 March 2010, <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/ugandalongago.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>61</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>62</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>63</sup> CMHLG/4/4/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>64</sup> GDA Box 532: Letter from J. W. Steil to Acholi Association, 22 September 1944.

<sup>65</sup> Reuben S. Anywar, *Lokke pa Gang me Kafiri Nodoko* [Nidoko] (Eagle Press, 1946).

<sup>66</sup> CMHLG/4/5/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

<sup>67</sup> CMHLG/4/5/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

various time Natives entered the stage to sing and dance with our students. They were very happy with the play and we think we should continue to show it to many people as possible.” She added that Anywar had already established himself as a prominent member of the local arts community and had now left an indelible mark on the students and members of the community, who flocked to the school, requesting that he take the play to their villages.<sup>68</sup>

Due to demands for the play, eight shows were scheduled for December 1947 and January 1948. However, on 13 November 1947, Anywar died suddenly, succumbing to cerebral malaria at the age of twenty-three.<sup>69</sup> It is unclear if the shows continued as scheduled. What is clear is that by the time of his death, Anywar had already established his reputation as a tireless teacher and editor and a prolific writer and translator. He was by far the most prominent public intellectual of his time in Acholiland. The obituaries give us even more insights into Anywar, revealing his standing in the region. For example, John Opiyo, whose story we began this article with, mentioned the large number of mourners at Anywar’s funeral at St. Philip’s Cathedral, calling his death the biggest loss for Acholi.<sup>70</sup> Moore, a close acquaintance of Anywar at Gulu High School, described his death as a loss not only to the Acholi Association but also to Gulu High School and the CMS.<sup>71</sup> “We have lost a great friend and educator,” she concluded.<sup>72</sup> Finally, Alipayo Latigo, Anywar’s friend and an ordained Anglican minister, called his death “a blow to everyone in the education department. ... I wish God had spared his life.”<sup>73</sup>

By the time of his death, Anywar had seen some of the fruits of his intellectual labor. He had seen his students, such as John Opiyo, graduate and take on jobs. He had seen two issues of *Acholi Magazine* published. He had seen his play draw people to the church and school. What Anywar did not see, however, was the publishing of his book, perhaps his most important work, to which he had dedicated most of his time. He left behind a manuscript, which was published posthumously in 1954 by Eagle Press (Figure 3). *Acholi ki Ker Megi* became the second book published by an Acholi, after Lacito Okech’s *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi*, published in 1953.

### Reuben Anywar and *Acholi ki Ker Megi*

*Acholi ki Ker Megi* is without a doubt Anywar’s magnum opus. It is 224 pages, divided into nine chapters. The cover page contains no picture or illustration, simply the book title, printed in bold, and the author’s name, spanning the page (Figure 2). The book is written in clear and engaging Acholi. Inside the book, there are neither illustrations nor maps. More striking, the book has no conclusion, and Anywar did not include a list of references. It is unclear whether Anywar intended to exclude the conclusion and references or death took him before he could complete them.

<sup>68</sup> CMHLG/4/5/1944/*Acholi Magazine*.

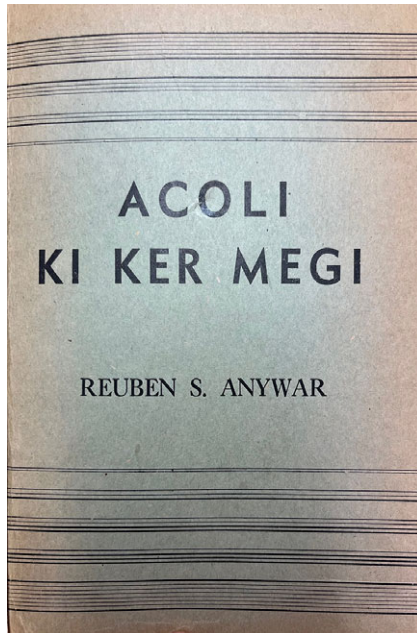
<sup>69</sup> See the foreword of Anywar’s book, *Acholi ki Ker Megi*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine*/“Death of Anywar”/1947, translation by author.

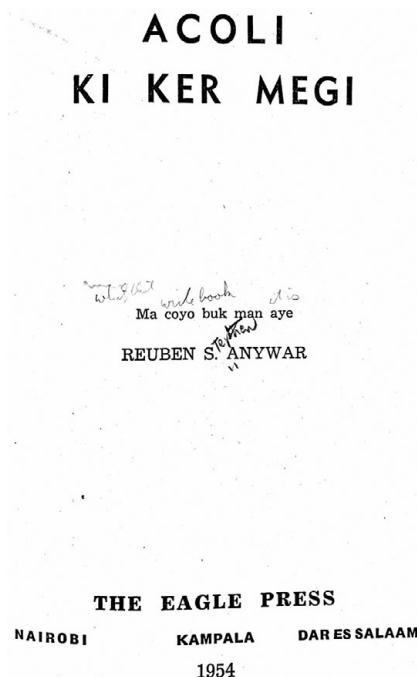
<sup>71</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine*/“Death of Anywar”/1947.

<sup>72</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine*/Mrs. Callon Moore.

<sup>73</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine*/“Death of Anywar”/1947.



**Figure 2.** Cover page.



**Figure 3.** Title page.

Moore, of the CMS, and Reverend Alipayo Latigo, who submitted the manuscript to Eagle Press, wrote the book's forewords. As mentioned before, Moore was Anywar's teacher at Gulu Primary School and later his colleague at Gulu High School, where they had become "close friends." Moore begins her foreword with a chronology of Anywar's life and times, showing him as a talented young teacher with various interests. She portrays Anywar as a big believer in the CMS's work and education. She also points out Anywar's work with the church, especially in translating text, and with the Acholi Association. Finally, she praises the book and makes clear that Anywar was its true author. As mentioned, Anywar did not include a list of references; however, Moore pointed out numerous sources she believed Anywar drew on to write his book. She concludes her foreword with the following: "Callon Moore, CMS Gulu, Uganda, 1949." This is important: it confirms it was written after Anywar's death.

Latigo – the first Acholi to be a CMS-ordained reverend, who was also Anywar's friend and colleague – also wrote a brief foreword, writing that he was full of joy that Anywar had completed this important work on Acholi history and culture. He emphasized the importance of the book, making it clear that it would enable readers to learn about migration and how Acholiland was changing under the Uganda Protectorate. He concluded that the book would preserve Acholi history and culture. He emphasized that the book should be of importance for Acholi and other ethnic groups because they will learn that they and Acholi are "brothers," or have common ancestry. He was, in particular, talking about the Lango. Latigo ended his foreword by writing his name, "A. O. Latigo," and the date, "27/9/47." This date, too, is important. It shows that Latigo completed his foreword before Anywar's death on 13 November 1947. This date suggests that Anywar had approached Latigo to write the foreword, perhaps to increase his book's profile among the Acholi. But after his death, perhaps given her position in Gulu High School, Latigo approached Moore, or she took it upon herself to introduce the book.

Following the forewords, there is a brief preface by Anywar himself, which suggests Anywar had fully completed his book by the time he died (Figure 4). "I wrote this book," he explained, "with the aim of recording Acholi history which might otherwise be forgotten if not put down in writing." "There are very few books on Acholi history, and, above all, the elders are dying at a fast rate and presumably, after about forty years or so," wrote Anywar, "they will not be of help in the writing of Acholi history." "In writing this book," he explained, "I used the material some writers had put in their books about Acholi, and I also used government records. I used this material to check what the elders told me about the early history of Acholi. This also made the dating of important events easier."<sup>74</sup> Anywar then mentioned that his targets were both "the young and the old" and implored them to "read this book so that they have a clear idea about the Acholi history rather than listening to stories about Acholi." Anywar also saw this book as something that "can be useful to teachers when they are teaching the children." However, he also believed

<sup>74</sup> Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, 6.

### III. LOK MUKWODO

Buk man acoyo i yo me tic mera me yenyo tekwaro me kaka Acoli, weki acogi i buk, pe gurweny. Tekwaro me Acoli nia yam con peya gicoyo, pi meno nen ni lok mapol koni dog mito rwenyo woko. Ludogo bene ma gijeyo lok maconcon koni dog gueto tum woko, pi meno ka mwaka okato gwok nyo 50 mukene, noyo lok maconcon bibedo tek. Buk man bikano lok meno maconcon weki pe gurweny; litino ki ludito gukwan obed botgi ryeko kikome ma pe giboko aboka.

I coyo buk man, atemo yenyo ada me lok ki i buk mapol ma yam jo mogo gucoyo manoknok i kom Acoli; atemo bene noyo lok mogo manoknok i "rekord" pa Gavumente. Man omiyo aporo maber lok ma ludogo gitito ki doggi kace rwatte ki ma nene gicoyo. Man omiyo anogo bene mwaka kikome ma lok mapol otimme iye. Pe adonyo i yo mo i lok ma kaka gimedo me yweka, ento acup i lok kikome ma pe goba.

Leb ma acoyo kwede en aye leb ma dwongge leb Payira. I coc kikome atemo totwal lubo yo me coc manyen me leb Nilotik.

Buk man twero konyo lupwony me School me nyuto tekwaro me kaka bot litino. Doki litino me Class V ki VI gitwero kwano pigi kengi macalo buk me Tekwaro, (nyo History).

Myero wiya pe owil ka pwoyo Ladit, Rev. A. O. Latigo pi kwano coc mera ki yubo lok mogo ma onoyo pe atir, ki pi coyo "Lanyut." Apwoyo bene lupwony A. B. Ocitti ki I. L. Latigo pi konya ki tie i wot mera

ma wiati. Doki apwoyo bene ludito me kaka acelacel pi miyo kare meg i me bedo kweda pi nino mapol kun akwanyo lok doggi me atama.

Apwoyo bene rwodi ki jagi Acoli ducu pi konya i yo mapol weki aco tekwaro man maber. Me agikine, apwoyo Maa ki dako mera pi konya ki wer mapol ma anyutogi i buk man.

R. S. ANYWAR

C.M.S. HIGH SCHOOL  
GULU.  
1947.

Figure 4. Preface.

that students, especially those in the fifth and sixth grades "can read it by themselves."

Anywar concluded his preface by acknowledging Latigo, whom he thanked for writing the foreword and reading through and correcting the manuscript. He also acknowledged two other people, A. B. Ociti and I. L. Latigo, for assisting him during his first research trip. While we know that Latigo was the first CMS-ordained Acholi reverend and Anywar's friend and colleague at Gulu High School, we do not know anything about Ociti and Latigo apart from Anywar's mention of them as teachers. It seems likely they were primary school teachers in eastern Acholiland who worked as Anywar's guide and research assistants in the region. Additionally, Anywar paid tribute to the elders, hereditary chiefs, and government chiefs. Lastly, he acknowledged his mother and wife for encouraging and helping him in the process of writing his book.<sup>75</sup> He signed the preface with his name and the year: "R. S. Anywar, CMS High School, Gulu, 1947." Curiously, Anywar omitted Moore's name in his preface, which suggests she might not have contributed significantly to the book, despite what her foreword would imply.

The foreword and preliminary pages of *Acoli ki Ker Megi* – by Moore, Latigo, and Anywar – reveal a lot about Anywar and his magnum opus. First, they tell us when Anywar conceived of writing this book. Though Anywar himself never made clear when he developed his interests and started writing *Acoli ki Ker Megi*,

<sup>75</sup> Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, 2.

Moore explained that when Anywar had joined Makerere College, he had become deeply interested in writing a book about Acholi history. She contended that the author's decision to study a certificate in ethnology was what inspired Anywar and even made him begin using his holidays judiciously to "collect information on the early chiefdom of his village." The information he collected over time, she concluded, was what Anywar "used for writing his book."<sup>76</sup> Moore's foreword, therefore, makes clear that Anywar began writing the book in 1940, when he joined Makerere College.

Secondly, the preliminary pages tell us about Anywar's network, which made it possible for him to write the book. Specifically, the reader is introduced to people who mentored Anywar, inspired him, and helped him with research and in other ways, including proofreading his manuscript. Moreover, the reader is introduced to the institutions that helped him. Anywar openly recognized the roles of both the Anglican Church and Gulu High School. For example, in 1946, when Chief Awich of Payira Chiefdom died, the CMS and the school gave Anywar time off to go to Payira and "witness the occasion and also record the proceeding of the ceremony," which appeared in great detail in *Acoli ki Ker Megi*.

Thirdly, Anywar's preface tells us a lot about his skills as a researcher and historian – as well as his limitations. He reveals his sources, telling the reader that he relied on government records, which helped him reconcile things like dates during the interviews he carried out. Additionally, Anywar used oral sources extensively. He interviewed many people, acknowledging elders, hereditary chiefs, and government chiefs, but he never mentions them by name and does not explain why. Anywar, however, tells the reader that, despite interviewing these people, he did not write everything they told him. According to him, some chiefdoms wanted to exaggerate their histories, but he stood for the "truth." The challenges he encountered with many of these leaders could be part of the reason he never recognized many of them by name. Additionally, Anywar drew on sayings and songs, crediting his mother and wife for introducing him to the songs.

Finally, Anywar himself was an important source, especially on events in the 1940s, such as the burial of Chief Awich and installation of Awich's successor, his son Yona Odida, as the chief of Payira.

Perhaps the most important thing Moore does in her foreword is introduce the reader to numerous sources she believed Anywar used but failed to compile, perhaps due to his untimely death. For example, she recounted that when Anywar died, she requested all his books in the school and his home be collected and brought to her. Moore found all the major books by early Europeans in Acholiland were in Anywar's personal library: Sir Samuel White Baker's two books, *The Albert Nyanza: Great Basin of the Nile and the Exploration of the Nile Sources* (1866) and *Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (1874); Lloyd's *Uganda to Khartoum: Life and Adventure on the Upper Nile* (1906); Kitching's *On the Backwaters of the Nile: Studies of Some Child Races of Central*

<sup>76</sup> Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, 2.

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Figure 5. Table of Contents.

Africa (1912); and Margery Perham and Jack Simmons's *African Discovery* (1942). She concluded that Anywar had also read the works of colonial officials, such as R. M. Bere and Wild, and the Verona Fathers, especially Father Crazzolaro.<sup>77</sup> This list suggests that Anywar read almost anything he could get his hands on. It is likely that he used these sources, as Anywar himself explained he had relied on many works and government records to compare information from elders and to date major historical events.<sup>78</sup>

After his preface, Anywar launches into the introduction, which is also the first chapter (Figure 5). The introduction focuses on Acholi origins. He argues that the Acholi were part of the Luo before they separated, around 1600. He speculates that the separation, and eventually the migration, was a result of quarrels among the many groups; once groups began migrating, some settled in Uganda, but others continued to Kenya and Tanzania. The introduction is largely

<sup>77</sup> On R. M. Bere, Moore may have been referring to Rennie M. Bere, "Awich: A Biographical Note and a Chapter of Acholi History," *Uganda Journal* 10, no. 2 (September 1946): 76–78. On J. V. Wild, Moore may have been referring to drafts of these publications, which were published after Anywar's death: John V. Wild, *Early Travelers in Acholi* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1954) and *The Uganda Mutiny* (London: Macmillan, 1954). On J. P. Crazzolaro, Moore may have been referring to drafts of *The Lwoo*, a three-volume publication that was published after Anywar's death, in 1950, 1951, 1954.

<sup>78</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 10.

Anywar's synthesis of the Acholi oral tradition, drawing heavily on the myth of Labongo and Gipir.

Chapters 2 through 9 focus on different chiefdoms. Specifically, chapters are as follows: Chapter 2, *Tekwaro Payira* (History of the Payira Chiefdom); Chapter 3, *Tekwaro Padibe* (History of the Padibe Chiefdom); Chapter 4, *Tekwaro Bwobo* (History of the Bwobo Chiefdom); Chapter 5, *Tekwaro Labongo* (History of the Labongo Chiefdom); Chapter 6, *Tekwaro Atyak* (History of the Atyak Chiefdom); Chapter 7, *Tekwaro Paimol* (History of the Paimol Chiefdom); Chapter 8, *Tekwaro Pacabol* (History of the Pacabol Chiefdom); and Chapter 9, *Tekwaro Omiya Pacwa* (History of the Omiya Pacwa Chiefdom). There is no bibliography.

It is unclear why Anywar chose these eight chiefdoms, five of which were in eastern Acholiland: Padibe, Labongo, Paimol, Pacabol, and Omiya Pacwa. For each chiefdom, Anywar used a simple framework to present his information: how the chiefdom's people arrived in Acholiland; a list of the chiefs; major wars the chiefdom fought; marriage customs; hunting and birthing traditions; and rituals performed in the chiefdom, such as planting and hunting rituals.

Like Lacito Okech's *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi*, Anywar's *Acoli ki Ker Megi* was a huge success in Acholiland. In 1954, Petero Loum, a Gulu High School student, wrote in an unpublished review for *Acholi Magazine* that "*Acoli ki Ker Megi* is the most important book on Acholi history, revealing the origin of the eight most important chiefdoms."<sup>79</sup> Not all Acholi, or even historians, would agree with Loum that the chiefdoms Anywar chronicled were the most important. Terence Obal, in a more measured tone, called the book an important addition to Okech's work but criticized Anywar for dedicating too much of the book to his own chiefdom, Payira. He urged all Acholi to buy the two books and read them together for a better understanding of Acholi history and chiefdoms.<sup>80</sup> Lastly, in January 1954, Pellegrini – the Catholic priest who had authored *Lok pa Acoli Macon* in 1949, which became a required text in Anglican and Catholic primary schools in 1951 – said that Anywar's book was much better than Okech's because it was well researched and written; however, he conceded that Okech's *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi* was the most popular vernacular history in Acholiland.<sup>81</sup>

### Critique of *Acoli ki Ker Megi*

That *Acoli ki Ker Megi* is an important piece of work is not an overstatement. It is a history of eight Acholi chiefdoms. In it, Anywar comes off as a skilled writer and historian. However, this is not to say there are no problems with the book. There are, in fact, some problems.

First, it is unclear how Anywar chose the eight chiefdoms he chronicled. The choices seem to have been personal. For example, Anywar starts the book by chronicling Payira Chiefdom, which is where he was from. More importantly, Anywar devotes more attention and details to Payira than to any other chiefdom.

<sup>79</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine/Powerful Acholi Leaders/1955*, translation by author.

<sup>80</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine/Powerful Acholi Leaders/1955*, translation by author.

<sup>81</sup> CMHLG/*Acholi Magazine/Powerful Acholi Leaders/1955*, translation by author.

In fact, his treatment of Pacabol Chieftdom and Omiya Pacwa Chieftdom is meager. In contrast, in the opening paragraphs on Payira, Anywar makes clear Payira was the largest, most powerful, and most sophisticated polity in Acholiland. Because of its efficient rule, and because of its assistance to many chieftdoms during warfare, Anywar goes on to explain, many people joined Payira, making it the most important chieftdom. He then goes on to praise Payira, especially two chiefs: Camo and Awich. On Awich, he goes to great lengths to make the case that he was the best leader and widely respected by not just those in Payira but by everyone in Acholiland. Here, one could see that Anywar's background influenced his writing. He writes favorably about Payira, promoting its exceptionalism and portraying it as the most powerful and advanced chieftdom in Acholiland.

Following Payira, Anywar chronicles Padibe, which was Payira's greatest rival in the late precolonial era. He claims that because many informants from Padibe had died, it was difficult to collect their traditions. His focus on Padibe, which was arguably the most stable and powerful chieftdom from the 1860s to the early colonial period because of the long leadership of Chief Ogwok, is a bit downplayed. Specifically, Anywar's writing on the war between Payira and Padibe is a bit dismissive – he dedicates only two paragraphs to the event.<sup>82</sup>

After Padibe, Anywar turns to Bwobo. It is curious that Anywar begins with the powerful Payira and Padibe and moves to Bwobo, a small, relatively unknown chieftdom, ignoring other larger and more influential chieftdoms – for example, Patiko, where the CMS built its church and where Anywar was living. There is no intellectual justification for choosing Bwobo. The only thing we know is that his mother, Locira Kipwola, came from Bwobo.<sup>83</sup> In his book's preface, Anywar recognizes his mother and says she was helpful in providing him with songs that he included in the book. Here, Anywar's choice was likely influenced by his mother.

Another possible problem with the book is that Anywar, like most local historians of the time, believed very strongly in the "idea of progress" or, more broadly, the ideals of the British "civilizing" mission. He even encourages the spread of Christianity and Western institutions in Acholiland. He argues that "European administration is the root-cause of African progress." He hoped his Acholi people would embrace colonial rule and "develop peacefully and quickly." This observation is significant. It seems Anywar's life in Buganda Kingdom made him look differently at colonial rule, believing that embracing it would bring a fundamental change in Acholiland. "Our progress," he added, "will only be effective if we decide to co-operate in working together with our hands. We must avoid disputes so as to bring further understanding among ourselves."

There is no doubt that Anywar was happy the British had come to Acholiland. He even rejected the idea that the British had used violence to conquer Acholiland, writing that "they did not use force in capturing this country." On the violence that the British used to institutionalize colonial rule in Acholiland, especially against three polities that rose up against the colonial state, Anywar wrote that the "troubles or resistance staged by" chieftdoms such as "Paimol,

<sup>82</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*.

<sup>83</sup> Anywar, *Acoli Ki Ker Megi*, 1.

Teretenye, and Lamogi came about because they were taken by surprise; they did not know what the new government wanted to do.” He concluded that, because of colonial rule, “Africans [have] gained a lot of knowledge from these Europeans.”<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, Anywar sees the coming of the missionaries, especially beginning in 1904, as the best thing to have happened to Acholiland. He was an important proponent of the civilizing mission. He implores missionaries to multiply schools in Acholiland and urges every Acholi to get an education. The change Anywar envisions includes more people getting education, more people working for the colonial state, and more people working for the mission. He, therefore, implores his people to embrace change because it would bring development. Yet, Anywar does not recommend full-scale adoption of Europeans values. “Perhaps some Acoli believe that all those things that the Europeans brought here are good,” he writes. “This is untrue because some of them are so bad that if you mishandle them they will cause shame at least and death at most. So I suggest that before any new thing is accepted it must be thoroughly examined.”

Yet Anywar sees his culture and customs as important. He appeals to his people: “We should not forget our customs altogether simply because we are learning those of the Europeans.” He concludes by using himself as an example: “My teaching profession has not turned me away from our traditions. I hope what I have written will make some people write about some other things.”<sup>85</sup> Here, Anywar comes off in a more measured tone, but his Christian beliefs and the idea of progress clearly impacted his writing.

Additionally, Anywar chooses not to write directly about Islam. He is critical of the Arabs, who brought this religion to Acholiland before colonization. He blames the chaos and violence that gripped Acholiland beginning in the 1850s, but especially between the 1870s and 1880s, purely on Arab soldiers in Acholiland. As a result, he largely portrays Acholi chiefdoms as being in peace and harmony with one another. Anywar’s views on the Arabs were perhaps a result of his awareness of the violence Arabs committed on Payira Chiefdom, especially the killing of Chief Camo, who arguably was one of the most prominent chiefs in precolonial Acholiland. The Arabs’ treatment of Chief Camo – beheading him – perhaps helped sharpen Anywar’s criticism of them. He writes that the Arabs did not make any significant positive contributions to Acholiland when compared with the Europeans.

Finally, as with many other local histories, Anywar avoids dating events before 1860. His dating starts largely in the 1870s. This is when travelogues of Europeans in the region become available. There is a clear indication that, although Anywar might not have recognized the works of early Europeans (because his book had no bibliography), he relied on their accounts, especially on Baker’s *The Albert Nyanza: Great Basin of the Nile and the Exploration of the Nile Sources* (1866) and Ismailia: *A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, to date some of the major events in the decades preceding colonial rule.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, 9–10.

<sup>85</sup> Odyomo, *Acoli ki Ker Megi*, 9–10.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel White Baker, *The Albert Nyanza: Great Basin of the Nile and the Exploration of the Nile Sources* (Macmillan, 1866) and Samuel White Baker, *Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (Macmillan, 1874).

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to rescue Anywar from obscurity and examine his role in the production of knowledge in northern Uganda. Despite his untimely death at the age of twenty-three in 1947, Anywar had already accomplished a lot, by the standards of the time; his list of works is much longer than scholars realize. Throughout his life, Anywar remained an active writer and educator. Moreover, he was willing to work with others to reach out and educate many people. His volunteer work with the Acholi Association, founding the *Acholi Magazine* and serving as its editor until his death, is just one example of how he wanted to use the power of print to reach many Acholi. Additionally, his play was able to reach many people. In all these activities, and many others, Anywar emerges as a tireless teacher, editor, intellectual, translator, and, most of all, a skilled mediator, attentive to the needs of the Acholi and the Europeans – both missionaries and colonial officials. And because of these various roles, Anywar enjoyed great esteem and garnered much respect from almost everyone, despite his youth.

Today, while Anywar has been largely forgotten by scholars of northern Uganda, his magnum opus, *Acoli to Ker Megi* (1954), and Lacito Okech's *Tekwaro ki Ker Lobo Acholi* (1953) continue to be two of the most influential works of history in Acholiland, inspiring many generations of local historians to document their chiefdoms' histories. The present local intellectuals continue to draw on Anywar's and Okech's ideas to explain contemporary problems and suggest solutions. On many of today's radio shows on history and culture in Acholiland, intellectuals rely on Anywar's and Okech's books to advance old ideas on marriage, health and healing, morality, justice, history, and culture.<sup>87</sup> That is how important Anywar's book is and how he lives on in Acholiland. Ironically, *Lok pa Acoli Macon* – a detailed history of the Acholi authored by an Italian priest, and a required text in Anglican and Catholic primary schools, which was distributed free to every Acholi – has completely disappeared. People do not talk of it as an important work of history.

In sum, we hope this article will invite scholars of northern Uganda, especially Acholiland, to engage with Reuben Anywar and his works on precolonial and colonial Acholiland.

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, how Lacito Okech's book is treated in Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 39–40.

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