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# Memory: Juba Four Years After Leaving

Maria Hamilton Abegunde

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## Abstract

What happens when we are unmade not by an “urban process” but by an urban process itself being unmade by war? On March 8, 2016, I arrived in Juba, South Sudan, to teach, three years after the beginning of the civil war and in the middle of tenuous peace agreements. Even if I had studied South Sudan for years, I would not have been prepared for what happened to me. This essay is a poetic reflection on how Juba unmade me and forced me to reconsider my relationship with the world. It is part of my commitment to make visible how poetic inquiry and auto-ethnography are essential to making academic scholarship accessible to the public, especially for artist-scholar-activists who directly confront trauma and who need to find sustainable ways to reclaim the pieces of themselves that get lost/left at their sites of research.

“...we must first reflect on how we have been made and re-made throughout history by an urban process impelled onward by powerful social forces.”<sup>217</sup>

“When are *you* coming to Africa? We need that healing there.”<sup>218</sup>

In the same way that we rarely pay attention to what makes a poem and why, we rarely pay attention to how and why a city makes and unmakes us, or why we love or not love it—sometimes in the same day. We may, in fact, lack the desire or knowledge to question the “powerful social forces”—

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<sup>217</sup> David Harvey, “The Right to the City.” *New Left Review*. Vol 52. (September-October 2008): 1.

<sup>218</sup> The question a South Sudanese woman asked me in 2014 after hearing me talk about my research and healing work to the fifteen South Sudanese women who were finishing their Master’s in Education at IU.

or the historical and political—that contribute to our inability to contemplate how and why we are connected to a city. Questioning may lead to unexpected answers and change the relationship we have with the city of our choice, and most importantly, the relationship we have with ourselves.

What happens, though, when we are unmade not by the “urban process” but by an urban process itself being unmade by war or armed conflict? This is not to say that the creation of cities is not a war. But this essay is not a discussion of urbanization or war, how both restrict or eliminate the freedoms of citizens, or how both create exclusionary practices and policies that punish collective actions for change and, yes, freedom.<sup>219</sup> It is a poetic reflection about how Juba, the capitol city of South Sudan, unmade me and forced me to reconsider my relationship with the world.

Before moving forward, let me answer the question that you want to ask: Why use poetry to translate my teaching and research experiences? Faulkner uses the term “research poetry” to situate poetry and the writing of poems as part of the research process. Poetry as methodology encourages co-created and collaborative work between researchers and the communities with whom they work. Research poetry results in a “participant-voiced work” that is not limited to the researcher’s field notes. It may include journaling and reflection from both researcher and community. And, it allows the researcher to use auto-ethnography to interpret and analyze their data in ways that are more accessible to a wider audience, and that remember and honor the contributions of the people who form the basis of their research. Faulkner writes that “...many poet-researchers consider poetry as an excellent means to present data about the human experience and consider poetry an ideal way to capture and present this experiences in a more easily “consumable,” powerful, emotionally poignant, and accurate form than prose research reports.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> When Henri Lefebvre first put forth “the right to the city” in 1968, he argued for the city to be a collective space for all citizens, one that was co-created and from which no one was excluded.

<sup>220</sup> Sandra. L. Faulkner, *Poetry as Method: Reporting Research Through Verse* (New York: New York: Routledge 2009), 20-22.

Bill Moyers writes in *The Language of Life*, one of the earlier texts to consider how poetry creates a communal experience for writer and reader through its performance and its ability to reveal the connections between poet and audience, that "Poetry is news—news of the mind, news of the heart—and in the reading and hearing of it, poet and audience are fused. Strangers converge but community emerges, the shared experience of being present when poetry reveals a particular life to be every life—my life, your life, you, me, us." Moyers goes on to write that during one evening while listening to poetry at the Dodge Festival he "...was struck by how much we owe our poets for reminding us that experience is the most credible authority of all."<sup>221</sup>

In his essay on memory and the slave trade, David Blight says this another way: "We should respect the poets and priests; we should study the defining myths at play in any memory controversy."<sup>222</sup> I am a poet and I am a priest. I went to Africa and, now, I too need healing. But, I also want to share with the world my memories of a Juba, South Sudan, that they will likely never see in the news. After Juba, I was/am/will be forever untethered and tattered. I do not know if the pieces of that self will be re-made seamlessly into the me you might one day meet. For now, I offer her to you unashamedly threadbare. Like Juba, I am at war with internal forces I cannot control. That means this essay is disjointed and incomplete: my memory to reconstruct a self who does not exist relies on notes, and are channeled through a deep grief for and of a people and city I barely know and may never see again.

On March 8, 2016, I arrived in Juba with minimum knowledge of the region's history beyond Fashoda and Dafur—that is, knowing nothing at all. It was three years after the beginning of

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<sup>221</sup> Bill Moyers, *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets* (New York: New York, Doubleday, 1995), xii-xiii.

<sup>222</sup> David W. Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be." in Horton, James Oliver and Horton, Lois E. (Editors). *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York, New York: The New Press, 2006), 26.

the civil war and in the middle of tenuous peace agreements.<sup>223</sup> Colleagues at the Indiana University (IU) School of Education had invited me to join them to develop a Master's Degree in Teaching Emergencies. This collaboration between IU, the University of Juba, and USAID existed long before I joined the team. Even if I had studied South Sudan for years, nothing and no one could have prepared me for my twenty-one days in Juba.

I arrived with a camera knowing that you are forbidden from taking photos in public places.<sup>224</sup> It was only fitting that when I disembarked the situation that greeted me would become the one I wanted most to capture visually: United Nations (UN) peacekeepers searching for shade under anything they could find, stooping on the ground, and using their backpacks to shield from the sun. These grown men looked frightened and confused. They were children lost and maybe already regretting their tour of duty. The few who were lucky enough to find shade under the one or two existing trees sat, faces forward, looking at no one, fighting to not smell the stench carried from the bathroom to the arrival door.

Since I knew before leaving the United States that I would never take that picture or others, I carried a small notebook; one small enough to hide in my purse, with pages that could be easily removed and hidden if I had to run or be evacuated. I did not know what I would do with my notes when I returned home. But one day, after watching a UN High Commission meeting on South Sudan, I became angry as each representative began their address with how much money their country had given to rebuild Africa's newest country. Someone may have mentioned human rights. Harvey argues that "...the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is...one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."<sup>225</sup> Perhaps. But a city must provide access to and protection of

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<sup>223</sup> In March 2016, we paid close attention to whether or not opposition forces, with the full regiment of tanks and soldiers, would be allowed back into Juba.

<sup>224</sup> We could also not take photos at the compound where we stayed.

<sup>225</sup> Harvey, *The Right to the City*, 2.

the human rights that ensure that citizens have a city to which they have rights. Juba could do none of this. Its citizens were like the UN peacekeepers: exposed, frightened, alone, and reliant on their own power to be a collective.

As I watched the commission, I began crying. It was in this moment that I finally understood how Juba had “marked” me down to my bones.<sup>226</sup> As a healer, I was accustomed to feeling what others could not. I was also accustomed to working with people and places healing from the past. This was different. War was imminent. History was being made and (re)lived in front of the world. In addition, I missed the people I had met, and was aware of the dangers and struggles they faced. In the aftermath of war, students had given me love and extended kinship. I had heard their harrowing stories of survival, but I had also witnessed their commitment to peace and transformation. I thought of the student who had addressed an email to me: “Dear Mother, I am very grateful [sic] to meeting you.” As I would write in a poem for this student:

Daughter. The word does not come easily.  
If I write, Dear Daughter, what will happen?  
Over 7,000 miles separate us. I cannot protect you  
from guns and soldiers or your own fear.

Daughter, I am afraid of this word even when I think it.  
I dare not whisper it to myself lest I am reminded  
I cannot hold you in my arms if you are hurt. If you die,  
part of me will die with you and my wailing will crack the sky.<sup>227</sup>

Juba did the one thing to me that rarely happens: it made me afraid. And, for the first time in my life, I did not see viable options. It became apparent after watching the commission that neither did anyone else.

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<sup>226</sup> When one of my readers used this term, I knew it was the right word: the experience of being in Juba had scared me in a way other trips had not. From a spiritual perspective, I understood Juba as an initiation to the continent and to aspects of my work that had laid dormant. Juba cut into me to reveal what I had hidden.

<sup>227</sup> Maria Hamilton Abegunde, “Response to Student Letter #1,” *COG*, accessed December 30, 2020. <https://www.cogzine.com/copy-of-jacob-appel-issue-6>

That day, I cried for over thirty minutes and had to call an elder to calm me.<sup>228</sup> If my reaction was an indication of what would happen at the mention of Juba, then I had to find a way to articulate my anger and fear without falling apart. The only way I knew to do this was with poetry: I return to poetry to see details clearly, to feel what I do not want to feel, and to tell the truth in words I would never use otherwise. Poetry is the way I mourn and heal. The poems in this essay tell a story and reveal how I use poetry as a rite and ritual of mourning to re-make what Juba unmade. Like stories and ritual, you will have to engage them, step away, and listen to what wants to emerge for you. I cannot tell you what to see or feel. I can tell you what happened, but even that is only what I am able to process at this moment.

“Security Briefing,” “On World Water Day,” “Memory: Juba Four Years After Leaving,” and “How to Make and Keep a Place” are from *Learning to Eat the Dead, Juba, USA*,<sup>229</sup> a manuscript I began out of my inability to unsee and unhear pain; my refusal and resistance to unfeel everything I experienced in my first and second—and final—trip to Juba. They began as daily electronic letters to family and friends to assure them that I was alive between March 8–16 and June 4–15, 2016, the weeks I worked on the project.

To reflect on how a thing changes us, we must at least have an idea of what the thing is, in this case the city of Juba. I begin with “Security Briefing.” Our secure compound was a city within itself, occupied by international peacekeepers, missionaries, NGOs, and educators. Like Juba, it was heavily guarded and adhered to the 9 p.m. curfew. Unlike Juba, it had resources: running water and working sanitation systems. Most fascinating, however, were the independent security

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<sup>228</sup> My unending gratitude to Iya Osunkoya Naheemah Jackson who took my call in the middle of the morning at work. I was shaking so badly I could barely speak.

<sup>229</sup> Maria Hamilton Abegunde, *Learning to Eat the Dead: Juba, USA*. You may find other excerpts from the manuscript published in COGzine (Issue 6), Tupelo Quarterly (November 14, 2018), and the Massachusetts Review (60<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue).

forces contracted to protect and, in the event of political turmoil, extract visiting groups. If I had had any doubts about the danger I was in, this meeting dispelled them.

### **Security Briefing**

I have arrived late, and, then, only because  
someone walked to my little house to make sure I had not fallen asleep.  
What was I doing, you ask?  
Choosing the right shoes to walk to the river for the evening.  
Spraying my body with repellent.  
Even at 6 pm I had to be careful of mosquito bites.  
Planning the next day's class lesson.  
Breathing the air in Africa.

Everyone at the bar knows why we are here.  
They've been through this before.  
For some, this is their second tour of duty.  
For others, this is their tenth.  
For me? Well, there's a first time for everything.  
We sit on the high stools around the high tables,  
like children unsure of what to expect  
of our new teacher, our savior if things go bad.

#### *What we are told*

Travel with passports all the time.  
Keep throw-away cash in your bras or socks.<sup>230</sup>  
Don't open car windows for anyone.  
Don't get out of car until destination.  
Don't violate the 9 p.m. curfew.  
Do inform us of your whereabouts.

#### *What I think*

I am sitting in a bar  
in a secure facility  
on my first visit to The Continent  
I have no place to hide  
the bed is too low to crawl under  
the wardrobe has shelves I cannot remove  
the bushes in front of the house are small  
I cannot run fast  
I am a woman

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<sup>230</sup> The cash was to pay off police or military in case our driver was ever stopped on the street. It could be removed quickly from your bra and socks without having to open a bag to reveal other items. In addition, students shared that they slept with money in their beds for the same reason: if (and when) robbers entered your house to steal, giving them money immediately could save your life.



I am Black  
I am an American  
I am talking to the John McClane of South Africa  
he is built like The Terminator  
and the compound dog loves him

*What I Feel*  
Absolutely nothing. Yet.

When I wrote this, I could not help thinking of how different the man who sat in front of me was from the young men I had seen at the airport. Later, after my friends and colleagues were evacuated in July 2016, I would learn that he had kept the promise he made to us that day: in case of emergency, he would drive around the city, throw us in his truck, and drive us to the airport, or Kenya if that was the only way out. But, I could not get the UN peacekeepers out of my head, especially after witnessing one of them clutch his steering wheel so tightly that I thought his fingers would break. If I was here to teach, they were here to protect. For the ones who were in Juba for the first time like I was, did they know what that meant? Did they know how to enter a city and care for its inhabitants? Did they know how to not act out of fear?

“How to Make and Keep a Place”<sup>231</sup> is a letter to sons of nations on how to enter another people’s city without arrogance. As I wrote it, I thought about what I would tell myself the first time I visited a place whose culture was different than my own. I wanted them to know that Juba was more than the sum of its wars and was populated by people who knew things that could help them. For me, it was also a reminder to take nothing for granted.

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<sup>231</sup> Tracie D. Hall, of the Joyce Foundation, commissioned this poem to be performed for the inaugural Artist as Problem Solver Workshop in 2018.

## How to Make and Keep a Place

First and foremost:

Ask how to honor the dead.  
Say thank you to everyone you meet  
and to every place you go.

When the people invite you to see their city,  
do not expect trees to shelter you from the heat.  
You will not need to ask this kindness  
if you water their roots and branches  
with whatever water you have left.  
Or if you have carried this water in buckets  
balanced on your head,  
like the women who pilgrimage daily to the river,  
the source of their living.

Let the bottoms of your feet touch the burning ground,  
Let the dirt settle between your toes.  
Seek out the oldest man and woman you can find.  
Wait for them to show you what they have created.  
Wait for them to show you the past.  
Wait for as long as it takes them  
to acknowledge your existence.  
Don't anger when they laugh because your asking  
has no rhythm or sense.

When it is time to eat, you will be disappointed.  
There is no table, only mats on ground,  
and large plates for everyone to share.  
Take only what you can hold between  
thumb and first two fingers.  
Put the food (not your fingers)  
into your mouth.  
Wait until everyone has done this once  
before taking more.

If still hungry, play with the children:  
They will offer you their favorite  
foods all sweet and salty and strange.  
Eat until you are full but leave a small bit  
for someone you will meet  
along the road towards your next destination.

At the end of the day, when you have heard  
all the people's stories,  
seen all they have made,  
re-lived all they have remembered,

wait, sit, be silent:  
the people will sing to you  
their true names and the names  
they have for things you think you recognize,  
and you will want to correct them  
or question the words they use  
to call the earth plenty or community family  
or sunflowers hope.  
Don't be rude.  
Repeat what the people tell you, until  
you, too, can speak their language  
with only slightly incorrect inflections.

Remember: arrive naked  
like the day you were born:  
knowing nothing  
trusting everyone (at first)  
and hungry for everything  
you don't even know  
you need to stay alive.

I wanted the peacekeepers to stay alive because I wanted to stay alive. And as I rode back and forth to the university, I saw signs that said the South Sudanese wanted peace. One day after teaching, I said to a student that this was my first time to Africa and that South Sudan was my point of entry. She said: A bad point of entry. To her disbelief, I disagreed. I explained: It is a good point of entry for me and the work I do in the world. I know that all of Africa is not like this, and that there would be peace in Juba again.

As the earlier poem "Security Briefing" illustrates, for safety reasons someone always drove us to and from the university. Hence, I was not allowed to see or interact with the city except on rare occasions: out of my desperation for chocolate, cheese, and a small bucket to wash my panties<sup>232</sup> the driver took me to a "global market," and at the invitation of a resident who was connected to the universities he took the team to that person's home for dinner. The trip to the grocery store was a privilege that I did not ask for again until my second visit to Juba. At the checkout,

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<sup>232</sup> While there was a mandatory laundry service, the women did not wash women's panties for cultural and, perhaps, religious reasons.

I understood why the women had been watching me so closely: the half-pound cheddar cheese that none of them could buy. Before paying for my items, I returned the cheese for a piece more reasonably priced than the more than twenty US dollars it would have cost me. The women reminded me of what I knew: a city is nothing without its people, especially Black women who would simultaneously chide you for and be in awe of your luxurious tastes.

If I define the city of Juba as the people I met and who cared for me, then yes, the city altered my life. It was the people who entered my soul the moment I landed. Upon my arrival, my passport identified me as the one Black non-African woman in the airport. The other women watched me with curiosity: my head was covered but I was not Muslim.<sup>233</sup> The men, on the other hand, treated me like a queen and, I joke, had calculated how many cattle I was worth based on my age, girth, weight, and education before I retrieved my suitcases. More than one of them assisted me through the customs line, showing me where I should sign forms I did not understand. At the university, students trusted me enough to invite me to pray with them the morning I found them saying the Rosary; on my last day in June, they prayed over me; they danced with me and imitated my dancing and joked at how free I was in my body. They accepted my gifts of incense and small cloth pouches. In return, they shared their stories with me and asked that I carry them home.

Harvey writes that we cannot separate “the city” from who we are and wish to be.<sup>234</sup> Juba made me ask who do I—individually and collectively—wish to be? What type of people do I want in the places where I live? How do I want to be in community with them? Juba made me answer these questions by learning why we kill the people we love and then “eat” them; that is why and how we feed on the death and suffering of other people. Juba made me want even more to live in a world

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<sup>233</sup> My passport was visible, but compared to others who spoke English, my speech was unaccented.

<sup>234</sup> Harvey, David. “The Right to the City.”

where after I leave a city its history does not haunt me; its trauma does not unearth my own.<sup>235</sup> This desire arose most when I saw children: they were soldiers riding in the backs of trucks and the homeless living in the cemeteries.<sup>236</sup> No one could protect them and, in some cases, no one would be able to protect me from them.

“Memory: Juba Four Years after Leaving” is one of several poems in the manuscript that focus on my encounters with children on the street. These were the hardest since we were prohibited from opening our windows to respond to their petitions. This was, of course, for our safety. We could not ascertain from looking at a child if they were working alone or in a group. An opened window could be an invitation for an ambush. Still, this did not stop my feeling helpless as we moved through the city. When I returned to the United States and started reviewing my notebook, I found an entry about a little boy who one morning walked up to the car, placed his hands on the window, and looked directly at me as he removed one hand, cupped his fingers as if he were picking up food, and brought them to his mouth. It was one of the few times someone “outside” made such contact. It would not be the last time I had to force myself to look through another human being to take care of myself. Like the image that shaped my entry into Juba, this image would shape my first exit from the city.

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<sup>235</sup> To prepare for Juba, I had to consider the worst things that could happen to me, especially being raped. This meant reflecting on (and sometimes reliving) the sexual violence that I had experienced as a child and adult. In August 2016, two months after I left Juba, humanitarian workers were gang raped not far from where we had been staying.

<sup>236</sup> When in Juba, I noticed that because of the number of internally displaced persons that people set up shelter in the cemeteries.

## Memory: Juba Four Years after Leaving

last day in Juba  
little boy walked to our car  
placed hand on window

i wanted to touch  
the window let him know  
child I see you but

i cannot help you  
i cannot help anyone  
yes i see you but

what do i do now  
with your face  
your unfed hunger

I have asked this question before: What do I, can I, do? The first time I became aware of Sudan was in 2006 after *Newsweek's* December 25, 2006–January 1, 2007 “Periscope,” from which I keep a torn-out page taped to a bookcase in my study so I can see it (or consciously avoid it): a grandmother holding a child. It still renders me silent. Then and now, I think: how can love sustain us during suffering?

On my second visit to Juba, it seemed like the child who touched the window was everywhere: the number of children on the street had increased, but so had the number of soldiers and armed vehicles. The city was full with internally displaced people seeking refuge under leafless trees. I would be in Juba for a longer time and knew after the first day I would not hold it together if this was all I saw. So, I chose to see the toddler in a purple dress running down the hallway as if all her life she will be in a playground, and the young couple leaning against each other, holding hands, talking and smiling as the sun set. It was during this trip that students told me all they had sacrificed to survive. And, it was this trip that reconfirmed for me that Black people all over the world know how to live. Students would remind me of this the day after the Pulse nightclub massacre when we

discussed the difference between political violence, genocide, and massacres. I heard a student ask, as if they were asking for the time of day: How many people did they kill from your village?

They each had an answer. I, on the other hand, could not tell them how and why the Pulse killing was possible—or the killings of Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin. In addition to being rite and ritual, the poems are how I search for answers. They allow me to remember the man strutting down the street in a yellow shirt and red pants as if 6-feet-5-inch tar-colored men everywhere could pull that off, or Abraham, a former child soldier, dancing to Salif Keita, down a make-shift *Soul Train* line. These memories balance the ones of a student hiding under dead bodies, or watching their family bombed, or knowing their sister will be captured and raped in a tunnel because she is too big to fit through the hole that they can. They are how bit-by-bit I do not succumb to the image the world has of Juba as a city of chaos and death.

To understand how a place has unmade you, you must know how other cities have done the same, or how they have helped you remake yourself. I travel as a Black Caribbean American woman. I am a different person in Bahia, Chicago, New York, and Bloomington: the histories and politics of those cities, and my knowledge of them, shape how others perceive me, my freedom to move through them, how I walk their streets, and my ability to make meaning of it all in my own life. In Salvador, Bahia, for example, the city reminds me that I am Black and a descendant of Africans who resisted enslavement; that samba is in my step; and the ocean invites me to accept her healing. Juba revealed to me the multiple futures of the world, and I did not like what I saw. My sobbing is my total rejection of them: I push out what the world wants to violently impose on me. I, therefore, cannot treat any city as external to my life and, for matters of safety and pleasure, must recognize how I have internalized a city's breath and heartbeat.

I am not a citizen of Juba or South Sudan. I have no rights in or to them. Yet, they have taken a right to me. If I told you how many hours and days I have cried (still cry), perhaps you might roll

your eyes and wonder at my privilege to do so. I am, after all, safe. I don't have the experience of my colleagues or the life of the students. Yet, part of me remained in Juba. I am working hard to reclaim her. Reclamation is hard work that requires re-remembering and re-integration; it requires an acknowledgment that I will never be the same and that I must re-vision myself and the world around me.

Juba tells me: nothing is permanent and all things are possible. I was reminded of this on the last day of class when a student arrived late. What she shared: The night before, a man went through her neighborhood knocking on doors. Everyone who opened the door was shot to death. Her father refused to open theirs "for anyone who did not already have a key."<sup>237</sup> Despite this, she did not want to miss class. She traveled the long distance by bus to give testimony and thanks for having survived the night.

Finally, as much as we watch the city and its inhabitants, they watch us. This was made clear to me in a conversation with Noah, one of our compound's staff, who had been given the assignment of coming to learn more about me. In doing so, Noah confirmed that in the short time I had been in Juba that my life was intricately linked to its people, who welcomed me in the best way they knew how: Asking me who I was. An excerpt from my conversation with Noah is below:

Noah: Yes, we have been talking about you. We see a lot of people here all year long. Hundreds of people come and go. But, we watch you and say, this woman is different. She is not like the others who come here.

Me: Different. Explain that to me.

Noah: You act like a rich person.

Me: A rich person? What does that mean? Is that good or bad (me thinking about socio-economic disparities, colonialism, perspectives on Americans, African Americans seen as white people in some parts of the world, privilege, overdressing)?

Noah: You move so calmly. Like you have nowhere to go. Taking your time. And the way you dress. We see you dress like you come from a nice family.

Me: That is something my husband's people would say. Who are your people?

Noah: The Bari people. And you?

Me: Born in the US and –

Noah: US?

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<sup>237</sup> Direct quote from student.



Me: Yes. US and brought up in the Caribbean.

Noah: US? You see, we said you are different.

Me: Do you have children? How are they? Your wife?<sup>238</sup>

Noah: Yes. I have three. My wife, she is well, too. Do you have children? My people say that a good tree will make two drums. Once you make the first and you see how good it is you want to make another.

Me: No children. Thank you, Noah for taking the time to talk to me. There are few things that are so important that I can't stop and say hello or help.

Noah: You see. We said you were different. Well. I know you must go and I must go.

Me: Thank you, Noah. It was good to speak with you. I hope to speak to you again.

Noah: Yes. We look forward to this.

I do, too. But the truth is, I don't know if I will ever return to Juba. It saddens me to write this because I see the great work the students are doing and have not figured out how I can help.

What happens when the city you visit is not one you ever desired; has no structures to provide human rights to its citizens, or to protect them? Or when you visit a city that has such a strong presence in the world that you are changed without any attempt of your own? What happens when you return home and you cannot externalize or excise the city and the relationships you have created with the people who have also been un/made by it?

You cry for days and weeks. When you meet peacekeepers, after you say hello, you ask: So, what are we going to do about Juba? You learn everything you can about Juba and South Sudan. At parties for exchange students, you seek out the South Sudanese to ask about their families. You don't sleep at night. You remember your childhood traumas. You write poetry. You pray. You remember as water flows effortlessly into your glass: make good with everything you have ever been given.

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<sup>238</sup> In June, I would learn to not ask this question unless invited to after meeting Mary who greeted me by saying: I have heard so much about you. We have been waiting for your return. When I asked her how her family was, she said without stopping to help me move in: oh, they are all dead.

## On World Water Day

Sip cool water.  
How easy you walk  
to sink, turn on  
faucet

clear liquid fills  
your glass  
does not  
smell of oil  
taste of chlorine  
burn like acid

meditate on sound  
a river makes over rocks  
a river meeting other rivers  
the rivers joining the ocean  
where life began

(The children are waiting.  
Their mother's wombs are dry.  
The children dream  
The time  
They choose  
to live again  
They will no longer be thirsty.  
They pray the oil in Juba  
Will turn into water.  
The water turned into rice.  
The rice turned into potatoes.  
The potatoes turned into bread.  
And that fish appear in baskets  
On top their mothers' heads.  
They say once,  
We agreed  
Never again.  
Yet, here we are.)

listen  
to stream whisper  
until your glass is full  
into silence

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