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# Politics, prophets and armed mobilizations: competition and continuity over registers of authority in South Sudan's conflicts

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## ABSTRACT

Spiritual and divine authorities play a prominent role in mobilizing armed violence. This article provides a micro-history of a contemporary Nuer prophetess (*guan kuoth*) in South Sudan who mobilized hundreds of armed men including in support of current anti-government rebellions. The article grapples with apparent paradoxes in her approach to *kume* (a broadly defined notion of government) and customary law. This prophetess rejects logics of authority associated with the *kume*. At the same time, she champions the continuity of the language and imaginaries of customary authority that are deeply associated with government registers of authority in this context. The article argues that at the heart of the prophetess's approach is her attempt to overturn historic government initiatives that separated the political and religious nature of institutions, and to assert that governance without government is possible. Previous attempts to govern without the divine have interrupted the customary law's ability to offer healing including from the spiritual and physical dangers of killing. Her ability to mobilize people to arms is partly based on political claims to reconstitute the divine authority behind the customary law.

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A century of armed conflict and intermittent, uncertain peace has turned South Sudan into a deeply fragmented political space in which competing authority figures constantly struggle to preserve loyal, easily mobilizable armed constituencies. Nuer communities, because of their specific histories and contemporary proximity to South Sudan's oilfields, mean that they have experienced exceptionally destructive violence, as well as repetitive waves of armed mobilization. As there is a constant probability of future *koor kume* (a Nuer concept translated as wars of government), government forces, armed opposition groups, customary chiefs and divinely inspired leaders, such as Nuer prophets all seek to maintain loyal, mobilizable forces.<sup>1</sup> The role of the prophets mimics patterns elsewhere in Africa where spiritual authorities over the last century have mobilized large numbers of armed actors both in support of state governments and in rebellion against them.<sup>2</sup>

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These unending *koor kume* wars have not only brought physical harms, but also moral and spiritual consequences. Various authority figures in South Sudan, including Nuer prophets, offer collective and individual healing against the consequences of this violence, partly as a way to build their own authority and ability to mobilize. Among the Nuer, the dangers of the pollution of *nueer* have posed particular concerns and dilemmas. *Nueer* is a potentially lethal pollution that arises after transgression of divinely sanctioned prohibitions, such as killing.<sup>3</sup> Changing ideas of power, morality, divinity, pollution and death, and the specificities of *koor kume*, mean that *nueer* has become a deeply contested concept.<sup>4</sup> Some Nuer prophets have been among those who have pushed back against claims of the insignificance of *nueer*, and some have come to offer healing. Such interpretations and healing do not only meet people's need for 'health', but also resonate with beliefs that the political and the divine, even in matters of war and government, are intimately linked.<sup>5</sup> This healing is part of their continual process of claiming authority and is a means to mobilize support.

Such collective healing resonates with Janzen's idea of 'collective therapies' which focuses on divine authorities ability to offer cures to social ills and to guarantee the well-being of the community.<sup>6</sup> To understand armed mobilization, it is important to take account of these struggles over registers of authority, claims of power and understandings of socio-political problems. Divine authorities are not inherently rebellious.<sup>7</sup> Yet, there have been many examples in which spirit mediums and divine authority have highlighted the oppressive nature of governments.<sup>8</sup> The spiritual dimensions of these rebellions provide an opportunity to notice that combatants themselves are often trying to avoid false distinctions between the divine and politics, and are 'creatively seeking to reintegrate and reorder their lives, to put it all together in search of a more holistic world'.<sup>9</sup> They are expressing a political vision about the nature of power itself.<sup>10</sup>

In Africa, various governments over the last century and a half have sought to sever spiritual and secular authority, to separate the political and divine worlds or, at the least, to assert government power over divine power.<sup>11</sup> Historically, there was no assumed distinction. Not only did governments and governing authorities often justify their power through connections to the divine, but also registers of authority among divine leaders have long been informed by centralized ideas of government. This is especially in areas such as the Sudans as proximity to Egyptian and Ethiopian kingdoms, and long histories of migration, trade and conquest, meant that centralized ideas of government were known.

Colonial-era authorities attempts at the secularization of authority primarily involved making government authority, not divine authority, the ultimate, sovereign power. This included government power becoming the power behind the chiefs and 'customary' authorities. Yet, in contrast to Mamdani's assertions, customary authorities were not simply colonial creations.<sup>12</sup> Instead, colonial authorities and governments since that period have found themselves in a 'contested co-production' of customary laws and customary authorities.<sup>13</sup> During Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudans, chiefs' authority and identity has become based on their ability to 'deal with government', not on them acting as agents of government.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in practice, as Van Bockhaven and Eggers show in this special issue, customary authorities could not be easily totally separated from divine authority. They often still relied on spiritual connections and remedial powers to maintain authority.<sup>15</sup> Their practice challenged assumptions of a division between divine and government powers, and the actual secularization of authority proved hard to achieved.<sup>16</sup> Many African leaders since the colonial era have not assumed a government

– divine dichotomy.<sup>17</sup> However, this colonial history has left a blind spot among European scholarship to the political implications of collective healing and its potential connection to armed mobilizations.<sup>18</sup>

This article looks at the flipside of governments excluding the divine, namely by studying a contemporary Nuer prophetess's attempts to self-exclude herself and her divine authority from government authority. In part, this is to highlight the ability for governance without government.

Just as governments struggled to detached themselves from divine authority, this article finds that some contemporary divine authorities have also struggled to separate themselves from government power although they find it hard to separate themselves from social imaginaries of public order that are usually associated with government. Even when divine authorities push back against, they may still anchor their political authority in the language of 'customary', even in political spaces where the 'customary' has become deeply associated with government. This is not to suggest that practices have remained the same since some 'customary' past. Rather it is argued that divine authorities still mobilize, evoke and perform ideas and language of the customary when customary ideas have been made dominant registers of authority including by governments. This echoes the work of Hoffmann, Vlassenroot and Marchais that notices the persistence of longstanding registers of authority connected to the state even among armed opposition groups.<sup>19</sup>

The article focuses on a contemporary Nuer prophetess in the Western Nuer, South Sudan, and her mobilization of armed men to fight the current government. Nyachol first claimed to be seized by the divinity of MAANI in 2010.<sup>20</sup> In 2012 and 2013, she mobilized armed men to raid into neighbouring communities. Since the outbreak of the South Sudan-wide war in December 2013, Nyachol has also mobilized armed men in support of the dominant armed opposition – the Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO).

This article is based on ethnographic and qualitative research in the Western Nuer conducted at various intervals between 2012 and 2016. When Nyachol was living in Mayendit and Leer Counties in 2012 and 2013, numerous interviews were carried out with Nyachol herself and the supporters that could be found attending her *luak* (cattle byre). At the time, interviews were also carried out with local youth, elders, chiefs and government authorities. The research was made possible with the help of a research assistant whose family lived in Mayendit. He was a distant relative of Nyachol but also an elder in the local church. In addition, ethnographic research and interviews were carried out with elders in Koch near the homelands of the former prophets of MAANI. In 2015, another series of interviews were also conducted in the opposition held areas near Leer. In 2016, interviews were carried out in the Bentiu United Nations Protection of Civilian Site (PoC). These later interviews were heavily reliant on the help of a research assistant from the family of the former prophets of MAANI. The article also makes use of material from the South Sudan National Archive in Juba.

The article will first outline notions of '*kume*', of Nuer prophets and the paradox of this prophet of MAANI. The second section of this article will recount how governments in the Western Nuer since the early twentieth century repeatedly tried to capture and secularize the customary laws and how this resulted in the courts' weakness in later decades and into recent times.<sup>21</sup> The next section will provide a brief introduction to former prophets of MAANI before going on to discuss Nyachol's seizure by MAANI and her claims to

build authority through her separation from government and its dangers. The article will then unpack the apparent paradox between her distance from government and her use of the customary law that has long been entangled with government power. The article will end with discussions of Nyachol's demise and its affirmation of the importance of her claims to be able to overturn the secular nature of local governance.

## Nuer prophets and *Kume*

*Guaan kuthni* (sing. *guan kuoth*) – usually translated as ‘Nuer prophets’ – literally means ‘owners of a divinity’.<sup>22</sup> They are ‘persons seized by a named divinity who then spoke through their mouths’.<sup>23</sup> After this seizure, they gain powers over life and death, health and illness, fertility and infertility.<sup>24</sup> Nuer prophets first emerged in the late nineteenth century, but incorporated pre-existing Nilotic ideas of the divine.<sup>25</sup> They have been a key part of the Nuer political system since, but their role, powers and registers of authority have changed over time and varied between places.<sup>26</sup>

The prophetic idiom has evolved along-side the coming and evolution of the idiom and experience of the *kume*.<sup>27</sup> *Kume* (from *hakuma* – the Arabic word for government) among the Nuer, and related terms in South Sudan more broadly, have come to represent a broad sphere of influences and authorities that include foreign traders, state governments, military actors, foreign powers and those spatially connected with towns or distant travel.<sup>28</sup> This is a form of authority first associated with the Turco-Egyptian army in the nineteenth century and the accompanying predatory raids for tradable goods and people.<sup>29</sup> The boundaries of *kume* have broadened over time to include new forms of authority; decades of war and rebel governance brought rebel groups into people's understanding of *kume*.<sup>30</sup> Hutchinson has highlighted that the association between guns and government loosened with the widespread dissemination of automatic rifles during the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Boundaries formerly separating government from nongovernment have unravelled further in recent decades. This was partly as the wars of the government continued in rural areas, bringing government-like violence into spaces previously associated with nongovernment authority. Furthermore, the last decade in South Sudan has seen the movement of local defense forces, previously seen as the epitome of nongovernment, being drawn into the heart of the state security apparatus.<sup>32</sup>

Over time, numerous Nuer prophets have pushed back against the militarized and secularized violence of *kume* in South Sudan, either through armed mobilization or more peaceful methods.<sup>33</sup> Hutchinson and Pendle have previously used the contrasting examples of Nuer prophet Gatdeang and Nuer prophetess Nyachol to show how prophets have interpreted cultural idioms in different ways to respond differently to the violence of *kume*. They highlighted Nyachol's use of the customary law to resolve disputes and her attempts to distinguish herself from government authority. However, the apparent paradox of Nyachol created by her both rejecting government while also relying on the customary law – a register of authority associated with government – was not explored. This article explores this paradox further in order to provide deeper insight into Nyachol's political vision.

The paradox surrounding Nyachol's authority sits in the contradiction in two key parts of her political philosophy. Firstly, she claims to offer a different type of power and political community than that of the government. Secondly, she has relied heavily

on her authority over the customary law to achieve power, especially among the armed youth. As this article will demonstrate, in the Western Nuer, governments since the early twentieth century have made customary law a key part of government's rule. As part of this, governments have tried to replace divine sanction behind the law with the power of the government<sup>34</sup> Nyachol's disassociation with government could predict her rejection of customary law and chiefs' courts. On the other hand, Nyachol insists on compliance with the customary law including the rulings of the courts of the government-appointed customary chiefs.

This paradox can best be resolved by recognizing that Nyachol's call for mobilization is not only to take up arms against the politicians currently in power. Instead, she seeks to recreate the very nature of customary institutions by demanding that the customary laws be reintegrated with divine authority. Nyachol presents herself as the restorer and custodian of a Nuer-wide moral community that rebuilds a notion of a Nuer 'customary' past that is backed by divine and not only government power. She is not only pushing back against the militarized power of government, but also the power of government as it has sought to capture and secularize the customary laws.

For Nyachol and her followers, reinstating divine power behind the customary laws allows the customary laws to also be remedial. The customary laws can provide individual and collective healing if they include divine authority and are not secular. She claims that the dangers of war, including the spiritual pollution of *nueer*, can only be successfully confronted by public authorities that reference long held and contested Nuer religious idioms. From the 1990s, politicians and communities contested the relevance of *nueer* to wartime killing. Politicians advocated for the lack of *nueer* when killing in *koor kume* so as to reduce their soldiers fears of fighting.<sup>35</sup> Plus, the scale of killing has made people question its relevance especially when guns mean a person's actual killer is unknown.<sup>36</sup> Others now consider *nueer* to be so pervading in society that it has itself become the cause of government wars. In this interpretation, *nueer* is remade as a danger not only individuals and families, but now to the wider community. Nyachol's focus on *nueer* not only offers a solution to this deadly pollution, but also reasserts the continued existence of *nueer*. The article grapples with why this vision has had such a popular appeal, especially among young, armed men.<sup>37</sup>

## Governments and customary law in the Western Nuer

Since the late nineteenth century, the Western Nuer has experienced an intermittent but particularly violent relationship with successive *kume*. In the mid-nineteenth century, traders established access to Southern Sudan through the swamps of the Sudd. Traders used new levels of violence to acquire slaves and ivory. For a brief time in the 1850s and 1860s, there was a Nile port at what is now Adok in the Western Nuer. However, no permanent presence was established. For nearly a century, the Western Nuer's proximity to governments and traders was through the port and *zara'ib* (trading station) at Mashra al-Rek to the west on the River Jur. This port was part of the dense networks in Bahr al-Ghazal.<sup>38</sup> Although this port was not itself in the government's administrative area assumed to include the Western Nuer, it sat in an important grazing land that was used by the Western Nuer.<sup>39</sup> This proximity to government gave them first-hand experience of shifts in government over the following century.

However, it was only in the 1920s, under the Anglo-Egyptian government in Sudan, that there was an attempt by government to directly administer the Western Nuer. This was largely in response to Nuer raids on government-controlled, Dinka areas. At this time, the Condominium government was also eager to formalize its use of law as a way to rule.<sup>40</sup> This formalization both reflected a formal recognition of actual practice and fears that educated, non-custom bound, urban South Sudanese could be dangerous.<sup>41</sup> Courts in the South were formally recognized in the Chiefs' Court Ordinance 1931.

When the government came to the Western Nuer in the 1920s, its earliest, principal demand to the local leadership was that the government had the right to settle all grievances (dominantly through the chiefs' courts), and that self-help justice through raiding and revenge should end.<sup>42</sup> The government claimed to govern through customary institutions and these government-supported institutions were judicial.

By incorporating customary law and chiefs' courts into the order of government, the government claimed the power to determine who was or was not an authentic 'customary authority'. The British District Commissioner appointed the chiefs to the courts. However, these early District Commissioners in the Western Nuer were aware of their limited reach and capacity for direct control. Therefore, they often sought out leaders with pre-existing authority to be chiefs on the condition that they accepted the government's overarching authority and instructions.<sup>43</sup> Much of the government energy in the 1920s went to seeking out appropriate candidates for the chieftaincies and securing their loyalty through gifts or punitive violence. The government also appointed some men to be chiefs based on their close relationships with government, because they had been informants or translators. However, as these men often struggled to control those they were meant to govern, the government often quickly removed them.<sup>44</sup>

These chiefs' courts were not just imposed from the top-down and were actively used and co-opted by the Nuer. There were no other courts accessible to most people in the Western Nuer and so the courts heard a wide range of cases. This varied from cases of homicide, to adultery, theft and elopement. By 1935, there were 3874 cases in chiefs' courts of the Western Nuer District, more than any other district in Upper Nile Province.<sup>45</sup> Over the following years, recorded court cases continued to be in the thousands<sup>46</sup> and exceeded cases in other districts.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the government's recognition of the beneficial functions of customary law sat along-side the governments' changing of the law. Government involvement in the Nuer customary law through the courts changed the nature of the law.<sup>48</sup>

In the daily realities of justice, the government's power over the chiefs' courts was most visible through the ability of the District Commissioner to overturn cases. He could be appealed to and would sometimes overturn the decisions of the chiefs. This highlighted government as the ultimate power and moral authority behind the courts.

As Johnson has highlighted, a significant shift in the law's nature was towards secularization.<sup>49</sup> Government officials claimed that the government power behind the law had transformed Nuer moral codes into Nuer law by providing sanctions.<sup>50</sup> This ignored the reality that religious authorities had previously provided sanctions against the violation of customary laws even if these sanctions were debatably less standardized.<sup>51</sup> However, as discussed below, some Nuer prophets blurred the distinction between government and spiritual power.



While the chiefs' courts were seen as government courts, foreign government officials had a limited influence over their daily workings and rulings. District Commissioners often struggled to visit the courts to even collate the number of cases heard or the number of fines collected.<sup>52</sup> The clay flood plains of the Western Nuer made access for the government officials particularly difficult to the extent that administration of the Western Nuer took place from a boat until the 1940s. District Commissioners did hear appeals from the chiefs' courts, but this was limited. For example, in 1940, only 111 of 4089 Chiefs' Court cases came to the District Commissioner on appeal.<sup>53</sup>

Since Sudan's independence in 1956, governments and rebel forces have continued to govern through the chiefs' courts. In 1983, mutinied Sudan Armed Forces formed the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The SPLA's rapid success meant that it found itself governing vast areas of rural South Sudan and, therefore, had a government-like relationship to those it governed. In the early years of the SPLA, Marxist thinking prompted them to question the legitimacy of the chiefs' courts because of their association with colonial rule. However, the chiefs' courts were a realistic way to maintain order in the SPLA-controlled areas.<sup>54</sup> Southern intellectuals also formed an ideological basis for opposition to Islamic law by penning justifications of the value of customary law as an adequate basis for a modern legal system.<sup>55</sup>

In 1991, Riek Machar (a senior Nuer commander in the SPLA from the Western Nuer) defected from Garang's SPLA and mobilized support in his home area. During this period, Riek Machar also tried to reform the content of the customary law as a way to entrench his control over his territories and the new multiplicity of small arms. He instructed that the Nuer law be written in a book known as 'The White Book'. The codified Nuer law also contained revisions to deter the use of guns in community disputes. For example, compensation for killing with a gun was double that of killing with a spear.

By the 1990s, *kume*, such as Riek's rebel forces, were not pursuing secular claims of government but framed their rebellion in religious terms.<sup>56</sup> Riek himself intentionally referenced his father's own divine powers and the prophecies of the late Ngungdeng Bol that could be interpreted to predict his own rise to power.<sup>57</sup> However, Riek's demand for the application of the revised Nuer law was enforced through the threat of military force more than demonstration of divine force.

In the later years of the 1990s, Riek Machar and Paulino Matip's forces fought in the Western Nuer.<sup>58</sup> This period of intra Nuer fighting undermined previous norms of conflict; brothers ended up fighting brothers as methods of recruitment cut across sectional, clan and family lines. The Nuer customary law and courts proved incapable of limiting this intra-Nuer killing. This period in particular brought contestations over the continued relevance or ability to limit *nueer*.

In 2005, the SPLA signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the Sudan government. Earlier, in 2002, Riek Machar had reconciled with the SPLA. This peace agreement formed a new Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) which was dominated by the SPLA and its political wing – the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The agreement also committed the parties to allow a referendum on Southern succession. Therefore, GoSS became a national government in waiting.

However, the CPA negotiations had excluded other armed forces in the South other than the SPLA. The SPLA's domination of the new GoSS brought uncertainty and fear in the Western Nuer as many in the Western Nuer had spent the previous two decades



fighting the SPLA. In this post CPA era, multiple anti-government rebellions were led from the Western Nuer, such as Peter Gadet's 2011 rebellion. In addition, there was violent opposition when the government carried out disarmament campaigns. The young men of the Western Nuer experienced the new era after the 2005 peace agreement as brutal, predatory and unpredictable. They had a very tentative trust in a government whose powers now backed the customary law.

Since 2005, South Sudan's two constitutions (the interim and then transitional constitution) as well as various pieces of legislation have entrenched the chiefs' courts and customary laws as part of the judicial and local government apparatus of South Sudan. However, when brought together, these pieces of legislation are ambiguous in the exact role of the chiefs' courts and whether the judiciary or local government have oversight.<sup>59</sup> However, it is clear that the South Sudan government provides the authority behind the courts, and alone has the power to legally create the courts.

At the same time, in Western Nuer daily realities of justice since the CPA, the power over the chiefs' courts has depended on the power of the Local Government Authority and the county commissioner in particular. This was even though there were no other government-backed courts within three days walking. In Mayendit County in 2013, the commissioner reformed the chiefs' courts to match the three-tiered hierarchical structure of chiefs' courts as outlined in the 2009 Local Government Act. He also started to refuse to hear appeals from the chiefs' court. This broke practice that had dated back a century since the Condominium's District Commissioners. Young men were particular critical as the chiefs' courts were free to issue high fines in cattle for elopement that entrenched the authority of male elders over marriage.

In December 2013, a gun battle between soldiers in Juba quickly ignited armed conflict across South Sudan. The violence in Juba united the Nuer politically and militarily in an unprecedented fashion.<sup>60</sup> The Nuer-dominated SPLA 4th division in Bentiu (the administrative capital of the Western Nuer) largely rebelled against the government. The nascent SPLA-In Opposition commanders also organized local men to support their more formal forces. Peter Gadet, on gaining command of the SPLA-IO in the Western Nuer in 2014, immediately opened a pan-Nuer customary court of appeal. It drew together senior chiefs from across the Western Nuer, including from Panyijar, Mayendit and Ler Counties. The court heard cases referred from all over the Nuer areas under the control of the SPLA-IO. The new, momentary legitimacy of the SPLA-IO and their new militarized strength through commanding figures like Peter Gadet gave the court a new, powerful government backer. This chiefs' court gained an authority that was suddenly capable of solving long-standing feuds because of the renewed legitimacy of the government-like forces of the SPLA-IO.

Yet, the SPLA-IO's power in the Western Nuer has declined since 2014. The political loyalties of the Western Nuer have become divided, especially since 2016 and the SPLA-IO have lost military strength. By 2017, as the SPLA-IO's powers waned, the chiefs' courts were again struggling to have the authority to solve even the simplest grievances. Therefore, historically, the authority of the chiefs' courts and the customary law has been entangled with the powers of government. This is shown by the waxing and waning of chiefs' courts' power in line with the waxing and waning of the associated *kume*.

## Prophets of MAANI, healing and government

Among the Nuer, the prophetic idiom emerged in the late nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup> This coincided with the shifting contexts of severe floods and famine, as well as the new experiences of government and its military power.<sup>62</sup> These difficult times created a new demand not only for a moral community,<sup>63</sup> but also for individual and collective healing. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Kolang Ket was one of the first people to be seized by a named divinity, namely the nascent divinity of MAANI. While these prophetic seizures marked a rupture from previous authority figures, there was continuity with Nilotic religious idioms.<sup>64</sup> For example, MAANI only came to Kolang after a blessing by Nuan Liep, a senior *kuaar muon* amongst the Jagei Nuer.<sup>65</sup> *Kuar muon* (sing., *kuaar*) is usually translated as an 'earth priest' or 'leopard skin priest' and was the principle spiritual authority capable of redressing the serious dangers of spiritual pollution (*nueer*) after acts such as killing. Therefore, although possession by MAANI brought a new form of religious authority, from the outset it was intimately connected with the power of *kuar muon*.<sup>66</sup>

For prophets of MAANI, the ability to redress the dangers of *nueer* eventually became an important part of their repertoire of powers. Hutchinson defines *nueer* as 'pollution' that distinguishes between flows of blood and food that are culturally defined as negative, death-ridden, and anomalous from others deemed to be properly mediated, positive, and life promoting.<sup>67, 68</sup> Evans-Pritchard had previously associated *nueer* with sin but also described *nueer* as a 'sickness of the whole body which generally begins with violent vomiting' but that results in death.<sup>69</sup> This association with a material, bodily experience remained important even if the use of 'sin' has now been set aside.<sup>70</sup>

Hutchinson recorded that by the 1990s, the Nuer were actively debating the concept of *nueer* in the context of homicide.<sup>71</sup> These debates were prompted by commanders' assertions that killing in 'government wars' did not bring the dangers of *nueer*. In addition, the replacement of spears with guns raised new questions about the connection between the killer and killed. Despite these debates, two decades later, *nueer* was still a common concern and debate among the Western Nuer as they experienced further episodes of extreme violence and regular social or political demands to kill.

For men who fight, *nueer* has remained a particular point of contention. Confronted by government-backed or armed violence, young men often found that they could only fulfil their social obligations to protect through killing. At the same time, if *nueer* could be healed, through the prophets of MAANI or *kuar muon*, there was a potential solution. This was not just to the dangers of *nueer* itself, but also to the complex moral dilemmas of these extreme conflicts. *Nueer* and its resolution brought a space for divine boundaries and social reconciliation to the extreme acts committed.

Kolang Ket did not intentionally distance himself from government powers. In the 1890s, during the nascent years of Kolang Ket's possession, MAANI took Kolang Ket on a journey to the base of the Mahdiyya Sudanese government.<sup>72</sup> He may have seen the British and Egyptian forces defeat the Mahdiyya in 1898 and he did understand the fearful strength of government power.<sup>73</sup> Local Western Nuer histories have even attributed the coming of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium government to an invitation from MAANI.<sup>74</sup> This highlights that the prophets did not perceive a necessary opposition between the powers of MAANI and government. This was despite early government

oppression of the prophets.<sup>75</sup> Yet, it also spins up-side-down government assumptions that it was the government that initiated their coming to the Western Nuer.

From the 1920s, local government officials tried to incorporate Nuer prophets into the government system.<sup>76</sup> The government approached many of the prophets to be government chiefs and to administer the customary law in the chiefs' courts.

However, not all prophets were appointed as chiefs. The government initially appointed Kolang Ket as a chief, although he was later arrested and died while in government detention.<sup>77</sup> After the death of Kolang Ket in 1925, his daughter Nyaruac established herself as the new prophetess of MAANI. As a woman, the government did not consider Nyaruac as a potential chief.<sup>78</sup> This allowed Nyaruac to maintain a clear distinction between government and her own, divine authority.<sup>79</sup> However, she did not enforce a distance from government and is remembered as warmly welcoming foreign and government visitors, as well as accepting the gifts that they brought her.

Eventually, the power of government and the power of MAANI were merged when the chiefdom passed to Nyaruac's family. During the time of Nyaruac, the paramount chief of Jagei community was from another clan. This paramount chief consistently complained to Nyaruac and the government that he did not have the necessary authority to implement his chiefs' courts' rulings as people would run to Nyaruac's *luak* for justice or for sanctuary from the courts' justice. His chiefs' police were too afraid to approach her *luak* to seize fines, cows or prisoners. Therefore, the chief kept petitioning that the paramount chiefdom be given to the family of Nyaruac. As a woman, Nyaruac was not an acceptable suggestion as chief to the government. Nyaruac initially refused the offer.<sup>80</sup> She argued that it would be wrong to mix together these two powers – the power of government and of MAANI.<sup>81</sup> However, the paramount chief continued to pressure Nyaruac until she accepted.<sup>82</sup> Her brother Kuol became paramount chief. Yet, as the power of government was handed to Nyaruac's family, she warned government and the community that once that power had been mixed in her family with the power of MAANI, the community would never again be able to separate it and take power from them.<sup>83</sup> At the time of writing, in 2017, the paramount chief of the Jagei continues to be drawn from the immediate family of the late Nyaruac.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, at the time of Nyaruac, the powers of government and the powers of MAANI were merged with Nyaruac's eventual permission.

Nyaruac also marked a further evolution in the power of the Nuer prophets. By the time MAANI came to Nyaruac, MAANI's superior power in the Western Nuer was already established. In contrast to her father's reputation for violent displays of strength, Nyaruac became known for her healing ministry.<sup>85</sup> Dominant in still-popular songs about Nyaruac was her ability to cure problems of infertility in women. She also wore a leopard skin and offered alleviation from the dangers of *nueer*.

After Nyaruac's death in the 1970s, MAANI did not seize another prophet. People continued to petition MAANI through visits to Nyaruac's *luak* or through receipt of tobacco blessed by Nyaruac's family. Even in the heart of battle in the wars of the 1980s and 1990s, people remember calling out to MAANI for protection.

### **Nueer and Nyachol's mobilization of armed young men**

Nyachol's authority is based on her claim to have been seized by MAANI in 2010. In 2010, a large raid had killed women and children in Nyachol's home village. The raid was from a

neighbouring Dinka community during a period when the government was carrying out disarmament amongst the Nuer. This reinforced Nuer fears that the government was supporting Dinka raiders. After this raid, Nyachol fell sick and later appeared to people to be possessed by the familiar divinity of MAANI. Sickness had also been a feature of Kolang Ket's initial possession.<sup>86</sup> Her support was strongest in Mayendit and Ler. Nyachol started to build her authority by her ability to cure infertility, offer fighters protection from bullets, end Nuer-Nuer feuding and deal with the deadly spiritual consequences *nueer*.

The seizure of Nyachol by MAANI came in this context of collective despair and extreme social trauma. Her seizure could be understood as an expression of agency against oppression. There was a demand for a therapeutic insurgency.<sup>87</sup> Her spiritual possession was not an empty expression of agency but contained a clear political content that built on specific religious doctrines and that included a revision of the nature of customary authority.

*Nueer* and the reasserting of its relevance, even during government wars, were a key part of the religious beliefs of Nyachol and her supporters. She both argued that there were still spiritual consequences such as *nueer*, as well as offering healing from *nueer*. Nyachol has even explained the long absence of MAANI (since the 1970s until her seizure) as a result of the widespread *nueer* in the Western Nuer during this time. These wars created a pervading *nueer* that Nyachol and her supporters now claim is itself perpetuating conflict and bringing society-wide disease and famine. She claims that *nueer* itself is so present and so powerful that it has caused these devastating years of violence and hunger. For some, *nueer* is now so prevalent that it is hard to imagine how anyone can escape its curse.<sup>88</sup> *Nueer* is now seen as spiritual pollution that can bring physical sickness akin to leprosy and death.<sup>89</sup> This is a clear contestation of politicians' previous claims that *nueer* does not result from government wars or guns.

MAANI gave Nyachol the ability to recognize if someone was contaminated with *nueer*. In an unresolved feud where the facts were disputed, she was able to point out the slayers through her ability to see their *nueer*. The Western Nuer had no criminal justice system capable of collecting the standard of evidence expected for such trials. However, without evidence and when the facts were disputed, there was a real danger that the case would not be solved and that the feud would continue. Nyachol's knowledge of *nueer* allowed her to settle cases and end feuds.

Nyachol also wore a leopard skin to associate herself with the *kuar muon*. She offered healing from the dangers of *nueer* and started to reconstitute a political order in which politics and religion were entwined and in which *nueer* could be ended. Feuding families who even had wartime legacies of discord started to be reconciled. The chiefs' courts had proven incapable of grappling with these deep, wartime legacies.

Nyachol gained most of her visible popularity from the armed, cattle keeping men, who faced the real dangers of being embroiled in armed conflict and *nueer* in defense of their cattle and communities. Her popularity was visible among these armed cattle keepers both through explicit comments but also through their regular attendance at her *luak*. At high points in her popularity, thousands have gathered to her *luak* on a daily basis.<sup>90</sup>

Nyachol was also demanding local, senior *kuar muon* to demonstrate their submission to her or risk losing their power. She was asserting herself as the giver and taker of the powers to redress *nueer*. For example, on one visit to Nyachol in 2013, I found a local, respected *kuar muon* in her *luak*. He had brought two large, finely decorated bulls as a

gift to Nyachol. She still spent much of her time rebuking him for his tardy display of submission.

Nyachol did not only offer healing from *nueer* but enforced it. In the days before raids sanctioned by Nyachol, cattle would be sacrificed to petition MAANI. Before the raids themselves, she would scatter over the young men blessed tobacco to offer protection from bullets. However, this spiritual protection was only offered to those free of *nueer*. Drawing on and reshaping deeply rooted Nuer religious idioms, Nyachol insisted that people needed to be free from *nueer* before they could even approach her for protection and advice.<sup>91</sup>

Nyachol also reinforced that *nueer* carried collective dangers that would be experienced by the killers' whole family. For example, on one occasion a young man was prohibited from approaching Nyachol's *luak* because his cousin had accidentally just killed someone nearly a hundred miles away in Bentiu. The news had reached Nyachol although the cousin did not yet know. He was still considered as contaminated with *nueer* and made to wait at a distance from the *luak*.

For the community's armed young men, Nyachol offered a radical departure from the chaotic, dangerous socio-political order presented to them by governments at the time. However, Nyachol did not gain unanimous support. Many who were formally educated rejected the epistemologies of the prophets as 'customary' and pre-modern. In 2012 and 2013, the local church's teaching explicitly condemned association and belief in Nyachol and other Nuer prophets. Among the older, married men in the community there was an active debate that contrasted the powers of Nyachol with the powers of government.

While Nyachol offered healing from *nueer*, Nyachol also offered a vision of a peace that was metaphorically 'hot'.<sup>92</sup> She embraced the pervading, militarized sub-culture of the post CPA South Sudan and helped her supporters build a strong, armed, militarized defense against government and Dinka forces.<sup>93</sup>

## Understanding the paradox

In addition to Nyachol's power to redress the dangers of *nueer*, Nyachol also presented a bold image of an imagined, a-historic 'customary past' that pre-dated government and could be re-created by her. The armed youth were attracted to this future creation of an idealized 'past' as it brought a utopian promise of moral and spiritual certainty at a time when government, its security provisions, its disarmament campaigns and its modes of warfare brought regular confrontations with the dangers of being killed and of killing.

Nyachol enacted this vision through her insistence on her power being distinct from government, as broadly defined. This included her material separation from things she associated with government such as guns, cars, cameras, phones and imported clothing.<sup>94</sup> Imported clothing has long been associated with government and government chiefs are known as '*kuar bie*' ('chiefs of the cloth') that references the robes of office that they have worn since the Anglo-Egyptian Government.<sup>95</sup>

In order to visit Nyachol, people were expected to remove their shoes and clothing. She would not permit these items in proximity to her *luak*. Small piles of these items were found at a distance from her *luak*, marking a perimeter to her customary world. As one

elder explained, this was to demonstrate that 'You didn't know government and only believed in the prophets'.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the removal of shoes and clothes was not a symbol of submission just to the specific prophet but to a whole, alternative, religious realm of authority.

On an early visit to Nyachol, my conversations with her were dominated by her fears of the UN as an alien, foreign government. She was having nightmares that she described as given by MAANI in which UN officials found her and took pictures of her. She feared that this photography would chase MAANI away from her.

As discussed above, during Nyaruac's seizure by MAANI, Nyaruac finally consented to the merging of government and divine powers by allowing her brother to be appointed as chief. Nyachol, however, intentionally distanced herself from this history. Nyachol is not part of the immediate family of Nyaruac and, therefore, not part of the family of the paramount chiefs of the Jagei. She is also not part of another chiefly family. This distance from the family of Kolang and Nyaruac has prompted Nyaruac's family to question the authenticity of Nyachol's claims to be seized by MAANI. However, for Nyachol, her distance from this family of the paramount chief adds to her claims of authority based on her claims that legitimacy is through distance from government forms of power. She claims that it is because she is distant from the authority of government chiefs that MAANI chose to come to her.

Nyachol's attempt to distance herself from government was explicit, yet Nyachol's approach to the customary laws appears to create a paradox. Nyachol made healing from *nueer* a central part of her claim to authority. However, Nyachol also made it a condition of her healing of *nueer* that the parties first comply with the demands of the Nuer customary law as asserted by the government's chiefs' courts. She would even refuse people access to her *luak* until they had paid compensation as ordered by the chiefs' courts. She also agreed to act as an additional appeals court to the chiefs' courts. When cases reached Nyachol, she would rule with reference to the customary laws that she described as the Nuer customary laws of Fangak. Her legal authority was, therefore, made in reference to the chiefs' courts and the Nuer customary laws that themselves deeply entangled with the powers of government. In 2013, she was acting as a means of appeal from the chiefs' court precisely in replacement of the Commissioner at the time who was refusing to hear appeals.

Therefore, Nyachol was both entrenching the power of the government's chiefs' courts and customary law by insisting that it was a precondition of healing. At the same time, she was presenting a political philosophy that distanced her from government.

An incident in February 2013 helps unravel the apparent contradictions and paradoxes at the heart of Nyachol's political philosophy and ideas about governance. In February 2013, a local government county commissioner in the Western Nuer sent chiefs to talk to Nyachol. A month before, Nyachol had mobilized over a thousand, armed men to raid the cattle of neighbouring Dinka communities. The Nuer government commissioner interpreted this not only as an attack against the Dinka but as an attack against the government and their command not to raid. The commissioner was demanding that Nyachol submit herself to the authorities; he had already acquired an arrest warrant from the state government in Bentiu. He was also angry at her interference in the customary law.

However, Nyachol refused to submit to the commissioner. The government commissioner also feared visiting Nyachol because of the armed men that surrounded her that



could out-gun his small guard. He said he did not fear or believe in the divine powers of MAANI as he was educated. His concern about the armed men's power was realized in July that year when the armed men who supported Nyachol physically chased this commissioner out of his county and forced the governor to appoint a more popular commissioner. In February 2013, the commissioner could not go to Nyachol so he decided to send some of his most senior chiefs on behalf of the government to do the commissioner's bidding. Many of these chiefs had been in their positions for years and had not been directly appointed by the current commissioner. However, the chiefs were explicit representatives of government and obeyed the county commissioner's instructions.

Nyachol did not refuse to meet these government chiefs but demanded their submission to her socio-political order and for their recognition of the superior power of MAANI over the government. The chiefs were ordered to undress before they met Nyachol. The chiefs wore a variety of smart, cotton suits and shirts imported from distant tailors in Sudan. As instructed by Nyachol, they took their clothes off and left them beneath the tree. Again, before she agreed to permit them access to her *luak*, she sent a message that they were to bring cattle to her as a sign of their submission and recognition of MAANI's authority. When one brought a bull that was small, he was sent to bring another. The chiefs were too afraid to not comply, although it was unclear if it was the armed men or MAANI that they principally feared. In the end, the chiefs failed to even ask Nyachol about her lack of willingness to comply with the government's arrest warrant. Although they had been sent by government, Nyachol transformed their visit into an act of submission to MAANI.

This meeting between the chiefs epitomized Nyachol's demand for the governance regime and customary authority to be based on recognition of MAANI's power and not the secularized ideas of government. Nyachol's vision of a new socio-political order did not need to disregard everything that had become associated with government. Instead it attempted to reassert a new divine authority. By being selective about which things associated with government she would or would not accept, Nyachol was directly challenging the contemporary government's claims to determine the legitimacy of public authority figures including figures who made claims based on custom. Instead, Nyachol was presenting herself as the appropriate judge to decide which forms of government power and customary power were acceptable.

Importantly, her demand that the chiefs' respect her divine authority also highlighted that the customary laws needed to reincorporate spiritual dimensions. While she insisted on compliance with chiefs' courts' rulings or her interpretations of the customary law, she also demanded that people seek her help to redress the dangers of *nueer*. *Nueer*, spiritual authority and customary law were innately linked.

After December 2013, Nyachol also mobilized support for the SPLA-IO and for their new divisions of *gojam*. From January 2014, the senior opposition commander would regularly send her cattle as a sign of respect. In return, she was able to send him many men to be trained and armed.<sup>97</sup>

Nyachol also continued to mobilize the armed cattle guard for local defense against government forces. In March 2014, large government offensives pushed into rural areas of the Western Nuer near Nyachol's *luak*. Nyachol is credited with mobilizing a force large enough to resist the government's advances beyond the village of Miirnyal,



protecting various villages and cattle camps. A recent song recalls her capture of a large government tank at this time.

However, importantly, Nyachol's political vision continued to subordinate government power to her own divine authority. Nyachol did not comply passively with the SPLA-IO's attempts to mobilize support. In January 2016, Nyachol even secretly invited commissioners from the government and opposition sides to a meeting in her *luak* to build a pan Nuer peace. The commissioners had no knowledge that the other would be there. This countered the SPLA-IO's attempts to mobilize Nuer to fight against other Nuer. For Nyachol, this intra-Nuer fighting brought lethal dangers of further contamination with *nueer*.

## Conclusion

Across South Sudan, East Africa and the world, religion including spirit possession is playing a role in armed mobilizations. Many international actors who engage in these conflicts to bring peace or reshape the war carry with them assumptions of a division between religion and politics. However, the history of Nyachol as a prophetess of MAANI highlights that the non-secular epistemologies and subsequent political theories of combatants and those involved in mobilization need to be taken seriously if wars are truly to be understood. Possession and religious assent may not be only an expression of marginalization and social trauma. They may also highlight much deeper concerns with the very nature of power and the illogical separation of parts of life. This micro-history of Nyachol highlights that the alternative and varied ontologies, epistemologies and political theories of spiritual authorities need to be taken seriously. In future research, we need to revisit how we have understood previous spiritual authorities and their role in armed mobilization.

Crucial for Nyachol and those armed men that she mobilized was the reinstating of customary laws as deeply entwined not only with the powers of government but also with spiritual powers. Governments in Africa, often informed by European ideas, have commonly sought to secularize authority based on the assumption that a division between government and the divine is possible. Yet, for many who take up arms and fight, a more holistic understanding of power makes much more sense and offers the possibility of healing. Nyachol has built her authority through divine powers to offer collective healing but she has also relied on registers of authority associated more closely with government.

## Notes

1. On *koor kume*, see: Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 109; Hutchinson, "A Curse from God?". For example, Eastern Nuer prophet Dak Kueth apparently mobilized tens of thousands of armed youth to violence. Breidlid and Arensen, *The Nuer White Armies*.
2. Eggers, "Mukombozi and the Monganga"; Hoffmann, "Myths Set in Motion"; Verweijen and Vlassenroot, "Armed Mobilisation and the Nexus of Territory".
3. Evans Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 293–4; Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 106–7; Hutchinson, "Dangerous to Eat".
4. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 103–22. On 'koor kume', see: Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 109; Hutchinson, "A Curse from God?"

5. [5] Janzen, *Ngoma*; Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories". Also discussed by Eggers, "Authority that is Customary" and van Bockhaven, "Anioto and Nebeli".
6. Janzen, *Ngoma*.
7. This is despite many governments assuming this to be the case. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*. See, also, Eggers, "Authority that is Customary" and van Bockhaven, "Anioto and Nebeli".
8. Spencer, *The Massai of Matapato*; Mamdani, "Uganda in Transition"; Allen, "Understanding Alice".
9. Shah, "Religion and the Secular Left".
10. Ibid. Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities*.
11. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*. See, also, Eggers, "Authority that is Customary" and van Bockhaven, "Anioto and Nebeli".
12. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.
13. See Special Issue Introduction. Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa". Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.
14. Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.
15. Van Bockhaven, "The Leopard Men of the Eastern Congo".
16. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion*, 30–90.
17. See, for example, Feyissa, "The Religious Framing of the South Sudanese Civil Wars".
18. Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories". See, also, Eggers, "Authority that is Customary" and van Bockhaven, "Anioto and Nebeli".
19. Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, and Marchais, "Taxation, Stateness and Armed Groups".
20. Hutchinson and Pendle, "Violence, Legitimacy and Prophecy".
21. Leonardi et al., "The Politics of Customary Law Ascertainment"; Leonardi et al., *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*.
22. This follows the translation was used by G. Leinhardt and D. Johnson. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
23. Johnson, "Prophecy and Mahdism," 47.
24. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
25. Anderson and Johnson (Eds.), *Revealing Prophets*; Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*; Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*; Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*; *Nuer Prophets*; Johnson, *Nuer Prophecy. A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile*.
26. Their political importance was invisible in the works Evans-Pritchard, but their political importance has been firmly established in later works by Middleton, Johnson and Hutchinson. However, Graeber has argued that Evans-Pritchard's lack of research on the prophets was not because he did not see them as political important but because he wanted to make a political stand against the government (his employer's) preoccupation with the Nuer prophets.
27. Hutchinson and Pendle, "Violence, Legitimacy and Prophecy".
28. Leonardi, "Liberation or Capture".
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 394.
31. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 103–22.
32. Pendle, "They are not Community Police".
33. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; Hutchinson and Pendle, "Violence, Legitimacy and Prophecy".
34. Johnson, "Judicial Regulation"; Leonardi et al., *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*; Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.
35. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 103–22.
36. Ibid.
37. Evans Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 293–4; Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 106–7.
38. Johnson, "Prophecy and Mahdism in the Upper Nile," 44.
39. Johnson, "Prophecy and Mahdism in the Upper Nile"; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
40. Ibreck, *South Sudan's Injustice System*; Howell, *A Manual of Nuer Law*, 2; Johnson, "Judicial Regulation," 65; Massoud, *Law's Fragile State*.

41. Mawut, *The Southern Sudan Under British Rule 1898–1924*, 206.
42. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*, 257.
43. For example, see personality report sheets in the South Sudan National Archive. SSNA.WND. 66.D.1. For examples elsewhere in Southern Sudan, see: SSNA.EP.66.H.11.
44. Ibid.
45. Parr, Governor of Upper Nile, Letter to Legal Secretary on 'Chiefs Courts Statistics', Malakal, 19th February 1936, SSNA.UNP.1.B.6 Attached pro forma – 'Upper Nile Province Chiefs Courts Statistics'.
46. District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 9th February 1937, SSNA.UNP 1.B.6R.80; District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 5th April 1939, SSNA UNP 1.B.6.R District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 1st April 1940, SSNA.UNP 1.B.6.149.
47. District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 9th February 1937. SSNA.UNP 1.B.6R.80
48. Johnson, *Judicial Regulation*, 59.
49. Ibid., 60.
50. Howell, "Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile".
51. Johnson, *Judicial Regulation*, 61–2; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
52. District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 19th December 1935, SSNA.UNP 1.B.6 p.36.; District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 14th February 1938, SSNA UNP 1.B.6.96; Letter from District Commissioner, Western Nuer to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 31st March 1939, SSNA.UNP 1.B.6.139; District Commissioner Western Nuer, Letter to Governor of Upper Nile, S. S. Kerreri, 11th March 1935, SSNA.UNP 57.A.1.
53. J.H.T Wilson, A/DC Western Nuer, Pro Forma, 21st January 1941, SSNA.UNP 1.B.6
54. Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.
55. Deng, *Tradition and Modernization*; Makec, *Customary Law of the Dinka People of Sudan*.
56. Feyissa, "The Religious Framing of the South Sudanese Civil Wars".
57. Ibid.
58. Johnson, *The Root Causes*.
59. Leonardi et al., *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*.
60. Pendle, "The Nuer of Dinka Money".
61. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*.
62. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
63. Ibid.
64. This is analogous to the role of healing institutions in Bantu cultures, which have a similar corrective role in history, criticizing, counter-balancing regimes and recreating tradition in innovations. See Van Bockhaven, "The Leopard Men of the Eastern Congo" and Van Bockhaven, V., "Anioto and Nebeli".
65. Elder from Koch whose grandfather was in the same age-set as Kolang Ket (namely Lelnyang) and who, himself, was known for singing the songs of MAANI. 25th July 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer.
66. These recent accounts affirm Johnson's argument that the Nuer primarily associated MAANI with Nilotic religious idioms and not the Islamic, northern Mahdiyya. Johnson, "Prophecy and Mahdism in the Upper Nile".
67. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 107. Hutchinson, "Dangerous to Eat".
68. Evans-Pritchard refers to *nueer* as 'a grave sin'. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 129.
69. Evans Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 182.
70. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*.
71. Ibid., 107.
72. Elder from Koch whose grandfather was in the same age-set as Kolang Ket (namely Lelnyang) and who, himself, was known for singing the songs of MAANI. 25th July 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer.

73. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
74. Interview 2nd elder of family of Kolang Ket, Koch, 3rd May 2013 (in Nuer).
75. Johnson discusses this in detail. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
76. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
77. Ibid., 261; 'The Rill Nuer Chief Madi is universally feared and his word is law'. [p.12] [SNR (1921) p.147]; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; Elder (age-mate of Kuol Kong Kolang) from Koch and brother of man who sang songs of MAANI. 31st July 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer; Elder from Koch whose grandfather was in the same age-set as Kolang Ket (namely Lel-nyang) and who, himself, was known for singing the songs of MAANI. 25th July 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer.
78. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.
79. Ibid.
80. Paramount Chief Dingding Kuol Kolang Ket of the Jabany Section, Bentiu POC, 16th July 2017, in Nuer.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Elder from Koch, 1st August 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer.
86. Elder from Koch whose grandfather was in the same age-set as Kolang Ket (namely Lel-nyang) and who, himself, was known for singing the songs of MAANI. 25th July 2017, Bentiu POC, in Nuer.
87. Hunt, *A Nervous State*; van Bockhaven, "Anioto and Nebeli".
88. Interview with *gojam*, Thonyor, July 2017.
89. Interviews amongst the *gojam*, July and August 2016, Thonyor.
90. NGO Security Working Group Meeting, Minutes, 20th February 2013.
91. Evans Pitchard, *Nuer Religion*, 293–4; Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 106–7.
92. Hutchinson and Pendle, *Violence, Legitimacy and Prophecy*.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 291.
96. Interview with elder, Miiirnyal Market (Maynedit County), April 2013 (in Nuer).
97. Interviews with James Koang, Nairobi, April 2014.

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