

# **Marking Nuer Histories**

**Gender, Gerontocracy, and the Politics of Inclusion in the Upper Nile from 1400 – 1931**

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# Table of Historic Age-Sets / Marriageability-Sets

Cohorts of the Eastern Jikāny and other *nei ti naath* until 2003

Ric ( <i>thok naath</i> )	Age-Set / Marriage-Set Name (English)	Initiation Date
<b>- Early Sets (Bul and Jikāny) <sup>1</sup> -</b>		
Riek <sup>2</sup>	Alter Pole	Unknown
Jok <sup>3</sup>	Earth-Spirit / Disease	Unknown
<b>- Sets with Gaar (Jikāny, Lak, Thiaŋ, Jagci, Lou, and Gaawäär) <sup>4</sup> -</b>		
Cot-Bör <sup>5</sup>	[Sacrificial] Hornless-White [Steer]	circa 1800
Geer-loic	Turning-Heart (winning hearts and minds)	circa 1810
Yuac	Pulling Out (era of exodus)	pre-1828
Yilbith <sup>6</sup>	Gushing wound [from a] Fishing-spear (fleeing a battle)	post-1828
Dom-piny <sup>7</sup>	Copulating-Ground (sexual frustration or territorial conquest)	1830s
Cuēt-Cuor <sup>8</sup>	Eagle's Cry (after many warriors slaughtered)	circa 1840
Lajak	[Steer] with a White Body and a Yellow Head	late 1840s
Thut <sup>9</sup>	Flatulating (during initiation rites)	1850s
Boi-loic	White (Bör) – Heart (plague of bovine pleuropneumonia) <sup>10</sup>	1860s

<sup>1</sup> By 2013, Eastern Jikāny elders had no memory of these sets, which may be fairly mythical even when Stigand (1915) and Jackson (1922) heard of them (see citations below). In most contemporary Eastern Jikāny traditions the first set is remembered as *Röök* though Cienj Laan maintain a separate account of "Eight Boys" (*Dhol Badek*).

<sup>2</sup> Stigand's list named the oldest set as *Riägh* among the Jikāny. Jackson gave *Riar* as the very first set for the Bul. Gabriel Giet Jal has suggested that *Riäk* (actually a word in *thok naath*) was what those Englishmen misheard. Chauncey Hugh Stigand, "Warrior Classes of the Nuers" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1918) p. 224-226. Henry Cecil Jackson, "The Nuer of Upper Nile Province" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1923) p. 59-190. Edward Evans-Pritchard, "Nuer Age-Sets" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 247. Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Eastern Jikany Nuer before 1920" PhD diss. (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> Again, Stigand listed the second oldest Jikāny set as *Juok* while Jackson listed *Juuk* as the second Bul set. Both are similar to the work *Jok* which Giet Jal proposed as the correct name. After these two (possibly mythical) sets the Bul, who use a different scarification style, began giving their sets entirely independent names.

<sup>4</sup> Almost certainly included the *Lëëk* as well. The *Dök* also probably used the same names as the *Gaawäär* at this time. No source has yet reported the names of early sets farther south among the *Nyuoŋ* confederation.

<sup>5</sup> *Cot Bör* is the first set linked to particular historic events. In 2013, elders disagreed wildly on the sequence of various other named sets from this early era, including *Wëë* and *Möth*. Named in various local songs and colonial-era lists, these sets certainly existed, but I have not included them in this list.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to fleeing a battle without having time to bandage one's wound.

<sup>7</sup> One Eastern Jikāny interpretation of this name is that it reflected the sexual frustration of physically mature males who "made holes in the ground" because they had long been denied initiation and the chance to marry.

<sup>8</sup> A feast for the carrion birds after a profound military defeat by the *jaan* (that is "Dinka").

<sup>9</sup> Eastern Jikāny circulate two narratives about this name. Some claim that it was the elder's insult, calling their offspring mere excrement. Others that the name arose after one initiate fluctuated during his initiation.

**- Uniquely Eastern Sets (Lɔu and Eastern Jikāny) –**

Maker	Steer with Black body and White stomach	1876 (circa)
Dan-Gon <sup>11</sup>	Prophet's Rod – (after the prophet Dundon Bon)	1896 (circa)
Car-Boic <sup>12</sup>	Black [Steer] – Laughter	1905 (circa)
Lith-Gaac	Grey [Steer] - Surprised (for Gaac Jaan, the ritual leader)	1913-1922 <sup>13</sup>
Cayat	Butter (given to recovering initiates)	1925-1928 <sup>14</sup>
Rial-Mac <sup>15</sup>	Black and White [Steer] - Gun	1931 (circa)
Koryom (Gaa-jiok) <sup>16</sup>	Locusts (a plague, prophet Lual Nyathon begins his career)	1935
Rean-Gaac	Many Colored [Steer] - Surprise (the speared Steer's reaction)	1937 (circa)
Dëyien	Yellow ( <i>yien</i> ) Goat ( <i>dëel</i> ) [used for sacrifice]	1940
Lith-Jaan	Grey [Steer] - 'Dinka' (a reference to Gaac Jaan's lineage)	1944 (circa)
Thok-Thok	Decorative Armlet (worn at dances)	1953
Dëkɔl (Dëel-Kɔl)	Multi-colored Goat [used for sacrifice]	1955
Sudan	Sudan (commemorating independence)	1957
Jagaac (Jak-Gaac)	[Steer with] White body and Yellow head– 'Surprise'	1960 (circa)
Tuitui	Water Hyacinth (caused floods, blocked canoe traffic)	1964

**- Initiated in the Era of Fissure and Decline –**

Lökelet <sup>17</sup>	Reject Back-Fat (Lual Nyathon curses Cien Kuëk)	late 1960s
Pan-Den <sup>18</sup>	Den Descends (Tun Kuac begins prophetic career)	1972
Puot-Cot-Geer	Hornless Steer (with a Bell) Turned [when speared]	1973-4
Nyanlek <sup>19</sup>	Striped and Brindled Colored [Steer]	1976
Wee-Jaan <sup>20</sup>	Sacrificial Steer-'Dinka' (Attempt to reassert the Jaan lineage)	1979
Thiele yow Nien (Gaa-Guon) <sup>21</sup>	No Leftovers (food scarcity)	1981
Mawumbith <sup>22</sup>	Consumed right off the Fishing-Spear (fish not shared at home)	1983-4

<sup>10</sup> Many contemporary *nei ti naath* interpret this name as "Laughing Hearts" since *böy* means "laughter" but Stigand's informants explained it as a shortening of *bor* (white) which referred to a symptom of this plague.

<sup>11</sup> Often simplified to *Gonja* among the Gaa-jak. Roughly equivalent to the Gaawäär set *Dan* (1900) which reflected a similar sentiment toward their prophet, a certain Den Laka.

<sup>12</sup> Often named as *Luac* ("Heart") among the Lɔu.

<sup>13</sup> Gaac Jaan apparently opened this *ric* before dying in 1913. Major Stigand personally attended a Lith-Gaac initiation in 1915, and Lith-Gaac was originally multiple sets. In 1928, American missionaries were describing Lith-Gaac *in tot* ("smaller") as 20-25 years old and Lith-Gaac *in dit* ("larger" or "older") as a few years older.

<sup>14</sup> Missionary records date this set to 1925 and list various other names for sets marked in 1925 and 1926 (*Wum Kolon* and *Tuck Lercni*) which were subsumed within Cayat. In 2013, elders dated this set to the year Guek hid among the Cien Laan section of the Gaa-jiok (1928).

<sup>15</sup> The Gaa-jak call this set *Rial-Nuen*.

<sup>16</sup> Gaa-jak communities did not join this set or revere this prophet.

<sup>17</sup> The Gaa-jak never accepted Lual Nyathon's divinity and name this set *Tharkol* after a sacrificed steer's color.

<sup>18</sup> Some Gaa-jak call this set *Yualwau*, meaning "Stirring Cud"

<sup>19</sup> Some in Nasir County name this set as *Luonje*.

<sup>20</sup> The Gaajiok generally call this set *Ruan-Lual*, meaning "Year-Red" in reference to sacrificial steer.

<sup>21</sup> Some in Nasir County name it *Nyathuol*.



Milica (Cieŋ Nyalith)	Militia (recruited for the civil war)	1984-5
Doguice <sup>23</sup>	Offspring of Tiny Fish (eaten out of desperation)	1986
Mayotil <sup>24</sup>	Front-teeth, Nile Minnows (another flesh of last resort) <sup>25</sup>	1989
Cär-Kuoth <sup>26</sup>	Black [Steer]-Divinity (a reference to swearing by god falsely)	1993
Jithedow (Gaa-Jak)	Fruitful Pumpkin Vine (a bumper crop)	1997
Pen-Kiir (Gaa-Guon)	Kiir Descends (Dokor Kun Thoal inherits his father's divinity)	2003

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<sup>22</sup> The Cieŋ Laaŋ refer to this set as *Nyabor*, a kind of river flower used to make decorative armlets.

<sup>23</sup> The Gaajiok did not recognize this set.

<sup>24</sup> Also known as *Ruan Kuɔn*, “Year of the Rats” [who consumed the crops] among the Gaa-Guon.

<sup>25</sup> Only children who had not yet had their lower incisors pulled could eat these tiny fish without first breaking them up with their hands.

<sup>26</sup> Gaa-jak prefer the names *Cär-Gaac* or *Cär-Jaaj* in honor of the lineage of *Gaac Jaaj Win*.

## Orthographies, Spellings, and Translations

Until the late twentieth century, people who spoke “Nuer” simply called the language “the mouth of the people” (*thok naath*), a term I have not capitalized because it was not used as a proper noun. Today many native-speakers call their language *Thok Nuääri* (“Mouth of the Nuers” as opposed to other “people”) and learn to write it at grammar schools in South Sudan, Ethiopia, or in the diaspora. As with many Sub-Saharan languages, different missionaries invented different orthographies to represent the languages’ consonants, vowels and rising tones. Absent any authority, various scholars (both foreigners and native-speakers) have also spelled the same words differently. These inconsistencies do not cause much confusion for anyone who speaks *Thok Nuääri* / *thok naath* since all spellings are phonetic. It does however mean there is often more than one “correct”, or at least conventional, way to write the same word.

This dissertation uses the *thok naath* orthography and spellings found in Sharon Hutchinson’s *Nuer Dilemmas* as its template and marks high tones only when they significantly alter a word’s meaning. For example, *caa wä* (“I went”) versus a high tone /*caa wä* (“I do not go”). As in the examples just given, reduplication signals a long vowel sound, though this is often a subjective judgment. Native-speakers do not agree whether the vowel sound in words like “people” ought to be written as *naath* or *nath*. Other spelling “discrepancies” are the result of regional dialects and because there is no consensus on whether words like “divinity” should be spelt as *kuoth* or *kwoth*. I have also followed Godfrey Leinhardt and Douglas Johnson by writing the names of divinity in capital letters to distinguish them from ordinary words. Thus DED refers to a divinity unlike *deŋ* (a word meaning “rain”). I have also added two symbols Hutchinson omitted (*ĩ* and *ë*) because native-speakers use them in their own schools and publications.

## Vowels in *Thok Nuääri* / *thok naath*

<i>ī</i> an aspirated or breathy vowel even more closed than the vowel sound in the English “see”	
<i>i</i> like the vowel sound in the English “see”	<i>ī</i> an aspirated or breathy <i>i</i>
<i>ē</i> an aspirated vowel between <i>i</i> and <i>e</i> similar to the French <i>été</i>	
<i>e</i> like the English “bell”	<i>ē</i> an aspirated <i>e</i>
<i>ĕ</i> an aspirated vowel resembling the vowel in the English “bat”	
<i>ε</i> like the vowel sound in the English “pet”	<i>ĕ</i> an aspirated <i>ε</i>
<i>ü</i> an aspirated vowel resembling the vowel in the English “luck”	
<i>a</i> like the vowel sound in the English “far”	<i>ü</i> an aspirated <i>a</i>
<i>ö</i> an aspirated vowel similar to the vowel in the French <i>pomme</i>	
<i>ɔ</i> like the entirety of the English “awe”	<i>ö</i> an aspirated <i>ɔ</i>
<i>ō</i> an aspirated vowel resembling the vowel in the English “put”	
<i>o</i> like the vowel sound in the English word “boat”	<i>ō</i> an aspirated <i>o</i>
<i>u</i> an aspirated vowel resembling the vowel in the English “fool”	

## Consonants

### (Not Found in North American English) <sup>27</sup>

<i>nh</i>	an interdental “n” (an “n” pronounced with the tongue between the teeth)
<i>ny</i>	a palatal “n” (an “n” pronounced with the tongue touching the back of the teeth)
<i>ŋ</i>	a guttural “n” (an “n” pronounced with the back of the tongue) often Anglicized as “ng”
<i>dh</i>	a “th” sound from “the”, sometimes vocalized as “z” ( <i>th</i> is used for the “th” in “think”)
<i>ɣ</i>	a voiced velar fricative (like <i>ɣ</i> in Greek or <i>ġ</i> in Arabic) often Anglicized as “h” or “gh”
<i>r</i>	a thrilled “r” as in Spanish or the Arabic letter <i>ر</i>
<i>c</i>	equivalent to “ch” in English, sometimes vocalized as “sh”

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<sup>27</sup> In addition to the extra consonants listed above, *Thok Nuääri* / *thok naath* lacks certain English phonemes so native speakers conflate certain English consonants. In practice this means that native speakers can pronounce *p* as either the English consonant “p” or the consonant “f” without signifying any difference in meaning or causing confusion. Native speakers also often pronounce *th* as either “th” (as in “thing”) or “s” so that “think” and “sink” are identical from their perspective.

This dissertation applies the above orthography to all *thok naath* terms with the exception of some contemporaries' personal names, which have established neo-English spellings. I have made this exception because native-speakers who enter academic contexts consistently Anglicize the way they spell their names. For example, John Koang Nyang did not author his 2013 master's thesis, "Nuer Verb Morphology" under the named Jɔn Koan Nyang even though he is an expert on *thok naath* orthography. I have maintained *thok naath* orthography for the names of historical persons like the prophet Dundɛŋ Bɔŋ, who never expressed an interest in belonging within the colonial British regime and "becoming Ngundeng Bong" so to speak. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from *thok naath* are my own or, in the case of songs, collaborations with native-speakers. I have taken both the orthography and translation of words in other Nilotic languages (*thuɔŋjäŋ*, *dhòk anywaa*, *dhø cøllø*) from dictionaries, which are duly cited.

When transliterating Arabic, this dissertation follows the conventions of Anglophone Sudanists and contemporary South Sudanese but also includes English translations and Arabic script in the footnotes to clear up any ambiguities. For example, the White Nile's main tributary appears as the "Bahr el-Jebel" (not the more "correct" transliteration "Baḥr al Jabal"). I then translate this name as "Sea of the Mountain" and put the true Arabic (بحر الجبل) in a footnote for the curious. Similarly words like "paper" appear as *wargak*, not as *waraq* (ورق), after the way South Sudanese pronounce these words in a dialect known as "Juba Arabic" that differs significantly from the Arabic spoken in Khartoum or in any other part of the world. This dissertation also uses the symbols **e**, **u**, **ī**, **a**, **ē**, **i**, and **o** for the seven vowel sounds found in Amharic and **ch**, **j**, **sh**, **zh**, and **ny** for its distinctive consonants. Dots under letters in transliterated Amharic words indicate a glottal explosive.

## Acknowledgements

Too many persons have contributed to this work for me to list them comprehensively here but it seems fitting to recognize those without whom this history would have been impossible. First I would like to thank the Nebraskans who taught me to speak, read, and write *thok naath*: Luak Gaatluak Thor and the late Dɛc Manytap Macar (who would want his named written with the strictest *thok naath* orthography). In Ethiopia's Gambella Region, I am indebted to Jiop Gaatcai and Koat Riɛm Cany for introducing me to Gaa-jiok and Gaa-guonj elders in Matar, and to both Thakdɛl Manytap and Nhial Kanj for connecting me with Gaa-jak elders in the capital, Jukow, Larɛ Woreda, and along the khor Macar in South Sudan. In South Sudan's Nasir County, I would like to thank Puok Dɛŋ, Kailec Yut, and Duoth Dɛŋ Balaŋ for both their expert knowledge and for mobilizing elders on my behalf and express my gratitude for Nyarai's hospitality in Korenge Payam. Conversations with Thomas Tut Thon and Dɛŋ Nhial in Ulang County dramatically changed the course of my inquiry. I owe much of my knowledge of Gaa-jak history to Tap Luak the living library of Longechuk County.

Within academia, this dissertation would have been impossible without my advisor (and tireless editor) at the University of Virginia, Joseph Miller. I am also grateful to the Presbyterian Historical Society for funding my research, and for guiding me through their archives. In the U.K., Douglas Johnson has generously shared his expertise, and I could not have accessed archives in Addis Ababa with the help of Määr Tuom. I am deeply indebted to a man I never met, the late Gabriel Giet Jal, whose dissertation directly inspired much of my research methodology. Finally, as many academics can attest, I would never have completed this work without the support of my wife Nefret.

### Gathering of Elders: Mathiang town, South Sudan

Tap Luak (back row, fourth from the right) was one of the many knowledgeable elders in South Sudan's Eastern Upper Nile State and Ethiopia's Gambella Region who informed this history.



### Members of the Dissertation Committee: University of Virginia

Joseph Miller (second from the left) served as my advisor from 2009 until 2016 and contributed significantly to this text. My wife Nefret is, quite appropriately, both in front and at the center.



## Marking the Past:

### Indigenous Epistemologies of History, “the Nuer”, and Africanist Historians

An evaluation of oral tradition as historical evidence must depend upon detailed ethnographic knowledge of the social functions of folk history, [and] its manner of transmission ... We have to study the way in which whole societies and segments of society have thought of themselves in relation to what they understood as their past and their knowledge of it. We will discover that such a concept of history is logically related to other fundamental concepts in a particular society, and that such a concept of history itself has a historiography.<sup>28</sup>

Bethwell Allan Ogot

A firm chronology can exist only when the evidence from the past bears *marks* ... Sequence, even without reference to years, is the indispensable preliminary ... on which rest all historical explanation.<sup>29</sup>

Joseph C. Miller

What kind of knowledge about the past qualifies as history? All academics wrestle with this epistemological conundrum, but researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa often struggle with conceptualization more than do historians of Europe, Asia, or the post-Columbian Americas. Many scholars confront variants of Frederick Hegel’s racist remark in 1831 that “Africa had no historical part in the world”, but Africanists also face a kind of methodological marginalization.<sup>30</sup> Historians have fetishized written sources since nineteenth-century Europeans codified the

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<sup>28</sup> Bethwell Allan Ogot, “Luo Identity and History”, in Luise White, Stephan Miesher, & David Cohen, ed.s, *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001) p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph C. Miller, “Introduction: Listening to the African Past”, in Joseph C. Miller, ed., *The African Past Speaks* (Kent, England & Hamden, Connecticut: Archon & Dawson, 1980) p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Geogr Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, John Sibree, translator, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1831) p. 99.

modern discipline around written documents they esteemed as direct witnesses. But, with a few famous exceptions, Africans who had not been forcibly incorporated into European empires did not disembody knowledge onto paper or papyrus but chose to mark their pasts as meaningful through embodied communal acts.

One solution to this epistemological gap between living collective knowledge and the documents that historians have adored is to accept a Euro-centric episteme and write only histories of Africa that begin with conventional written sources, in many areas only around 1900. The overwhelming majority of Africanist historians since the late 1970s have chosen this conventional path, but this choice has created something of an intractable intellectual crisis by reducing African history to a much shorter time frame than historical research on any other continent. The founders of professional African history like Roland Oliver and Jan Vansina began in the late 1970s to complain that their successors had forsaken every subject save colonialism, or its consequences, and their lament has continued until today.<sup>31</sup> Richard Reid echoed this concern in the July 2011 issue of *The Journal of African History* by noting that this “foreshortening” has blinded historians to processes of the *longue durée*.<sup>32</sup> In 2013, Carola Lentz noted the same concentration on the very recent past in the context of her research in northern Ghana by writing that “many studies remain ... committed to a presentist perspective. They hardly explore the precolonial history.”<sup>33</sup> This presentism is not just a benign blind spot but also a disservice to the idea of history in Africa. Can anyone imagine contemporary historians of the

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<sup>31</sup> Roland Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold: Pioneering in African History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 363.

Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Reid, “Past and Presentism: the ‘Precolonial’ and the Foreshortening of African History” *The Journal of African History* (2011) p. 135-155.

<sup>33</sup> Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa: Natives and Strangers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013) p. 5.



United States ignoring the American Revolution or the Civil War on the assumption that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are not relevant?

Africanists can and do attempt to address this presentism in various ways, but common approaches through archaeology and historical linguistics still use epistemologies embedded in European and North American frameworks of knowing (which helps explain why so few experts in these methods are Africans). Historians at universities outside of Africa have resorted to these Western epistemologies since the late 1970s in significant part because they lost faith in the credibility of African oral sources to describe much of anything beyond the tellers' own lifetimes. This view of oral knowledge has pushed many Africanists who remain deeply committed to working with communities in Africa toward presentism and driven scholars interested in a deeper sense of history to spend much of their careers in European archives or poring over old missionary dictionaries. Africanists who hope to address presentism in their field have little chance of doing so by developing methods that do not involve research on the continent and should look instead for new research methods that render African communities' own historical knowledge credible to scholars steeped in a contemporary western episteme.

One way to begin vindicating indigenous knowledge of the past in Africa is by recognizing that people who practice different lifeways create different knowledge regimes and archive their knowledge differently. Until 1900, relatively few persons living south of the Sahara Desert chose to conduct an impersonal kind of commerce that required written logs to record the transfer of fungible goods between virtual strangers; thus writing was not part of their processes of archiving knowledge. Instead many communities in African developed mnemonic techniques better suited for distributing resources they considered meaningful among known persons who shared more intimate or communal bonds.

For example, herding communities in East Africa kept no receipts of the number of cows that a groom's family gave the family of the bride when arranging a marriage because they did not need to produce impersonal evidence for strangers and because they did not see cattle as a commodity. Herders in East Africa named and composed entire songs for individual animals whom they treasured. When discussing bride-wealth, they listed each cow by name and used sticks and figurines to represent particular animals. These intimate relationships with cattle enabled herders to celebrate marriages as symbiotic covenants that gave life to the families of both the groom and the bride by allowing both people, and the reproducing animals whose milk they drank each day, to give birth to the next generation. For generations after, families of herders not only continued to remember how many cattle had changed hands at each wedding but also knew these animals, not only by their number, but by their names.

Many Africans who eschewed impersonal commerce also found no need to build highly centralized states, kingdoms, or empires where military elites could use literate bureaucracies to coordinate their domination of thousands, or even millions of strangers across vast domains. These "stateless" Africans invested power in local communities instead of in imperial capitals, but they were not egalitarian, nor pacifists. Instead, ambitious persons in these communities advanced themselves only by persuading others to join them, since local elites rarely acquired the administrative or coercive machinery for independent, arbitrary rule. Communities in Africa who had no emperor, chief, president, or pope may appear ahistorical to westerners, who think of history in these highly hierarchical terms. However Nuer-speaking herders in East Africa, who teach even small children to memorize their ancestors' names to the tenth or twelfth generation, have told me that they pitied westerners who, from their perspective, know almost nothing of their own personal pasts.

This thesis is a history of “the Nuer”, or *nei ti naath* (“people of the people”), “Nilotes” who live in what is now South Sudan and western Ethiopia, and their own distinctive methods of marking the past.<sup>34</sup> Among the most important are their personal names. *Nei ti naath* who still live in rural areas give their children names like “Flood” (*Nyɔc*) or “Smallpox” (*Guɔl*) that reflect the memorable circumstances of their births. For example, one man named “Tamarind Tree” (*Koat*), who lives in what today is South Sudan’s Nasir County, pointed out the exact tree where his mother went into labor as we walked past a particular abandoned cattle-camp settlement. Another girl named “Daughter of Dollars” (*Nyadollar*) in Ethiopia’s Gambella Region will never forget, and will teach her children, that she survived her mother’s troubled pregnancy because relatives in the United States wired money to her parents for a cesarean birth at a local hospital.

This commemorative style of naming makes the genealogies that *nei ti naath* commit to memory rich archives of historical knowledge. Most academics have heard of “the Nuer” only through the iconic ethnographies of anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, where he theorized about the lineages he saw as central to their politics. However, no anthropologist has ever noted the narrative content within these genealogies. When translated into English, the names of ancestors read like “Building Barn [son of], Doubtful Paternity [son of], Sedan Chair, etc.” and that *nei ti naath* know revealing stories behind each name.

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<sup>34</sup> A term linguists use to refer to a large group of languages spoken now from the Saharan fringes of eastern Africa in the north and as far south as Tanzania, and a component of the larger Nilo-Saharan macro-family of African languages.

## Living History: When Names Are Sources



UN Maluth Cuol: Korenge Payam, South Sudan



Nyadollar Jiop Gaatcai: Gambella town, Ethiopia

UN was born around 1999, when the UN was supplying food to many families along the Sobat, including his own. His father, Maluth, was born when his family was far from home, in the “Dinka” (Padaŋ-Ageer) town of Maluth and his grandfather, Cuol (literally “replacement”), was born after the death of an elder sibling. Nyadollar’s father, Jiop (“Axe”), was born when his family had just acquired a new axe. Her grandfather, Gaatcai (“child of Burun”) was born while his family resided in the Burun territory known today as South Sudan’s Mabaan County.

*Nei ti naath* who retain such knowledge about their particular families because they find it inherently meaningful, but they also mark persons in other ways that make their collective knowledge of the past more useful to historians. The most important of these corporate naming practices revolves around what scholars have generally called “age-sets” (*riec*, or *ric* singular) but which I translate as “marriageability-sets” to reflect their primary purpose among the *nei ti naath*. These sets are gender-specific cohorts of male peers initiated at the same time by having a distinctive mark – six parallel horizontal lines - (*gaar*) scarified across their foreheads. Each set receives a collective name like “White-Hearts” (*Boi-loc*), for the symptoms of cattle lung

sickness that devastated their herds in the early 1860s, or “Water-Hyacinth” (*Tuitui*) for the plants that caused massive flooding in 1964 by forming a natural dam across the Nile.

Although the names of these marriageability-sets convey important historical memories in their own right, because *nei ti naath* know which sets their forefathers belonged to, these sets also allow historians to confirm and contextualize the historical circumstances of individuals’ birth names further by identifying notable concentrations of descriptive personal names of the sons in each marriageability-set, such as several named “Fleeing War”, “Marital Dispute”, etc.<sup>35</sup> In short, *nei ti naath* who memorize the relative seniority of marriageability-sets by listing their names in a multi-century sequence have literally marked time on their forefathers’ foreheads.

This thesis draws on thousands of *nei ti naath* birth names collected in 2012 and 2013 in South Sudan’s Upper Nile State and Ethiopia’s adjoining Gambella Region. Each of these named ancestors is joined to a particular marriageability-set (*ric*), which locates them in time, and belonged to a particular territorial “community” (*cien*) that locates them in specific spaces. The original impetus for this insight came from reading the unpublished dissertation of the late Dr. Gabriel Giet Jal, to date the only person among the *nei ti naath* ever to receive a Ph.D. in history.<sup>36</sup> Giet Jal’s passing observation that many men in one particular marriageability-set (*ric*) were named “Drought” (Ræeth) inspired me to gather names systematically and see what patterns these names might reveal.

Most people who speak the Nuer language (*thok naath*) can, if they chose, readily recall and recite the birth names, marriageability-set names, narrative traditions, and songs that form the basis for much of this dissertation. However, for better or worse, my academic perspective

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<sup>35</sup> *Nei ti naath* do not have female marriageability-set. However many of their neighbors do and presumably maintain similar knowledge about the precise seniority of women in previous generations.

<sup>36</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer Before 1920” PhD diss. (School of Oriental and Africans Studies, University of London, 1987).

has led me to find local knowledge meaningful in ways that *nei ti naath* generally have not, especially when analyzing naming patterns quantitatively. Each chapter of this thesis also relies on a number of other kinds of sources drawn from libraries and archives of the kinds that Africanists generally frequent. For example, the first two chapters draw heavily on archaeology and linguistic data as well as oral traditions. Chapters three, four, and five similarly reference documents authored by foreigners in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries as well as a number of historical songs sung by *nei ti naath*. The result is that “Marking Nuer Histories” is something of a hybrid narrative that aspires to bridge epistemological gaps between distinct ways of knowing of the past, my own and theirs.

### **Names, Numbers, and Meaningful Knowledge: A Short Historiography**

Authors in a “western” cultural tradition have written histories describing the regions of Africa nearest to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea for as long as people there have used writing to know their pasts. Some Egyptian hieroglyphs are over five thousand years old, and in the fifth century B.C.E. Herodotus, the celebrated “father of history” as we know it, also used oral sources to write histories of northern Africa. Subsequent scholars like the Manethon in Ptolemaic Egypt and the medieval-era Muslim scholars Al-Masudi, Ibn Khaldun, and Leo Africanus continued using oral sources to write histories of North Africa, parts of West Africa, and the East African coast from antiquity through the early modern period. Nevertheless, for most of the continent, scholars began writing history only under European rule in the early twentieth century.

Many of these first modern historians were relatively elite African men who had imbibed western concepts of history as written, as they underwent European training to become colonial

clerks or Christian clergy. Reverend Samuel Johnson and Jacob Egharevba in Nigeria, Reverend John Henderson Soga in South Africa, Nathaniel Mtui in Tanzania, Zablon Okola and Paul Mboya in Kenya, and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahim in the Sudan all produced histories of their natal communities during the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> These historians drew on oral sources but rarely discussed their epistemological bases, presumably for two reasons. First, they were barred from the racist and imperialist academy of their eras, where scholars debated methods and philosophies of history. Secondly, these authors were, to borrow Derek Petersen’s phrase, “ethnic patriots”, who wrote in praise of the Xhosa, or the Luo, or Sudanese Arabs, for audiences who shared an intuitive understanding of the oral sources these authors presented.<sup>38</sup>

These reasons for neglecting epistemological inquiries into the historicity of oral sources disappeared when Europe’s colonies in Africa began to gain their independence and western universities first began to accept African history as a legitimate field of study. Early professional researchers like Kenneth Onwika Dike, in Nigeria, acknowledged almost immediately that Africanists needed to define an epistemology (if not several) for their oral sources as they wrote for wider audiences, battled the old colonial guard, and explored questions about historical method.<sup>39</sup> Jan Vansina’s *De la Tradition Orale* broke new ground in 1961 as the first book to

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<sup>37</sup> Writing for local audiences, many of the avocational historians published in local languages and have been translated into English or French only when the wider academic community has taken interest. For example, Jacob Egharevba wrote his history of Benin back in 1934 in Edo. Only in 1956, during the build-up to independence, did Nigerian historians at the University of Ibadan translate the work into English.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the early historians of this era in East Africa see

Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 20-25.

For more on Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahim see

Heather Sharkey, “Arabic Literature and the Nationalist Imagination in Kordofan” in Michael Kevane & Endre Stiansen (ed.s) *Kordofan Invaded: Peripheral Incorporation and Social Transformation in Islamic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) p. 174-175.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Dike, “History and Politics” *West Africa* (1953).

offer a fully formed methodology for historians turning to oral sources, especially in Africa, but this seminal work did not entirely escape Euro-centric presumptions about the epistemology of history. Vansina primarily described oral traditions maintained by official court historians within African kingdoms as viably reliable but cautioned historians that such knowledge was limited to “territorially stable” and relatively centralized polities like the Kuba and Rwanda kingdoms.<sup>40</sup>

Vansina’s framework had limited applicability because most Africans lived not in the hierarchical frameworks of western history but in what anthropologists had classified (rather negatively) as “stateless societies”. These “stateless societies” supposedly organized themselves through systems of “segmental lineages” that supposedly coalesced only to face outsiders and therefore had no royal courts, much less court historians.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, most Africans remained without history, in the minds of academics, until 1967, when Bethwell Alan Ogot published *History of the Southern Luo: Migrations and Settlement, 1500-1900*, outlining a history of “stateless” Nilotes in western Kenya, coincidentally linguistic relatives of the *nei ti naath*.

Ogot’s monograph used informal and gender-specialized schools run by Luo historians to contrast the rich knowledge of the past maintained within Nilotic herding communities with the ill-informed, and often contradictory, European travelers’ logs for the same region. Africanists praised Ogot’s work for opening doors for historical research across much more of the continent than Vansina’s “kingdoms” but struggled to pursue his model of community-based research and local knowledge because the field’s center of gravity shifted overseas. By 1970, prestigious African universities like Ibadan, Dar es Salaam, Dakar, Makerere, and Nairobi were facing

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<sup>40</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, H. M. Wright, translator, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1965) p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard and Meyers Fortes, *African Political Systems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).



financial crises, political purges, and in some cases civil war, and began to lose the capacity to support and publish professional research. Influential historians like Kenneth Onwika Dike, Jan Vansina, and Terence Ranger left universities in Nigeria, the then Zaïre (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Tanzania to join the rapidly multiplying (and better funded) African Studies programs in North America. The U.S. and the former colonial powers of Europe became the new centers setting the tone for graduate and post-graduate historical research in Africa.<sup>42</sup>

One consequence of this remote basis of African history was that younger scholars increasingly directed their research toward the colonial era, since they could more easily access archives in Europe and because even intensive language courses in the U.S. were never as effective as true language immersion. Some scholars continued to focus on indigenous knowledge and wrote histories that did not revolve around European rule, but even these committed Africanists tended to array elements of local knowledge along time-lines based on Europe's Gregorian calendar rather than allowing alternative indigenous ways of knowing to showcase their own epistemological frameworks.

Several Africanist historians trained in North America during the early 1970s studied under Vansina at the University of Wisconsin and went on to scour Central Africa for "kingdoms" where they could test and refine their mentor's methods. Other historians who worked in East Africa generally received their training at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and tended to relate their scholarship to Bethwell Ogot's work on the cattle-keeping Luo. These experts in the "stateless societies" of East Africa included John Lamphear, Richard Waller, Alan Jacobs, and John Tosh, who focused on "age-sets" (groups of peers initiated into generational cohorts) among the Maasai and other pastoralists as a means of

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<sup>42</sup> Dike accepted a position at Harvard in 1971 but returned to Nigeria 1978.

historicizing genealogies and remembered lists of the “age-sets”.<sup>43</sup> However, this generation of historians explored age-sets or other forms of local knowledge not as historical sources with logics of their own but rather as means of generating dates they could plot on Europe’s Christian calendar, as Tosh proudly explained in 1978.

East African societies whose social organization is based on age-sets or generation-sets provide the historian with an invaluable tool. Normally the sets are named groups which follow each other in a fixed cycle at regular intervals, and historical events are ascribed in oral tradition to the time of one set or another. In this way Masai [sic] chronology extends back to the late eighteenth century, and Kikuyu chronology to the seventeenth century.”<sup>44</sup>

For historians like Tosh, age-sets were valuable to the extent that they mimicked the Gregorian calendar of Europe in their fixed regularity, or any other dating system built around numbers and the counting of “regular intervals”. This quest for datable oral proxies led historians to spend their epistemological energy worrying about objective temporal consistency because they envisioned meaningful history as using these rigid temporal benchmarks.

Historians hoped to convert age-sets into numbered years like 1896, which historians use to show that the Abyssinians (now called Ethiopians) defeated an Italian invasion a few months after the British conquered Asante (a realm in modern-day Ghana). No historian pretended that the number of years since a year ascribed to the birth of Jesus had any bearing on the events of 1896 in Africa, and they did not expect African dating systems to convey knowledge in dimensions that Europeans had never dreamed of. The historians who focused on converting *nei ti naath* marriageability-sets into Christian dates included Douglas Johnson and Gabriel Giet Jal,

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<sup>43</sup> John Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

Richard Waller, “The Maasai and the British 1895-1905, the Origins of an Alliance” *The Journal of African History* Vol. 17, No. 4 (1976), pp. 529-553.

Alan Jacobs, “The Traditional Political Organization of the Pastoral Masai” Ph.D. diss. (Oxford, 1965).

<sup>44</sup> John Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) p.12.

who counted Nuer “age-sets” without translating their *thok naath* names to reveal their historical meanings. These historians often experienced their quests for dates as the epistemological equivalent of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. They published their best Gregorian estimates but continually worried that the necessarily assumed “regular intervals” might be a chimera. This concern drove them to continue directing energy toward verifying or improving their estimates, leaving much of the actual history of the marriageability-sets to cultural anthropologists.

Anthropologists from Japan and Europe like Eisei Kurimoto, Simon Simonse, Günter Schlee, Kaori Kawai, and Shun Sato generated significant scholarship on “age-sets” throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Some, like Eisei Kurimoto and Simon Simonse, went to considerable lengths to present the particular kind of peer cohorts called *monyomiji* (or *mojomiji* in some languages) in the southeast corner of what is now eastern South Sudan as historical by working to uncover how communities had adopted *monyomiji* from their neighbors. These anthropologists were also careful to distinguish particular traditions they glossed as “the *monyomiji* system” (which enabled middle-aged men to govern their communities collectively) from “the *gada* system” that their Oromo-speaking neighbors across the modern-day borders with Ethiopia and Kenya pegged more closely to regulating relationships between fathers and sons.<sup>45</sup> However, being anthropologists and not historians, these scholars viewed “age-sets” as present-day functional systems rather than as sources that maintained knowledge of the past.

Ironically these historians and anthropologists of East Africa passed over the unique epistemological strengths of at least some “age-set” traditions (not to mention the meanings of personal birth names preserved in genealogies) at the same time as scholars of North America

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<sup>45</sup> Eisei Kurimoto and Simon Simonse (ed.s), *Conflict, Age and Power in North East Africa: Age Systems in Transition* (Oxford & Nairobi: James Currey & East African Educational Publishing, 1998).

and Europe began celebrating the subjectivity of oral sources. Conservative historians had long criticized oral sources, both stories handed down from generation to generation and personal reminiscences, as biased by the perspectives of the tellers of these tales, but this methodological debate took different paths in separate fields. Vansina's *De la Tradition Orale* had not challenged the positivism that still ruled academia in the late 1950s but worked to meet positivist historians' epistemological requirement of preserved direct witness for African contexts. Consequently, Vansina and many of his students developed techniques to work past the subsequently acknowledged propaganda aspect of oral sources. They also focused on clues that allowed them to reverse the trajectories of traditions that changed over time, particularly when African "informants" had drawn on written histories when telling oral traditions and caused modifications that David Henige called "feedback".<sup>46</sup>

By the 1970s, historians in more established fields had begun to worry less about "facts" asserted orally that they considered sufficiently documented and began focusing more on how subjective knowledge made history meaningful as they entered a historiographical period commonly glossed today as the cultural turn. In 1978 and 1979, social historians Paul Thompson and Michael Frisch turned the epistemological qualities attributed to oral sources on their head by arguing that subjective memory served "as the object, not merely the method, of oral history".<sup>47</sup> Social historians of the cultural turn argued that the oral "bias" that positivist

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<sup>46</sup> David Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimeria* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1974) p. 95-117.

David Henige, "The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands" *The Journal of African History* Vol. 14 No. 2 (1973) p. 223-235.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Michael Frisch, "Oral History and Hard Times" *Oral History Review* Vol. 7 (1979) p. 77.

historians had condemned was exactly what made oral knowledge valuable for exploring how people made their pasts meaningful, and hence memorable.

Younger Africanist historians embraced this new epistemology, especially those working among herders in East Africa, who had no lists of kings and thus had never fit particularly well within the methodology that Vansina had developed for Central African kingdoms. The most vocal of these younger scholars was David William Cohen, who had started his career among seemingly “stateless” Soga (modern Uganda). In 1977, Cohen began arguing that Vansina’s search for stable recollections elided the complicated processes of generating and maintaining oral traditions through situational adaptations. Cohen saw these traditions as continually altered, both consciously and sub-consciously, by ordinary community members “through the complex networks of relationships, association, and contact that constitute social life”.<sup>48</sup> Cohen stressed that historians could not depend on oral traditions alone, regardless of how tightly controlled a chain of stable transmission from one trained expert to the next might appear. He argued that historians should focus on oral historiographies that contextualized localized memories of ancestors’ marriages and movements that, in the aggregate, contained knowledge of the past that had no place in highly selective (and generally propagandistic) official narrative oral traditions.

Cohen’s initial stance challenged Vansina’s techniques but also complemented his original project of uncovering centuries of African history through local knowledge, albeit with indigenous knowledge more characteristic of that of East African herders. However, Cohen’s movement toward popular and diffuse sources also predisposed him, and other historians of the 1980s, to eventually break with many of the epistemological underpinnings of the discipline of historical discipline itself. This break allowed them to use oral sources with worrying about

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<sup>48</sup> David William Cohen, *Womunafu’s Bunafu: A Study of Authority in a Nineteenth-Century African Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1977).

positivist “truth” but also helped undermine the epistemological basis for much of early African history up until that point. Joseph Miller’s edited volume *The African Past Speaks* in 1980 included a range of the approaches of used by older Africanists like Vansina and younger challengers like Cohen. However, this incipient dialogue dissipated as younger historians who used indigenous knowledge essentially stopped writing early African history and Vansina himself turned to other sources like historical linguistics.

Gifted historians like Luise White joined Cohen in focusing on the subjectivities within oral sources on the recent past, often as recovered from written sources, as their way of describing how Africans made history. However their close analysis of the process of creating knowledge drew their temporal focus toward the moments of their own interviews instead of the substance of the accounts that Africans recited or performed, at least if they related events that predated Europeans. Cohen’s own writings essentially became cultural anthropology instead of history, a fact he implicitly acknowledged when he began calling himself a historical anthropologist. Without intending to do so, Africanists who followed this path empowered conservative historians who still insisted that the study of Africa belonged to anthropology, just as it had in the colonial era, because “real” history was the privilege of literate “civilization”.

Vansina and Africanists from his generation were highly sensitive to this problem of reducing African history to a historicized kind of anthropology. Vansina decried the post-modern scholarship Cohen helped inspire for eroding historians’ abilities to study the past, particularly in an address to the African Studies Association in 1992.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately for Vansina, his efforts to refine his method by publishing a thoroughly revised approach to *Oral Traditions* in 1985 had

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<sup>49</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, “‘Living by Fluidity’: Oral Histories, Material Custodies and the Politics of Archiving” in Caroline Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh ed.s, *Refiguring the Archives*, (Clyson Printers: Cape Town, 2002) p. 209-228.

not satisfied historians of the cultural turn. More importantly, no monograph of method could address the underlying problem that accessing indigenous knowledge of the distant past required levels of linguistic and cultural competence that often taxed the abilities of historians who trained outside of Africa. Vansina and other enthusiasts of early African history responded creatively by embracing sources, and their corresponding observers' forms of knowledge, that they could access. Generally this meant developing materials not maintained by local African communities.

In 1990, Vansina published *Paths in the Rainforest*, which presented his own approach to the linguistic sources other Africanist historians like Christopher Ehret had been using to reconstruct the etymological roots of words like “to herd” in particular language families and thereby date the domestication of cattle, sheep, and goats to the eras in which the progenitors of modern language communities had invented words to refer to them. *Paths in the Rainforest* used central and western Bantu words for modern political practices to reconstruct millennia of politics in these regions without worrying about the propagandistic agendas of particular oral narratives about them. Nevertheless, this quest for relatively objective truth in “words and things” had also driven historians like Vansina to step outside historical knowledge maintained within African communities. In short, this method of knowing the past through reconstructed vocabularies drew viably on African words but did not include African voices.

### **Toward an Africanist Historiology**

The lingering perils of presentism that African historians face today flow from this fairly extreme epistemological choice between either focusing on knowledge within African communities or writing African histories that predate European sources. Africanists can escape this trap by developing a different way of knowing history or, to invoke a term popularized by

Martin Heidegger, a different historiology. Africanist historians have more valuable knowledge to offer when their ways of knowing differ from both present-oriented anthropologists and historians who use sources with epistemological roots in nineteenth-century Western Europe. This thesis pursues that goal by blending the knowledge of the past maintained within rural communities in the Nilotic Sudan with sources and epistemologies of history found in contemporary academia. “Marking Nuer Histories” fills a temporal gap in African history by focusing primarily on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it also hopes to bridge an epistemological divide between Africanists in academia and the *nei ti naath* elders who inform much of this thesis.

A number of twenty-first-century Africanists have helped lay the ground work for this thesis with scholarship built on the kind of local knowledge regimes that also drive its narrative. Tamara Giles-Vernick’s monograph *Cutting the Vine of the Past* published in 2002 represented an unusually thoughtful engagement with indigenous knowledge as a fundamentally historical epistemology. Giles-Vernick described how the Mpiemu, who reside in the remnants of the rainforests of what is now the Central African Republic, have created a new identity in the recent past by navigating both their changing physical environments and their personal and collective histories through a category of knowledge they call *doli*.<sup>50</sup> Giles-Vernick explained this Mpiemu way of knowing by referencing French philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s theories about “the body as object”, the place where humans access the world, become persons, and enact “historical processes of meaning-making”.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately her history still focused on the early twentieth century as the period that formed the context for a contemporary Mpeimu dispersal and posture

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<sup>50</sup> Tamara Giles-Vernick, *Cutting the Vines of the Past: Environmental Histories of the Central African Rain Forest* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 72 & 140.



of lament for a lost coherent past. Nevertheless, *Cutting the Vines* revealed that local communities altered their knowledge regimes over time (meaning they had own oral historiographies) and that indigenous knowledge involves more than the environmental conservation for which they are generally praised by UNESCO.

In 2005, Heidi Gengenbach's *Binding Memories: Women as Makers and Tellers of History in Magude, Mozambique* shifted Giles-Vernick's discussion of embodied memory toward profoundly tactile expressions of it by showing how women in southern Mozambique remembered the past through their bodily ornaments and scarification. Gengenbach described gender-specific knowledge regimes by contrasting how men generally knew the past through storytelling, public hearings, and verbal debates while women recorded their pasts physically, with or without accompanying narratives. Gengenbach demonstrated that practices early ethnographers often glossed as "tribal marks" not only have a history of their own but also mark aspects of the past beyond themselves.

Shane Doyle's article from 2008 in *The Journal of African History* entitled "'The Child of Death': Personal Names and Parental Attitudes toward Morality in Bunyoro, Western Uganda, 1900–2005" offered an example of what historians learn from birth names in East Africa.<sup>52</sup> Doyle used colonial-era missionary baptismal records to show that Banyoro parents, who regularly named children "the child of death" in 1900, ceased doing so as child mortality rates dropped under British medical regimes and they began to assume that newborns would live. The *nei ti naath*, who live over a thousand miles northeast of Bunyoro, have practiced a very similar approach to naming infants, though – sadly – birth names like "Will Die" (*Bilieu*) and

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<sup>52</sup> Shane Doyle, "'The Child of Death': Personal Names and Parental Attitudes toward Mortality in Bunyoro, Western Uganda, 1900-2005" *The Journal of African History* Vol. 49 No. 3 (2008) p. 341-382.

“Replacement” (*Cuɔl*) have remained very common in the distressed circumstances of South Sudan in the early twenty-first century.

Doyle was not the first historian to use naming patterns evident in written sources to trace when communities changed their attitudes on particular topics. That distinction probably belongs to Richard Bulliet, a historian of Islam who, in the 1979, applied a similar technique on a much larger scale to Persian genealogies to reveal that most Persian families converted to Islam in the ninth century even though their living descendants claim seventh-century conversions to associate themselves with early heroes of their faith.<sup>53</sup> Doyle’s more modest work is significant in the context of this thesis because it demonstrates that at least one community that speaks an Eastern Bantu language has used birth names to capture some of the same subjective experiences as their Nilotic-speaking counterparts throughout the region. These similarities in historical knowledge among the *nei ti naath* in this history and the communities in Uganda and Mozambique described by Doyle and Gengenbach do not suggest the existence of any one pan-African way of knowing the past. However, in pointing to these parallels in widely dispersed and sharply differing contexts, this history does hope to spur the imagination of other Africanist historians interested in engaging local knowledges of meaningful pasts.

## Chapter Summaries

The thesis opens with a chapter sketching early historical eras in the Nilotic-speaking regions west of the Upper Nile before *nei ti naath* began initiating the marriageability-sets that structure the rest of the narrative. It uses an ethnography of oral “genesis myths” to discern the historical messages these tales carry about new breeds of cattle and sorghum attested in the

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay on Quantitative History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

archaeological record around 1400 C.E. The historical narrative goes on to suggest why River-Lake Nilotes in the region apparently began extracting their front teeth to physically mark a prosperous lifestyle that they built around these new lifeways. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how their descendants at the end of the eighteenth century created the basic template for the ethnic groups we know today as they specialized between cattle-grazing communities who used land extensively and practiced exogamy to help them negotiate distant and irregular contacts (the dry-side) and those who cultivated intensively and increasingly organized their communities around land-owning chiefs (the wet-side).

The second chapter relates how, at the turn of the nineteenth-century, dry-side herders developed innovative ways of initiating gendered marriageability-sets as they competed for the loyalty of young bachelors. Dry-side communities known generally as “Dinka” (*jiëëŋ*) or as “Nuer” (*nei ti naath*) developed these strategies to prevent polygynous elders from alienating male youths by abusing their control of livestock and marriages to claim wives for themselves. Some of the *nei ti naath* communities west of the Bahr el-Jebel River experimented with facial scarification to mark their marriageability-sets and to recruit males from other communities with less effective rites. *Nei ti naath* became heavily invested in a kind of scarification called *gaar* around the time they initiated the marriageability-set named “Turning-Hearts” (circa 1810) to commemorate the assimilationist successes that created this generation. Around 1820 a hundred-year-flood also devastated *jiëëŋ* to the east, who lacked this efficacious tradition, and opened spaces for *nei ti naath* migrants to take this western innovation to the east.

Chapter three focuses more specifically on how *nei ti naath* newcomers in the east gained control of these *jiëëŋ* and of other communities living in the eastern Upper Nile between 1828 and the 1860s. *Nei ti naath* warriors lost enough of the battles during this process to name one

marriageability-set “Eagle’s Carrion Cry” (circa 1840, for the bodies left in the field), but they also peacefully assimilated autochthons whose sons adopted *gaar* in order to marry *nei ti naath* daughters. This kind of marital incorporation eventually compelled everyone in the region to change how they understood their own ethnic identities. Different *jiëëŋ* either became *nei ti naath*, or forsook exogamy, or adopted their own versions of *gaar*. The wet-side communities who refused ethnic conversion had to adapt to the newcomers by giving up cattle completely, and became extreme versions of their former selves. *Nei ti naath* in the east who incorporated outsiders also lost political consensus based on descent and, when stressed by drought, began to fight among themselves. The complex processes of adaptation described in each case belie views prevailing in the historiography of these events as one-dimensional “Nuer conquests”.

The fourth chapter examines how the succeeding generation of these eastern *nei ti naath* between the 1870s and 1898 reconstituted a sense of moral community by drawing on the spiritual beliefs of the assimilated autochthons among them. These composite communities rallied around an innovative *nei ti naath* officiant who transformed himself into the prophet of a local *jiëëŋ* divinity and built a shrine in the same style as his eastern *jiëëŋ* predecessors. This chapter adds to previous histories of this well-known and seemingly unchallenged prophet by focusing on his opponents and using birth-naming patterns to chart the uneven rise and fall of his influence in specific local communities.

The final chapter redefines the early twentieth century in the Upper Nile region as a time when *nei ti naath* militarized by acquiring guns from foreigners, first to hunt elephants and sell the ivory for cattle, then to defend themselves, and finally as symbols of prestige under colonial authority. *Nei ti naath* initiated this trend by importing guns from Ethiopia and continued it after British colonial forces finally defeated them in 1920. Ultimately herding communities could not

repel troops armed with machine guns or R.A.F. bombers, but they did compel the colonial regime to meet their demands of patronage. By 1931, British officers who sought to govern *nei ti naath* had resorted to giving out Remington rifles to local elites who converted these symbols of power into instruments of internal political competition.

The conclusion reframes the processes of historical change described in earlier chapters as fundamentally additive, rather than as sequences of breaks with the past. These closing remarks also return to questions of method and historiology by deploying this additive logic to describe the cumulative nature of the indigenous knowledge invoked throughout the thesis. This juxtaposition of history and historiography highlights how *nei ti naath* have incorporated the new alongside the old in terms of both their history and their historiology to give a richer sense of the integrated processes of “Marking Nuer Histories”.

# Chapter1

## History as Exogamous Kinship:

### Agro-Pastoralist Mobility, Pulling Teeth, and Ethnogenesis After 1400

#### Chapter Overview

Until the late twentieth century, the communities outsiders now describe with the proper noun “Nuer” referred to themselves in this general sense with the common noun of *naath* (“people”) or *nei ti naath* (“people of the people”). These “people of the people” used idioms of exogamous kinship to describe how they belonged within various “communities” (*cieŋ*, the singular form of the noun). They also create flexible links between communities by extending discourses of shared ancestry to form larger confederations (groups Evans-Pritchard called “tribes” or “maximal lineages”). These confederations prevented war among neighbors by adjudicating blood feuds that often arose among cattle herders.<sup>54</sup> These *nei ti naath* did not recognize a political or moral union with everyone who spoke their language (*thok naath* or “mouth of the people”), but they did share an abstract idea that real people had ties of exogamous kinship with people, making them, in their words, *nei ti naath*, “people of the people”.

*Nei ti naath* have affirmed and reinforced this distinguishing sense of self in their oldest stories of “beginning” (*tuk*), which focus on the “beginning of people” (*tuk naath*) or on the oldest named ancestor in each confederation. Foreign scholars have been recording similar versions of these oral traditions for a hundred years but have overlooked the central message of these tales. They revolve around defining “kinship” (*maar*) as exogamous by policing the

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<sup>54</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 6.

boundaries of what these agro-pastoralists consider “incest” (*ruaal*). Scholars who have missed these messages have also made the mistake of treating these tales as mere myths describing only contemporary values rather than as an epistemologically valid way of knowing the past. The essence of these tales of *tuk naath* matches archaeologists’ reports that, by 1400 A.D., residents of the Sudd had begun adopting a more mobile form of agro-pastoralism that motivated herders to expand their kinship networks as they encountered unfamiliar *naath* as they ranged across wider territories. In other words, earlier *nei ti naath* apparently experienced this formative period in their history as the same sort of redefinition of kinship as hyper-exogamous described in contemporary oral traditions. Thus the tales scholars have examined as present-day ideology also have intelligible historical referents.

Most “people” (though not all) who now neighbor the *nei ti naath* speak one of many closely related languages that linguists have classified as a River-Lake Nilotic. In linguistic terms, River-Lake Nilotic is a sub-set of the larger Nilotic language family spoken by many herding communities in East Africa from Sudan to Tanzania, all of whom also share a tradition of distinguishing themselves from non-Nilotes by removing at least two of their lower front teeth. Within the specific context of the Sudd, all River-Lake Nilotes have essentially called themselves “people” or “the real people”, but communities that practice different means of food production have qualified this claim through correspondingly different discourses.

River-Lake Nilotes who practice a highly mobile style of agro-pastoralism, included *nei ti naath* and those known to foreigners as “the Dinka” (*jiëëŋ* or *jän* in their own language), have emphasized their commitment to the exogamous marriages that have enabled them to negotiate chronic disputes with fellow herders. Alternatively, sedentary River-Lake Nilotes like “the Shilluk” (or *cøllø*), “the Anuak” (or *anywaa*), and the Northern Luo have stressed their status as

“those who share” (*anywak*), and “those without the evil-eye” (*luo*), or jealousy, to highlight the values that cultivating communities have used to maintain harmony where landowners invariably accrue more wealth than their tenants.

Unbeknownst to previous scholars, each group of “people” has also created the current names for their neighbors that reflected their own perspectives on regional processes of economic specialization that seem to have coalesced around 1400 C.E. The *nei ti naath*, for example, call the *anywaa* “hunters” (*bär*), and the *cøllø* “diggers” (*tæt*), while the term “Nuer” comes from *nuääär*, a subspecies of sorghum closely associated with *nei ti naath* modes of agro-pastoralism. This kind of food-production discourse, and the exigencies of pursuing similar lifestyles, encouraged mobile herders (or “dry-side” communities) and sedentary cultivators (or “wet-side” communities) to develop traditions about political and spiritual power that resembled their fellow specialists. At the same time, communities similar to one another also had to compete more intensely for the same resources, and this competition drove them to develop any further differences that seemed to offer an advantage.



# Map 1.0

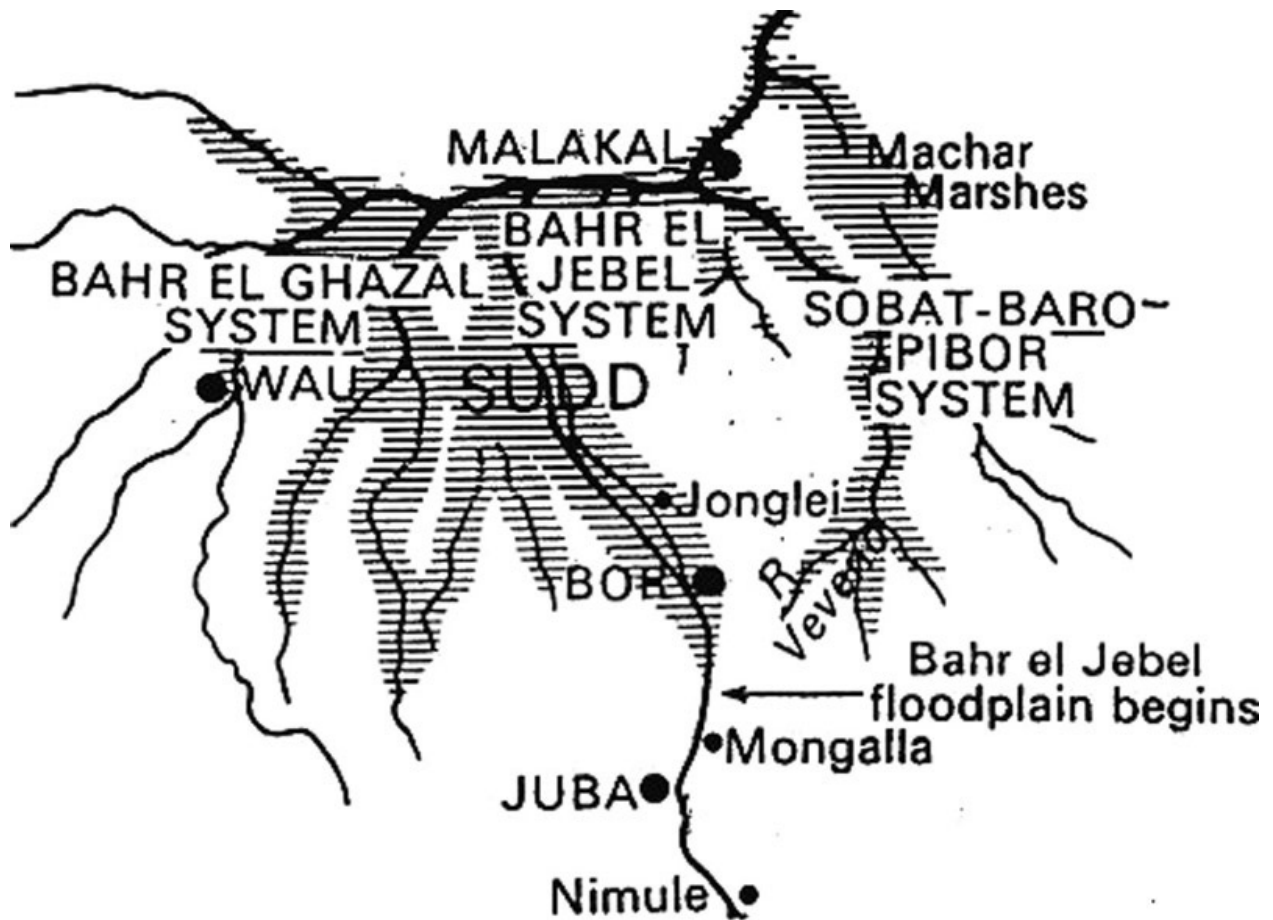
## The Nile River Basin



Courtesy of the World Bank's Map Design Unit

## Map 1.1

### The Upper Nile Region and the “Sudd”



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<sup>55</sup> Reproduced from Paul Howell and Michael Lock, *The Jonglei Canal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

## Inventing Incest: Tales *Tuk Naath* and *Tuk Kiir*

For the last hundred years scholars have been recording similar versions of two distinct origin stories maintained among communities that speak “Nuer”, one for the Eastern and Western Jikāny confederations and another for everyone else.<sup>56</sup> The Jikāny tale hinges on a famous ancestor named *Kiir* (that is “gourd”), while the primary *tuk naath* tradition centers on a famous tamarind tree. At face value these tales appear incompatible because they invoke different images and name different ancestors, but for those who understand *nei ti naath* customs about exogamy and incest, both tales carry the same message about creating kinship through exogamous marriages.

Versions of the broader *tuk naath* narrative recorded by colonial officers in the 1910s and 1920s, then by Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s, and again by historians Giet Jal and Johnson in the 1980s, all used essentially the same plot (though different narrators often selectively played up “their” own particular ancestors’ roles in it).<sup>57</sup> In the most basic versions of the tale, two “brothers” named *Yaak* and *Gëë* came together under a particular tamarind tree (or *koat*) called *Koat-Lic* on the west bank of the White Nile’s main channel through the Sudd, a river now called

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<sup>56</sup> When *nei ti naath* began developing a sense of nationalist identity late in the twentieth century, they began using the term *Thok Nuääri* “mouth of the Nuers” which is a proper noun every bit as much as the word “English”. I have not used this term here because the idea of speaking “the language of people” is different from the idea of speaking “the language of the Nuer people” in several important respects. Most obviously the older term suggests no meaningful political unity among those who share this language but merely implies that those who cannot speak “the mouth of the people” may not be fully human.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Cecil Jackson, “The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1923) p. 69-76.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 139.

Douglas Johnson, “History and Prophecy among the Nuer of Southern Sudan”, PhD diss. (University of California Los Angeles, 1980) p. 88.

Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” PhD diss. (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 14-15.

the Bahr el-Jebel (“Sea of the Mountain” in Arabic).<sup>58</sup> At this sacred tree, the brothers cut a steer in half (from head to tail) to prohibit “incest” (*ruaal*) between their offspring. In 2013, *nei ti naath* were still describing Koat-Lic as a sacred site where Yaak and Gëë memorialized their common bond by vivisecting a steer in this manner and declaring that the descendants of Yaak or Gëë could not marry one another.<sup>59</sup> They also agreed that this tree had stood as a boundary between the “descendants” of Yaak to the south and those of Gëë to the north until it eventually burned down (an event that British authorities observed firsthand in 1918).

Evans-Pritchard treated this tale as his crowning evidence of cultural ahistoricism among “the Nuer”. Evans-Pritchard occasionally acknowledged that ethnic groups with some monarch-like figure (like the Azande along the border with what was then the Belgian Congo) had some kind of history, but he was also a champion of structural-functionalist theory that often treated human cultures as static systems. The iconic ethnographer saw enough of this ahistorical philosophy in his interlocutors’ stories to report blithely that “it astounded me ... [but] is in no way remarkable to the Nuer, that the tree under which mankind came into being was still standing in Western Nuerland a few years ago”.<sup>60</sup> Fortunately, he also published observations that help explain why tales of *tuk naath* hinge on cutting a steer from stem to stern.

In the most serious cases [of incest] an ox, must be sacrificed ...  
The beast is slaughtered by being cut vertically in twain from head

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<sup>58</sup> Bahr el-Jebel (بحر الجبل) is the name of the primary tributary of the White Nile that flows out Africa’s Great Lakes to the south before joining various other rivers near the northern end of the Sudd and, in technical terms, officially becoming the White Nile. In everyday speech people often refer to this tributary as being the Nile.

Since *Jiath* means simply “tree” and Koat-Lic is sometimes called *Jiath Liec* which is how the Thar Jiath (that is “under tree”) oil fields in modern-day Unity State’s Koch County received their name.

<sup>59</sup> Duoth Deng Balaj, interview with author, Nasir town, South Sudan (February 7, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Time-Reckoning” *Journal of the International African Institute* vol. 12 no. 2 (1939) p. 218.

to tail ... these cuttings are spoken about as *bakene rual*, the cutting, or splitting, in two of incest.<sup>61</sup>

Given that *nei ti naath* use the same rite to address incest that they also say marked the “beginning of people”, the most reasonable interpretation of tales of *tuk naath* is as a story about redefining bonds of kinship and transforming mere “humans” (*raan*) into beings morally valid as “people” (*naath*) whose exogamous relationships made them *nei ti naath*.

Evans-Pritchard’s own observations further support this historical interpretation of the tale because he also recorded that *nei ti naath* said that Gëë and Yaak, the first “people” (*naath*) were descendants of “*Ran*, Man, whose father is said to be *Kwoth*, God.”<sup>62</sup> This observation is direct evidence that *nei ti naath* explicitly told Evans-Pritchard that human beings pre-dated Koat-L̥ic. Taken as a whole, these traditions actually declare that divinity created *Homo sapiens* sometime before Gëë and Yaak but that it was these particular ancestors (and others who came to Koat L̥ic) who created meaningful history (*tuk naath*) by inventing a kind of exogamous kinship.

This distinction between mere “humans” (i.e. *Homo sapiens*) and real “people” (as in one’s family and friends) is at the heart of the tale of Koat-L̥ic because the story describes how kinless human individuals were transformed into exogamous communities of “people”. Wild tamarind trees have a life span of several centuries, so even an oppressively literal understanding of Koat-L̥ic allows for more historical depth than Evans-Pritchard imagined, but actual oral traditions have not treated Koat-L̥ic as a single literal tree and name persons who were alive before this “beginning”. For example, one elder living among the Gaawäär confederation (a group claiming descent from Kar and War who now live east of Koat-L̥ic) gave this account in the 1980s.

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 184.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 239.

At first people came from the west in the sky of Divinity. They came down one by one. Kar came first and was followed by Kuec, and Loh came down too. Their brother War remained in the sky. They came and stayed in a place called Koat-Liec [sic]. Kar said “Our brother is in the sky, we have to trick him to come down. We have to kill a cow and roast the meat. There is a tamarind tree which starts in the ground and goes to the sky. When he smells the meat he will come by this tamarind tree ...

War came down and found the meat and ate it, then he went away to hide himself ... Kar decided to cut the tree that goes to the sky, because if he left it, War would come and eat and go straight to the sky ... War came down ... When Loh came where he [War] was he asked him, “Are you the one?” He brought him out.

In the beginning it was Kar who brought people down. And then each section went to his cattle camp ... Yes, War brought people down. People came to Koat-Liec [sic]. This is how people [*naath*] came into existence.<sup>63</sup>

At first glance this tale appears to present a number of logical contradictions. How could “people” come into existence at Koat-Lic if brothers were already living in the sky? How could a tamarind that Kar felled back in this “beginning” also burn down in 1918? If Kar described War as “our brother”, why did Loh not even recognize him and have to ask him who he was? All these apparent inconsistencies actually make sense when viewing this story as a tale of strangers becoming brothers who practice exogamy and are thus *nei ti naath*. Post-modern scholars may suggest this tale can really tell us only about the 1980s, or even only about the precise context of one conversation. However, at the very least, the passage above is essentially the same as a Gaawäär account recorded in 1923.<sup>64</sup> Anyone suggesting that the tale was merely a product of the early twentieth century would have to explain how the tale by then had already diffused across the entire Upper Nile region, and how *nei ti naath* had constructed twelve-generation-long

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<sup>63</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 50.

<sup>64</sup> Percy Coriat, “The Gawair Nuers” in Douglas Johnson (ed.) *Governing the Nuer: Documents by Percy Coriat on Nuer History and Ethnography 1922-1931* (Oxford: Antony Rowe, 1993) p. 13-14.

lineages that separated themselves from ʕaak and Gēē by the time the British arrived at the turn of twentieth century. Moreover the most reasonable view of this tradition's antiquity is that it dates to a period when both exogamy and cattle-sacrifice became pillars of a *nei ti naath* moral universe.

The Jikāny, most of whom are also called the Gaat-Gan-Kiir (“children of father Kiir), are the only *nei ti naath* who do not claim some patrilineal descendant from ʕaak or Gēē and thus to have originated at Koat-Lic.<sup>65</sup> However, their entirely distinct origin story also focuses on redefining incest and kinship. Eastern Jikāny elders in 2013 often offered details that differed from versions recorded by Major Chauncy Hugh Stigand (published in 1919), Evans-Pritchard (recorded in the 1930s,) and Giet Jal (published in 1987).<sup>66</sup> However, all these accounts agree that Kiir (that is “gourd”) joined human society after some “Dinka” (that is *jiēēŋ*, the region's other highly mobile agro-pastoralist Nilotic “people”) cut open the gourd he was living in. No scholar has noted this parallel before, but the Kiir epic also clearly hinges on rites related to incest and kinship that Evans-Pritchard noted eighty years ago.<sup>67</sup>

If a proposed union is a borderline case [of incest] a gourd may be ritually broken in half to end kinship. They then say ‘*bakena mar*’, ‘we split kinship’, and ‘*ba bak ne kir*’, ‘it (kinship) is split with a gourd’.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Eastern Jikāny are the easternmost confederation of “people of [the] people” today. They live in the modern-day South Sudan's Upper Nile State and Ethiopia's adjoining Gambella Region. Other *nei ti naath* confederations include the Low, Gawäär, Lak, and Thiaŋ of Jongeli State and the Bul, Leek, Western Jikāny, Jagey, Dok, ʕaak, and Nyuoŋ of Unity State. “The Atuot”, who call themselves *reel*, speak a dialect of *thok naath* and acknowledge a common history, including versions of the Koat-Lic narrative, but live well apart in Lakes State.

<sup>66</sup> Chauncy Hugh Stigand, “The Story of Kir and the White Spear” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1919) p. 224-226. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 231-236.

Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Phd. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 15-20.

<sup>67</sup> In their own language, *nei ti naath* actually refer to *jiēēŋ* with the noun *jaan*.

<sup>68</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) p. 31.

The Jikāny origin story, and the Koat-L̥ic narrative, not only share imagery that revolves around creating exogamous kinship but also carry a common theme about isolated individuals becoming social beings. Obviously, anyone living inside a gourd has a limited social life, but communities of *nei ti naath* also associate being inside a gourd with the occult powers of a “witch” (*tiēt*).<sup>69</sup> In many versions of this tale, K̥iir could not join the community of *jiēēŋ* who first freed him from his gourd because he was still afflicted with an anti-social “evil eye” (*pēēth*), so that he constantly killed people and cattle by looking at them. K̥iir escaped this curse only when, while fleeing for his life, he met a similarly isolated river-dwelling witch doctor named Tik (that is “Life”), who washed K̥iir’s lethal eyes so he could live among “people” (*naath*).<sup>70</sup> While this Eastern Jikāny telling adds common *anywaa* and *cøllø* tropes about “the evil eye” to the central image of isolation in a gourd, both narratives repeat the theme of becoming “people” by removing anti-social barriers and building relationships.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Tiēt* is also the general *thuŋjāŋ* or “Dinka” term for witch. Evans-Pritchard also explained their link with gourds by writing “The best-known sort of *tiet* is the *tiet gweni*. He divines by throwing mussel shells on the convex surface of a gourd ... he speaks to his familiar spirit, which is associated with the gourd, perhaps being regarded as in it during the séance.” Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 96.

<sup>70</sup> Nyak Tuŋ Wan, Pal Wandīŋ, Tap Luak, and Luny Yual, interview with author Mathiang town, South Sudan (April 6, 2013).

<sup>71</sup> This particular innovation presumably dates back to the nineteenth century when Eastern Jikāny began assimilating large numbers of *anywaa*.





Luwal, the *tiēt* of Gwala village, conducting a second rite of healing in 1910 for a certain Acole, the wife of a man named Bul. Luwal determined that Acole was possessed by the spirit DED. Seligman took this photograph during a part of the ceremony where DED had entered Luwal's body as Luwal rubbed and shook a gourd. At the end of the ceremony, Luwal told Bul he must sacrifice a steer in order to heal his wife.<sup>72</sup>

Eastern Jikāny elders are aware of the parallels between these two stories and even invoke Koat-Liç when they want to skip through portions of the Kijir epic they consider unimportant, as one elder named Nyak Tuong Wan in Longechuk County did in 2013.

Cike we thar yieer ke yōō  
riem kam raar mi cike kak kër emə.  
Ciken je lak kā nōŋke je jio̯k.

Yiol cə kak kër.

Gēē cə kak kër rey Liç, rey Bentiu.  
Mii Kijir cə lieu mut Wiu kā  
tuac Kijir cike wa Mathian.  
Kun cə nōŋ wiel Kijir.  
Majiok cə nōŋ dēēth

They [jiēēŋ] went by the river because  
blood came out when they cut that gourd.  
They washed it and brought it back  
[to the cattle camp].  
Yiol [of the Dōok confederation] cut the gourd.

[interrupted by passersby and starting over]

Gēē cut the gourd in [Koat] Liç, in Bentiu.  
When Kijir died the spear of Wiu and  
Kijir's leopard-skin went to Mathian.  
Kun received a caracal-skin.  
Majiok received blacksmithing tools

<sup>72</sup> Photograph by Charles Seligman, "Dinka Spirit Healer" [ca. 1910], Accession Number: 1967.26.155, Box of negatives in envelopes # 1-242, Pitt River Museum, University of Oxford.

kä Nyaŋ dual Kiir.

and Nyaŋ Kiir's goat-skin.<sup>73</sup>

At first glance it may seem that Nyak became confused and contradicted himself by saying that different persons – Yiol and Gëë - cut the gourd in different places but, in the context of the conversation, Nyak was actually trying to compensate for annoying interruptions. After my earlier requests that he backtrack and clarify details from Kiir's early life, the elder seemed eager to skip ahead and describe how Kiir's eldest son Mathianj had inherited the most sacred object in Jikäny spirituality (the spear of the divinity WIU that Kiir held when he emerged from his gourd). To reach that point, the elder skipped details he had already given about Kiir's dealings with the Dook, meeting Tik, and marrying *nei ti naath* wives without changing the story's main point about becoming *nei ti naath* through exogamous kinship.<sup>74</sup> Nyak was able to make this kind of substitution only because, at least in his view, the specifics of tales of Koat-Lic and of Kiir harbored the same essential meaning.

Both these oral traditions describe humans becoming *nei ti naath* by creating broadly defined exogamous communities that forbade intermarriage even to the twelfth generation, so that families could keep building kinship networks that integrated people across huge swaths of territory.<sup>75</sup> This explanation of “Nuer origins” in strict rules of exogamous kinship described in both myths also helps establish analytical links with the “beginnings” of other “people” who are

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<sup>73</sup> Nyak Tuonj Wan, Pal Wandij, Tap Luak, and Luny Yual, interview with author, Mathiang town, South Sudan (April 6, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> The wives of Kiir included one descendant of Yaak named Nyakuini (who bore Mathianj) and two descendants of Gëë named Nyabōra (a daughter of the Bul confederation who bore Kun) and Duany (a daughter of the Lëëk confederation who bore Majiok and Nyaŋ). These four sons of Kiir (Mathianj, Kun, Majiok, and Nyaŋ) are the founding patriarchs of the major Jikäny sections, the Gaa-jak, the Gaa-jiok, and the Gaa-guaŋ so traditions about their matrilineal links with other confederations of *nei ti naath* allow Jikäny to claim a distant kinship with all other *nei ti naath*.

<sup>75</sup> In the 1930s Evans-Pritchard reported that sex was considered incest even to the twelfth generation. Sharon Hutchinson documented that this principle had relaxed somewhat by the 1980s and intermarriage after the eighth generation was often permitted. Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

not *nei ti naath* but have used modified forms of the same narrative motifs in their own tales. Scholars have long described stories about cutting a tree or rope that joined heaven and earth as common to all the River-Lake Nilotes of the region, since communities of *jiëëŋ* and *anywaa* also tell these tales.<sup>76</sup> Even the less common gourd tradition exists also among the particular cluster of southern *cøllø* who live closest to the Jikāny as well as among some *anywaa* who admit they were once *naath*.<sup>77</sup> These overlapping idioms suggest that Nuer ethnogenesis (*tuk naath*) was never a hermetically sealed process but evolved alongside other definitions of “people” as part of a wider regional transformation in the values that River-Lake Nilotes used to define themselves.

### **Trading in Teeth for New Cattle and Crops: Economic Precursors to *Tuk Naath***

The challenge for historians who understand *tuk naath* traditions as alluding to historical events is discovering when and why early *nei ti naath* decided to forbid previously permissible marriages as incestuous. Historians cannot convert genealogies associated with *tuk naath* narratives into Gregorian dates, since *nei ti naath* regularly omit ancestors they see as unimportant to the point they wish to make and, according to my test samples for later periods, the average age gaps between fathers and sons have fluctuated over time. Fortunately archaeologists have unearthed the remains of cattle, evidence of crops, and the skeletons of people who practiced dental evulsion that help reveal how the new ideas about exogamous kinship expressed in *tuk naath* narratives fit in with other historical transformations across the Sudd.

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<sup>76</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: the Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 34-36. Conrad Perner, *The Anyuak: Living on Earth in the Sky vol. 1* (Frankfurt: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1994) p. 71-74.

<sup>77</sup> Deidrich Westermann, *The Shilluk People, Their Language and Folk Lore* (Philadelphia: The Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1912) p. 178-179. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (New York: Percy Lund & Humpries Co., 1940) p. 31-32. Conrad Perner, *The Anyuak: Living on Earth in the Sky vol. 1* (Frankfurt: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1994) p. 80-83.

Scholars who have tried to date Nilotic ethnogenesis have traditionally relied on the controversial linguistic technique of glottochronology and estimated from it that cattle herders created the first distinctly Nilotic language some five thousand years ago.<sup>78</sup> Many of the same scholars have used this same method to describe how roughly three thousand years ago “Plains Nilotes” and “Highland Nilotes” separated from their River-Lake cousins and left the Sudd for new homes in what are now Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.<sup>79</sup> This Neolithic narrative has become hegemonic in Nilotic studies, but self-identifyingly Nilotic material culture is not so ancient. Virtually all modern-day Nilotes remove their two front lower incisors, herd humpbacked cattle, and cultivate caudatum sorghum (a species unique to this part of Africa until its global dissemination in the 1970s).<sup>80</sup> In these tangible terms, “Nilotic culture” as we know it has existed for only six centuries and, if glottochronology offers even remotely accurate dates, many of cultural practices that are Pan-Nilotic developed long after modern-day Nilotic languages diverged from one another.

The fully-toothed people who inhabited the Sudd before 1400 may have spoken Nilotic languages, but their archaeological remains tell us that they practiced styles of herding, fishing, hunting, and grain cultivation that differed significantly from those of the teeth-removers who followed them. These earlier, fully-toothed residents of the Sudd lived in relatively permanent abodes and, by 500 C.E., had developed artisanal industries like ironworking that required heavy and immobile equipment. They prized cattle enough to bake clay figurines of their flat-backed

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<sup>78</sup> Christopher Ehret, “Some thoughts on the Early History of the Nile-Congo Watershed” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* (1974) p. 85-113.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Ehret, “Nilotic and the Limits of Eastern Sudanic: Classificatory and Historical Conclusions” in Rainer Vossen & Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst (ed.s) *Nilotic Studies volume II* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982) p. 393-394.

<sup>80</sup> Nicholas David, “The Archaeological Context of Nilotic Expansion” in Rainer Vossen & Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst (ed.s) *Nilotic Studies volume I* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982) p. 64.

animals, and these figurines also reveal limitations on their abilities to herd. Humpless cattle, or *Bos Taurus*, common for millennia throughout northeastern Africa, cannot travel long distances without food or water and struggle in extreme heat.<sup>81</sup> Herders constrained by these bovines' physical limits had to concentrate around the Sudd's very few elevated riverbanks, where cattle could manage a short trek between ridges that stayed dry at the peak of the annual flood and permanent bodies of water where edible grasses lingered throughout the dry-season. These fully-toothed communities could not build up large herds in these limited nearby pastures and so relied heavily on fish, wild game, and crops like sorghum bicolor that thrived in riverbanks' alluvial soils.

By 1400, people who removed their two frontal lower incisors had introduced a new material culture to the far northern Sudd, now known from archaeological excavations at Dhang Rial (a site on the north bank of the Bahr el-Ghazal River).<sup>82</sup> They were building temporary abodes, baked clay figurines of humpbacked cows, and eschewed equipment-intensive industries like ironworking. Over the next three centuries most people across the Sudd adopted this new mobile lifestyle, and modern communities have continued its distinctive features (dental evulsion, temporary dwellings, and molding humpbacked cattle figurines) until today.

Why did inhabitants of the Sudd forsake a “civilized” lifestyle with large permanent dwellings and sophisticated metallurgy and take up the painful practice of pulling teeth? The

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<sup>81</sup> This archaeological data came from Peter Robertshaw's excavations at Dhang Rial and other sites east of Rumbek and at Debbat Bangdit. Whoever these ancient denizens of the Sudd were, they shared a common burial practice of placing their dead on their left sides facing southward although their pottery varied widely by region.

Peter Robertshaw and Ari Sirriani, “Excavations in Lakes Province, Southern Sudan” *Azania* (1985) p. 89-161.

*Bos Taurus* is a rather redundant Latin name with *Taurus* meaning “bull” and *Bos* meaning “bovine”.

<sup>82</sup> Bahr el-Ghazal or بحر الغزال is Arabic for “Sea of the Gazelle”. The name of this major tributary of the White Nile is also used as a general reference for all of the Sudd west of the place where the Bahr el-Jebel River splits with its main anabranch, the Bahr el-Zeraf River or بحر الزراف (meaning “Sea of the Giraffe”).

most obvious reasons are economic. Humpbacked cattle (that is *Bos Indicus*) store a great deal of water and fat in mounds on their backs.<sup>83</sup> Communities with these hardier herds could lead their animals to far-flung pastures around pools that lingered into the dry season and interior ridgelines that stayed dry in the wet season, while their more sedentary predecessors had to huddle around a few steep, flood-resistant riverbanks. Teeth-removers' more extensive style of transhumance transformed huge swaths of previously marginal bush into productive pastures where ordinary families could own large herds that had once been the purview of a few elites.

This economic advantage meant that teeth-extractors enjoyed what James Fergusson has called "the bovine mystic" and that their poorer neighbors had clear reasons to adopt the culture of teeth-extracting newcomers who were out-producing, and thus out-reproducing, less mobile autochthons. Historians may never definitively prove that teeth-removers with larger herds secured more wives with bride-wealth and inspired their in-laws to adopt this more prosperous lifestyle. However, the idea of cattle as a symbol of prestige across East Africa, both as a daily source of daily nourishment that is more reliable than crops and as a more desirable kind of sacrificial meat, is too well known to cite comprehensively. A new devotion to wealth in cattle is a reasonable way to understand an identity-defining change among communities who already prized *Bos Taurus* cattle enough to sculpt them.<sup>84</sup>

Early Nilotes had less obvious reasons for extracting their bottom two front teeth, but scholars can make sense of this painful practice by examining the historical processes that ultimately produced the community evident at Dhang Rial in 1400. Archaeological findings

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<sup>83</sup> Hellmut Epstein, *The Origins of the Domestic Animals of Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1971). P. 340-380.

<sup>84</sup> James Ferguson, "The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho" *Man* (1985) p.647-674.

For a recent example of scholarship on how the lure of such bride-wealth has motivated people to change their ethnicity see Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

support the theory, first presented here, that teeth-removers developed their excruciating dental tradition by intensifying a practice found earlier further north in the same areas where African pastoralists first acquired humpbacked cattle until this once uncommon behavior became a visible sign of being true “people”.<sup>85</sup> As the name of this new species, *Bos Indicus*, suggests, the humpbacked cattle that cover East Africa today originated in India. Archaeologists have unearthed East Africa’s oldest known humpbacked cattle bones from the second century C.E., at an Axumite site known for its traffic with Asia via the Red Sea (called the Erythrean Sea in ancient Greek documents). Archaeologists also tell us that pastoralists to the south (modern-day coastal Kenya) did not acquire *Bos Indicus* until 1200 C.E. Consequently the herders who brought humpbacked cattle to the Sudd must have reached the White Nile from the north, precisely the place where archaeologists have unearthed the oldest known human skeletons that lack lower front incisors.<sup>86</sup>

The earliest people known to have pulled these two particular teeth were first-century pastoralists who buried their dead at Jebel Moya, a massif located between Axum and the Sudd in a region of Sudan between the Blue Nile and the White Nile now known as al-Gezira (Arabic for “the island”).<sup>87</sup> Some denizens of Jebel Moya (twelve percent of men and eighteen percent of women) removed their lower front incisors to make room for large plugs they attached to their lower lips, presumably as a sign of unusual wealth or elevated status. While only an elite minority at Jebel Moya removed their teeth, many members of this herding community were wealthy enough to acquire goods manufactured elsewhere (including iron tools forged in Meroë

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<sup>85</sup> I am indebted to Joseph Miller for this compelling interpretation.

<sup>86</sup> Fiona Marshall, “The Origins of Domesticated Animals in Eastern Africa” in Roger Blench and Kevin MacDonald (ed.s) *The Origins and Development of African Livestock* (London: University of London Press, 2000) p. 17-44.

<sup>87</sup> Authors informed by sources from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium usually transliterate the Arabic الجزيرة as “al-Gezira” after the Egyptian pronunciation of the term. The alternative spelling of “al-Jezirah” reflects of the Sudanese pronunciation for the same word and refers to the same region of Sudan.

between 100 B.C.E. and 50 C.E.) and showed no evident interest in emulating the poorer farms of the settled cultivators of the Nile Valley.

Jebel Moya herders were unique among their neighbors for categorically rejecting grain cultivation and bulky equipment. Unlike the Nubians of the time to the north, who mostly ate grains, the herders of Jebel Moya had virtually no cavities or evidence of malnutrition. The herders of Jebel Moya also differed from their “civilized” neighbors at the ancient cities of Sinnār and Abu Geili (thirty kilometers to the east along the banks of the Blue Nile) because they eschewed bulky Merotic pottery wheels.<sup>88</sup> In fact the herders at Jebel Moya were so committed to a hyper-pastoralists lifestyle that they did not leave behind any of the digging sticks, grinding stones, and burnt grain (*sorghum bicolor*) that archaeologists have unearthed among the fully-toothed agro-pastoralists of the same era to the west at Jebel et Tomat (a peak along the White Nile).<sup>89</sup>

Archaeologists have conducted very few digs in the territory that lies between Jebel Moya and Dhang Rial but, based on what little we know, we can say that dental evulsion became a popular rite in the south only after pastoralists in the al-Gezira region had acquired humpbacked cattle. Dedicated herders, like those of Jebel Moya, who were unencumbered by bulky equipment, would have been in the best position to make the most of these new animals’ capabilities to exploit new pastures by making longer annual treks between low riverbanks and inland massifs instead of clinging to shorter (but much steeper) mountainside migrations.

Teeth-extracting herders who learned to use humpbacked cattle in this wide-ranging way were also able to multiply their productivity when they acquired new grain cultigens that they

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Brass, “The Southern Frontier of the Meroitic State” *African Archaeological Review* (2014) p. 425-445.

<sup>89</sup> A. B.L. Stemler, J.R. Harlan, and J.M.J. Dewet, “Caudatum Sorghums and Speakers of Chari-Nile Languages in Africa” *Journal of African History* (1975) p. 161-183.



could integrate into their highly mobile lifestyle. Sometime between 450 and 900 C.E., cultivators living east of Lake Chad and south of the modern city of Khartoum crossbred the domesticated sorghum bicolor that thrived in alluvial soils with local, hardier wild varieties. The cultivators who engineered this hybrid crop created one of the toughest cereals in human history, a type of sorghum (or *dhurra* in Arabic) now known to botanists as caudatum.<sup>90</sup> Caudatum sorghum has the unique ability to roll its leaves in the dry-season to lessen evaporation. Also, when waterlogged, its roots resist rot. Caudatum sorghum in very dry conditions can even become completely dormant, and this cereal still produces high yields (its only drawback seems to be that many foreigners find it unpalatable). One particular white-headed variety of caudatum sorghum (known in *thok naath* as *nuäär*) also grows especially fast and can mature a full month sooner than other sorghum sub-species.<sup>91</sup>

Teeth-extracting herders who had adopted the highly mobile lifestyle of Jebel Moya could not depend on any of the delicate domesticated crops sown in this region, but varieties of caudatum sorghum thrived far from permanent bodies of water. Thanks to this invention, teeth-extractors could count on grain to supplement their milk supply even in the dry-season when ridgelines quickly turn into impenetrable clay. Communities who adopted this mode of agro-pastoralism could also time their sorghum harvests to mature in the lean month when they waited for the annual floodwaters recede so they could return to richer alluvial soils and spear huge

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<sup>90</sup> A. B.L. Stemler, J.R. Harlan, and J.M.J Dewet, "Caudatum Sorghums and Speakers of Chari-Nile Languages in Africa" *Journal of African History* (1975) p. 161-183.

Jeff Dahlberg, "Classifications and Characterization of Sorghum" in C. Wayne Smith and Richard Frederiksen (ed.s) *Sorghum: Origin, History, Technology, and Production* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000) p. 99-130.

*Dhura* (ذرة) is a general Arabic term for grain. In Sudan today *dhura* refers to various kinds of sorghum or milo by default, much as North Americans use "corn" to refer to various kinds of maize because of the crop's ubiquity. However *dhura* should not be confused with *durra*, a crude transliteration of the same Arabic word, which refers to a variety of sorghum that Muslims brought to North Africa from Asia but which does not prosper in the Sudd.

<sup>91</sup> In actual fact *nei ti naath* have many varieties of caudatum sorghum, I mention *nuäär* for reasons that will become apparent later in this chapter.

quantities of fish trapped in inland pools and narrow channels as the marshes emptied back into the Nile.

At some point, highly mobile agro-pastoralists who had adopted this more effective method of food-production started removing their lower incisors, even if they did not wear lip plugs.<sup>92</sup> A practice that once marked some “special” status within a herding community became a means of distinguishing everyone with humpbacked cattle from others who lacked these animals, and in these more mobile herding societies dental evulsion became a general prerequisite for becoming an adult man or woman.

Adopting teeth extraction gave prosperous communities armed with humpbacked cattle and caudate sorghum a visible means of distinguishing “us” from “them”, which is also one reason the rite continues to prove useful in modern situations. For example, modern-day *jiëëŋ* have invoked teeth removal as proof that they differ from Arabs to their north when the cultural and political unity of *jiëëŋ* on highly contested modern borders has been otherwise questionable. Confederations of *jiëëŋ* who live west of the Bahr el-Jebel have long practiced the same rite of male circumcision as their Arab neighbors, but many of them also live along a disputed border between the modern governments of Sudan and South Sudan (formerly Southern Sudan). Because *jiëëŋ* who live east of the Bahr el-Jebel never adopted circumcision, the existence of circumcised *jiëëŋ* has threatened nationalist narratives about all *jiëëŋ* being Southern Sudanese (now South Sudanese). As a result western *jiëëŋ*, especially in the hotly contested Abyei region, have composed songs that used dental evulsion to “clarify” their ambiguous identity.

Three kinds of people met and some became confused: there were  
uncircumcised men, there were circumcised men, and men with

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<sup>92</sup> A. C. Beaton, “The Bari: Clan and Age-Class Systems” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 109-145.

John Burton, “Atuot Age Categories and Marriage” *Africa* (1980) p. 146-160.

unextracted teeth. Even if the Arab should say, “It’s a lie, I have my doubts, why is one Dinka [*muɔny-jäŋ*] circumcised and the other is not? I will answer, “Yours is the lie; don’t you see, our heads are marked and our teeth are removed? We are the ancient race of the Dinka [*jiëëŋ*].”<sup>93</sup>

Obviously “people” did not worry about whether Abyei belonged to the government of Sudan (controlled by Arabs) or to South Sudan (where *jiëëŋ* are the largest group of “people”) until these states existed, but similar principles seem to have applied. Earlier teeth-removers took great pains, quite literally, to create this visual distinction between themselves and fully toothed persons around them, showing that they too valued distinctions between “us” (highly mobile agro-pastoralists like those of Dhang Rial) and “them” (semi-sedentary autochthons). This physical mark of communal belonging also enabled newcomers with humpbacked cattle to assimilate autochthons who envied their prosperous lifestyle, demanding that converts make a dramatic and permanent commitment to the communities they joined.

This simple dichotomy between people who did and did not have their two front teeth seems to have worked fairly well for these ascendant agro-pastoralists from 1400 to 1700 C.E. but teeth-extractors eventually had to deal with the consequences of their own successes. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, dental evulsion had become so common in the Sudd that it began to lose its distinguishing power. Humpbacked cattle herders in the Sudd reacted with teeth-extraction inflation, a kind of teeth-removal arms race where herding communities gradually increased the visual effect, social significance, and physical trauma of this rite by upping the number of teeth they pulled and imbuing extraction with more polarizing meaning.

These efforts of the teeth-removers to remain distinct created a clear pattern in the ways that different Nilotes across East Africa practice this rite today. The Plains Nilotes and Highland

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<sup>93</sup> Francis Madin Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972) p. 66.

Nilotes in Tanzania and parts of Kenya have preserved the old Jebel Moya pattern of pulling only two teeth because it still distinguishes them from their neighbors, most of whom have remained fully toothed.<sup>94</sup> In contrast to this cultural conservatism, River-Lake Nilotes in the Sudd (and parts of Uganda and Kenya) found that they had to adjust their practices in order to retain a sense of their identity as the near totality of their own success destroyed the distinctiveness of dental evulsion.

These northern River-Lake Nilotes' continuing efforts to maintain their proud teeth-pulling identity also shows in the historical record. An English traveler in Darfur observed that people from the Sudd (presumably *jiëëŋ*) extracted only two teeth in the 1790s. By the time Turco-Egyptian merchants began visiting the *cøllø* and *jiëëŋ* in the 1840s, they had begun removing four of their lower front teeth. This extraction inflation continued throughout the twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> Most *cøllø* and *jiëëŋ* and *anywaa* were extracting six teeth when British officials began writing about them in the 1920s, and many *nei ti naath* began pulling out as many as eight (six from the bottom plus the two front teeth on the upper jaw) by the end of the century.

### Examples of Contemporary Dental Evulsion

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<sup>94</sup> For example the Maasai (Plains Nilotes living in Kenya and Tanzania) and the Kalenjin (Highland Nilotes in Kenya) extract only two teeth. In these southern environs, this rite is sufficiently unique to inspire the Kalenjin to call themselves *bikab kutit* or "people of the mouth".

<sup>95</sup> William George Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from 1792-1798* (London: T. Cadell Jr., and W. Davies et al, 1799) p. 347-349.

Selim Bimbachi, "Premier Voyage a la recherche des sources du Nil-Blanc" *Bulletin de la Society de Geographie* (1842) p. 82-83.



A Maasai man (left) who has had two teeth removed. Dobueny Bukjiok (center) is the Jikany confederation of *nei ti naath* who immigrated to Nebraska as an adult. His bottom six teeth were removed in childhood. Tongyik Teny Machar (right) lives in Lare, Ethiopia. He is also Jikany but had his top two teeth removed along with the lower six.

River-Lake Nilotes who doubled down on teeth removal also intensified the ideologies they associated this rite much more than more culturally conservative teeth-removers to the south. Unlike their fully toothed or semi-toothed counterparts, the extreme extraction in the Sudd changed how River-Lake Nilotes pronounce certain consonants, and River-Lake Nilotes began highlighting this further differentiation by calling their languages the “mouth of the people”.<sup>96</sup> Nilotes in the Sudd also treat saliva as a physical manifestation of the invisible powers associated with speech, particularly when blessing the heads and legs of honored persons by spitting

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<sup>96</sup> Examples of this “mouth of the people” expression among River-Lake Nilotes include *thok naath* for Nuer, *thuɔŋjāŋ* for Dinka, *dhø cøllø* for Shilluk, *dhòk anywaa* for Anuak, *dhi pāri* for Pari, and *dhoLuo* for Luo. These six examples come from languages dispersed across South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya. The ubiquity of this expression among River-Lake Nilotes contrasts with its rarity among neighboring non-Nilotic groups, who often name their languages by attaching grammatical prefixes, which have nothing to do with mouths, to their own words for people. For example, the largest non-Nilotic group in South Sudan is the Azande (Zande singular) who speak *Pazande*, a term unrelated to the physical word for “mouth” (*ngba*), but which uses a prefix similar to the their word *pai* or “word”. Other Bantu languages use a very ancient prefix *ki-*, to reference the language, as in Kiswahili, and others similarly denote Luganda, spoken by Ganda. Some Plains Nilotes also use this mouth expression, especially for languages spoken near the edge of the Sudd like *kutuk na bari* (that is “Bari”). Plains Nilotes in Kenya and Tanzania use phases like *ɔ/ Maa* (that is Maasai) which do not reference the mouth.

through a gap between their teeth with a motion that fully-toothed persons cannot properly replicate.<sup>97</sup>

The most extreme extractors, the *nei ti naath*, also transformed a rite that had originally been about lip-plugs into a foundation for new rhetorical distinctions. *Nei ti naath* who lived in a setting where removing the first four incisors had become normal began comparing people who still had their canines (the teeth next to the first four incisors) to wild carnivores. They also sharpened this distinction by refusing to eat almost any kind of meat and by describing peaceful pastoralists, who acquired proteins and fat through milk, as morally superior to cannibal-like hunters whose canine teeth highlighted their link with vicious wild beasts.

This particularly virulent view of the fully toothed or semi-toothed “other” linked “teeth” (*læc* or *lec* singular) with “predatory carnivores” (*ley* singular or *leey* plural).<sup>98</sup> *Nei ti naath* focused the meaning of the word *ley* (which their fellow River-Lake Nilotes still use as a general term for any animal) by glossing it as a category for creatures that might kill and eat a person. This usage includes both real predators (crocodiles, hyenas, leopards etc.) and legendary giant human-shaped “bears” (*leet* or *let* singular), which do not exist in Africa, at least in a biological sense, but serve as an ideal term for the monstrous inhuman human.

Words like *lec*, *ley*, and *let* have obvious morphological similarities and, for *nei ti naath*, they belong to a semantic field that revolves around pulling teeth, as one man explained in 2013.

Læc ti ŋuan /caa gɔa,  
dɔɔ naath bike lar jin cati ley.  
Cii leŋ ruac naath

Many teeth are not good/beautiful,  
maybe people will say you resemble a carnivore.  
You have heard the people’s saying

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<sup>97</sup> As with the above argument about language, the evidence for developing this new idea about saliva and spitting is that all the Sudd’s Nilotes have this practice.

Conrad Perner, *The Anyuak: Living on Earth in the Sky vol. 1* (Frankfurt: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1994).

<sup>98</sup> Other River-Lake Nilotes have essentially the exact same words for both “tooth” and “animal” but use different words to distinguish carnivores from other animals.

“maar læɛ /cii ɛ maar”.

“kinship of teeth [mere smiling] is not kinship”.<sup>99</sup>

This remark directly echoes a British official’s observation in 1923 that “the object of this mutilation [dental evulsion] is said to be to distinguish a human being from the carnivore, e.g. dog, leopard, crocodile. It is a term of abuse to say to a Nuer ‘you have many teeth’”.<sup>100</sup> This contrast in diet makes sense because *nei ti naath* have traditionally avoided eating almost every type of meat except when they sacrifice cows, sheep, and goats from their own herds.<sup>101</sup> As Evans-Pritchard famously observed, “it is not that they must only kill for sacrifice but they must sacrifice to kill”.<sup>102</sup> Sacrificing a steer you know by name in a ceremony intended to cure a sick family member is quite different, in moral terms, from spearing as many edible animals as possible, especially for a herder who sings to his cattle each day while rubbing their backs with ashes from his own hearth, ashes he also applies to his own skin as a balm.

In this moral discourse, the act of extracting lower teeth or *näk læɛ* (literally “to kill teeth”) removes a person’s animal impulse to ambush fellow creatures and feast on their flesh.<sup>103</sup> Put another way, *nei ti naath* extract their primal savagery and become capable of a kind of kinship that they contrast with murderous carnivores (lions, hyenas, leopards, and even omnivorous chimpanzees), all animals that sometimes do engage in cannibalism.<sup>104</sup> Today many, though not all, *nei ti naath* still refuse “strange meat” (as well as eggs) and look down on their

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<sup>99</sup> Kuac Mac Bup, interview with author, Lare Woreda, Gambella Region (Ethiopia May 1, 2013) .

<sup>100</sup> Henry Jackson, “The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1923) p. 134.

<sup>101</sup> Other hoofed animals like antelope and buffalo were a partial exception, at least when they were foolish enough to commit virtual suicide by approaching people on their own accord.

<sup>102</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 256.

<sup>103</sup> In its actual pronunciation, *näk læɛ* is contracted to *nälæɛ* as *thok naath* elides certain similar sounding consonants when they adjoin each other.

<sup>104</sup> It is worth noting that River-Lake Nilotes who all preform similar teeth-extracting rites do not use even remotely similar terms for the practice. Instead *jiëëŋ* call the rite *yöth* and *cøllø* speak of *wök*.

cattle-less neighbors who hunt. In 2012, when I first learned that *nei ti naath* refer to the sedentary *anywaa* as *bär*, I was warned “do not call them that to their face, it is a big insult”.<sup>105</sup> In *thok naath* the word *bär* also means “hunter”.<sup>106</sup>

This idea that some humans, especially those with “fangs”, are more like carnivores than real people also explains many otherwise opaque oral traditions. Historically marginalized communities within the Eastern Jikäny confederation often “admit” that their ancestors were the children of female *leey* (usually crocodiles or “bears”), who grabbed different sons and great-grandsons of K*ii*r and threatened to eat these patriarchs unless these sons of K*ii*r impregnated the beasts.<sup>107</sup> Other teeth-removers, including various communities of *cøllø*, tell similar tales, and ethnographers have long reported that “some of the clans claim descent from an animal”.<sup>108</sup> These traditions highlight how prosperous teeth-removers used a carnivorous discourse to saddle

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<sup>105</sup> Muon Bithow Tik, interview with author, Korenge Payam, South Sudan (June 12, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> From the moment British scholars began inquiring in 1910, they spoke of “the Anuak (called Bar by the Nuer)” Charles Seligman and Brenda Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1932) p. 105.

Failing to note its literal meaning as “hunter” Evans-Pritchard spoke of “foreign peoples ... generally classed as Bar, cattleless people or people possessing very few cattle”.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 130.

In their own language (*Dhók Anywaa*) *bär* means to forage for wild grains.

<sup>107</sup> The *cierj Laanj*, who populate all of Upper Nile State’s Ulang County, are probably the most famous example of people claiming descent from a female *let* or “bear”. Their founding patriarch, Bulbek, was the son of K*ii*r’s son Majiok and a female *let* named Cuol Watwat. Historically the *cierj Laanj* were marginalized, especially when resources ran short in a heavy drought back in the late 1850s. The *cierj Cany* of Jukow (which straddles Upper Nile State’s Maiwut County and the Lare Woreda of Ethiopia’s Gambella region) also tell an extremely similar story about a female crocodile named Nyalal who was the mother of their ancestor Cany. The word *cany* means “loath”.

Jok Luak Duop, Thomas Tut Thon, Tɔɔyik Ruor Khor, and Simon Kueth Reeth, Interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 28, 2013).

Puk Duel Kel, Muon Luak Can, and Pal Koor Nyang, Interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 14, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> Deidrich Westermann, *The Shilluk People, Their Language and Folk Lore* (Philadelphia: The Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1912) p. 127.



people they assimilated with stigmas that lingered for generations and also suggest that “Nilotic migrations” had more to do with people changing who they were than where they were.

### **Ecological Ethnogenesis: Diversity within Two Archetypal Strategies**

Teeth-removers created a prosperous, low-risk lifestyle that the herding communities of the Sudd willingly gave their eye teeth for by rebuilding their lives around the unique strengths of humpbacked cattle and caudatum sorghum. But new challenges to these new capabilities arose when larger numbers of more mobile herders had to share far flung pastures with more neighbors than ever before. Communities who stuck to the Sudd’s few riverside ridges struggled to compete for pasture with more mobile communities who used their mobility to accrue larger herds and more populous networks of kin. Ridge dwellers who could not compete with these committed herders gradually lost their ownership of cattle and became wet-side cultivators who had to compete more intensely with one another for limited elevated land. River-Lake Nilotes on both the increasingly mobile dry-side and the increasingly sedentary wet-side of this specialization process developed differing political-spiritual traditions and ideas about moral community that reflected each group’s specific challenges.

*Nei ti naath* origin traditions, archaeological evidence, and discourses of otherness built on dental evulsion all indicate that the River-Lake Nilotes of Sudd began to distinguish among the ethnic groupings that exist today far more recently than scholars who use glottochronology have suggested on the basis of linguistic differentiation. Numerous specialists who have worked in the Sudd have tried to date local processes of ethnogenesis with essentially the same style of glottochronology that celebrated historical-linguists like Christopher Ehret applied to all of Nilotic East Africa, and they have produced similarly ancient dates by taking language as

cognate with ethnicity. The first author to apply these techniques to River-Lake Nilotic languages dated the “ancient divergence” between Proto-Luo (the common ancestor of *dhø cøllø*, *dhøk anywaa*, *dhi päri*, *dho luo*, etc., now spoken to the north of the Sudd) and Sudd-centered Proto-Dinka-Nuer to 335 B.C.E., and also calculated that the “Dinka” (*thuɲjäŋ*) line of herders diverged from “Nuer” (*thok naath*) a bit later, around 85 C.E.<sup>109</sup> Douglas Johnson subsequently argued for higher rates of the cognation taken to mark closeness, and hence recency of dating, among these languages than his predecessors had detected, which, for those who accept glottochronology’s logarithmic premises, would suggest that *thuɲjäŋ* and *thok naath* diverged even more recently, around the tenth century.<sup>110</sup> However, even this more recent date comes several centuries before the first teeth-exactors identified in the northern Sudd and suggests that modern-day markers to differentiate between dry-side herders (*nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ*) and riverine cultivators (*cøllø*, *luo*, and *anywaa*) emerged along a different historical trajectory.

The documentary record since the 1840s shows that the sharp divide in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) century between mobile herding communities that speak “Dinka-Nuer” languages on the one hand and the sedentary cultivators who speak Luo languages on the other developed only after 1400. Language certainly mattered in this process of ethnic transformation, but these economic specializations were not equivalent to, or contemporaneous with, the consolidation of new “daughter languages”. The best available evidence suggests that the *luo* of Great Bahr el-Ghazal began losing their cattle (or chose to become *jiëëŋ* with more cattle than

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<sup>109</sup> John McLaughlin, “Tentative Time Depth for Nuer, Dinka, and Anuak” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (1967) p. 13-27.

Raymond Kelly, *Nuer Conquests: The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985) p. 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> Douglas Johnson, “History and Prophecy among the Nuer of Southern Sudan” PhD. diss (University of California Los Angeles, 1980) p. 575-576.

ever before) only as dry-side specialists filled up valuable pastures in the eighteenth century.<sup>111</sup>

Historical documents also prove that their *anywaa* counterparts in what is now eastern South Sudan and western Ethiopia gave up their cattle, or agreed to become *nei ti naath*, only between 1855 and 1897.<sup>112</sup> Moreover the *cøllø* have managed to keep some herd animals, especially goats and sheep, until today.

“People” in the Sudd who spoke Luo languages (the *cøllø*, *anywaa*, *päri*, and *luo* proper) became the ethnic groups ethnographers described in the colonial era only after they had turned away from herding to focus on cultivating, fishing, and hunting on precious flood-free lands. In more specific terms, all these similar “people” (*cøllø*, *anywaa*, *päri*, and *luo* proper) became increasingly different from one another as they concentrated in specific micro-environments and earned ethnic reputations that reflected their respective, and even defining, ecological expertise. The *anywaa* and *cøllø* provide excellent examples of local communities that developed the same wet-side economic template in slightly differing contexts. Contiguous communities of *cøllø* settled along the high banks of the White Nile (between Lake No and the modern city of Renk) and achieved the greatest population density anywhere in the Sudd. Farther south, *anywaa* spread themselves thinly amongst scattered ridgetops along the Sobat, Baro, Pibor, Akobo, and Gilo Rivers. Both “peoples” appeared similar enough in the nineteenth century that travelers like Andrea De Bono decided to call them both “Schellouk”, but De Bono’s contemporaries among the *nei ti naath* already distinguished between *anywaa* “hunters” (*bär*) and *cøllø* “diggers”

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<sup>111</sup> Stephanie Beswick, *Sudan’s Blood Memory: The Legacy of War, Ethnicity, and Slavery in Ealy South Sudan* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

<sup>112</sup> Andre De Bono, “Fragment d’un voyage au Saubat (affluent du Nil blanc) 1855” *Le Tour Du Monde* (1860) p. 348-353.

Charles Michel, *Vers Fachoda* (Paris, 1900).

(*tet*).<sup>113</sup> This distinction showed not only that *nei ti naath* were better informed than wandering Europeans but also that they were also informed differently. Their labels did not focus on language but rather on the pragmatic reality that *anywaa* in dispersed settlements could hunt regularly without depleting local game while densely settled *cøllø* had to focus on their grain.

Different dry-side communities also adjusted their admixtures of herding, cultivating, fishing, and other forms of food production to optimize yields in conditions that varied across the Sudd. The most obvious example is a particular confederation of *jiëëŋ* called the “bees” (*ciëc* in *thuŋjäŋ*), who directly border the honey-producing communities of the Ironstone Plateau southwest of the Sudd. This general pattern of food-based identities also explains the original etymology of “the Nuer” as some *nei ti naath* still recall.<sup>114</sup>

Nuäär ε bel, wide mi bor.  
Ni wal, cølkε naath Nuääri  
ke yöö ney tikø bel εmø.

Nuäär is a crop [sorghum], its head is white.  
Long ago, they called people Nuers  
because we had that crop.<sup>115</sup>

As the accurate *thok naath* spellings used above reveal, the ethnonym “Nuer” is properly pronounced *Nuäär*. The now-standardized English misspelling of “Nuer” is an unfortunate testament to anti-pastoralist British bigotry, and the sharp wit of hostile neighbors who knew that

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<sup>113</sup> In his 1855 voyage up the Sobat River, the Maltese explorer referred to *anywaa* as “Shillouk”. Shilluk being the usual Arab term for *cøllø*.

Andre De Bono, “Fragment d’un voyage au Saubat (affluent du Nil blanc) 1855” *Le Tour Du Monde* (1860) p. 348-353.

<sup>114</sup> Stephanie Beswick, *Sudan’s Blood Memory: The Legacy of War, Ethnicity, and Slavery in Ealy South Sudan* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004) p. 44-45, 65-66.

For an example of the same logic of ethnohistory on a grander scale see

David Schoenbrun, “We are What we Eat: Ancient Agriculture between the Great Lakes” *The Journal of African History* vol. 34 no. 1 (1993) p. 1-31.

<sup>115</sup> Gaac Tut, Interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 8, 2013).

the verb *nuer* (and the related noun *nueer*) are *nei ti naath* terms for a kind of lethal pollution that enters the bodies of murderers and spreads among their neighbors and kin.<sup>116</sup>

Documents from the 1920s show how the British helped twist an ethnonym that once recognized sorghum innovation into an epithet. By that time, American missionaries working closely with the British were already describing “nuar” as “a certain type of white dura” and “nuer” as “murderer” in their dictionary. Nevertheless this knowledge did not dissuade hostile officials from being drawn into local antagonisms.<sup>117</sup> British officials who had recently unleashed the Royal Air Force to bomb and machine gun the Eastern Jikāny did not even bother to mask their contempt as they rebranded them as murderers.

The Nuer must be among the most backward of all the peoples of Africa. They think only of their cattle ... The Nuer in their own language refer to themselves as Naz [*naath*] or Nuār;<sup>118</sup> the Skilluk [*cøllø*], Arab and Dinka [*jiëëŋ*] call them Nuer, and various writers Nuehrs, Nueirs, Nouaer, Nower, Nuwehr, etc. As the term Nuer by which they are generally known is a sufficiently accurate reproduction of the Nuer’s own pronunciation I have decided to retain it when writing of them... In appearance the Nuer is as repulsive as he is in his habits of life.<sup>119</sup>

Regardless of this British contempt for the *nei ti naath* lifestyle, early communities of “Nuer” had good reason to rely on disaster-resistant crops like *nuäär*, even more than the *jiëëŋ* who otherwise resembled them, because the original *nei ti naath* homeland along the Bahr el-Jebel is the most flood-prone part of the Sudd.

Though communities who herd humpbacked cattle can usually rely on their mobility to preserve their herds through intense droughts, they are also particularly vulnerable to moist

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<sup>116</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 182.

<sup>117</sup> Ray Huffman, *Nuer-English Dictionary* (Berlin D. Reimer, 1927) p. 25.

<sup>118</sup> *Thok naath* does not possess “s”, or “z” as semantically distinct phonemes. As a result “th” is often pronounced as “s” or “z”, especially among people who lack front teeth. Thus “Naz” was a reasonable rendering of “Naath”.

<sup>119</sup> Henry C. Jackson, “The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1923) p. 59, 66, 88.

conditions. Cattle that remain in marshy areas quickly succumb to a litany of diseases such as tsetse fly-borne trypanosomiasis and bacterial infections in their hooves. This vulnerability to moist conditions meant that early communities of *nei ti naath*, before they expanded to the east in the 1820s, ran greater risks of losing most of their herds in a flood than *jiëëŋ* either to the west (in the more arid Bahr el-Ghazal region) or to the east (along the Duk Ridge and the higher banks of both the Sobat River and the White Nile). Communities of *nei ti naath* never knew in advance if high floods might destroy their herds or if droughts would restrict fish habitats and probably became associated with *nuäär* for their unique focus on this reliable food source.

### **Spiritual-Political Innovations among Wet-Side and Dry-Side Communities**

Herders of the Sudd who saw themselves as “people” and their neighbors as possibly savage hunters, cultivators, white-headed sorghum specialists, or bee-keepers also developed distinctive, and distinguishing, political-spiritual traditions which addressed the most persistent problems of their ecological niches. Wet-side communities developed political strategies of killing or banishing unpopular rulers and honed moral discourses about “the evil eye” to condemn the endemic greed and lust associated with elite landowners. Dry-side communities worried far less about landowners hoarding wealth or abusing power because rights to grazing lands did not tend to produce the same extreme inequalities in communities who constantly dispersed their cattle among scattered trusted kin and clients to prevent overgrazing and mitigate the risk of disease. These mobile dry-side communities struggled instead with a constant temptation to rustle one another’s cattle, since they could literally walk off with their neighbor’s wealth. Dry-side communities addressed these problems by promoting honor codes among fighting-age men and organized collective militias to protect their herds, but they also created

spiritual-political officials who could settle the inevitable remaining disputes peacefully. Their moral discourses also encouraged an expansive sense of community that minimized localized squabbling, promoted broad alliances for mutual defense, and stressed the accursed state of persons who violated these ethics.

As with nuanced localized variations in food-production, environmentally distinct communities innovated their own variations of these two archetypal strategies of civil order and, in the contexts of specific semantic fields, linguistic analysis can help indicate how River-Lake Nilotes crafted differing traditions from a common heritage. For example, River-Lake Nilotic languages contain many cognate words regarding landownership and kinship that reflect ancient shared understandings that presumably pre-dated the recent processes of ethnic differentiation.

#### Landownership Terms (Cognates)

<b><i>thok naath</i></b> / English	<b><i>thuɔŋjäŋ</i></b> / English	<b><i>dhø cøllø</i></b> / English
<i>dil</i> (singular) / of a ruling lineage	<i>dhiel</i> / “to own” <sup>120</sup>	<i>dyil</i> / “owner of the soil”
<i>diel</i> (plural) / aristocrats		(an honored lineage) <sup>121</sup>

#### Lineage Terms (Predominantly Cognates)

<b>English</b>	<b><i>thok naath</i></b>	<b><i>thuɔŋjäŋ</i></b>	<b><i>dhø cøllø</i></b> <sup>122</sup>	<b><i>dhók anywaa</i></b> <sup>123</sup>
branch (of tree or river)	<i>kaar</i>	<i>kaar</i>	<i>kar</i> <sup>124</sup>	<i>kar</i> / <i>tung</i>
paternal lineage	<i>kaar</i>	<i>kaar</i>	<i>kal</i> / <i>kwa</i>	<i>tung</i>
household	<i>gɔl</i>	<i>gɔl</i>	<i>gɔl</i>	<i>kar</i> <sup>125</sup>

#### Kinship Terms (Cognates and Shared Initial Consonants)

<sup>120</sup> Roger Blench and John Duerksen, *Dinka-English Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.: SIL International, 2005).

<sup>121</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) p. 409.

<sup>122</sup> J. A. Heasty, *English-Shilluk Shilluk-English Dictionary* (Philadelphia: American Presbyterian Church, 1937).

<sup>123</sup> Conrad Perner, *Anyuak: A Luo-Language of the Southern Sudan* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Inc, 1990).

<sup>124</sup> In *dhø cøllø*, *kar* also means “sharing”, which is significant in light of later descriptions of wet-side Luo ethics.

<sup>125</sup> From *kar kwän* or the center of the homestead where “food” (*kwän*) is prepared. The more distantly related Bari language also uses *kari* for “lineage”, which strengthens the case for the antiquity of this term.

English	<i>thok naath</i>	<i>thuɲjäŋ</i>	<i>dhø collo</i> <sup>126</sup>	<i>dhók anywaa</i> <sup>127</sup>
mother (third person)	<i>maan</i>	<i>maan</i>	<i>mən</i>	<i>mieo</i>
mother's brother	<i>naar</i>	<i>ner</i>	<i>neya</i>	<i>närò</i>
mother's sister	<i>maulin</i>		<i>ma</i>	<i>marò</i>
father (third person)	<i>guan</i>	<i>wän</i>	<i>wän</i>	<i>wuöò</i>
father's brother	<i>gualin</i>	<i>walän</i>	<i>wiya</i>	<i>wuöò</i>
father's sister	<i>wac</i>	<i>wac</i>	<i>waja</i>	<i>waò</i>
son	<i>gaat</i>	<i>wät</i>	<i>wat</i>	<i>wädo</i>

A comparison of these pervasive cognate terms reveals that River-Lake Nilotes have shared a discourse about land rights, particular kinship relationships (especially on the mother's side), and patrilineal descent. In fact the only consistent variation of note on this list is that *nei ti naath* changed the initial phoneme that denoted paternal kinship from “w” (the consonant used by everyone else) to “g”, an innovation that might reflect their distinctive ideas about spiritual and political leadership. <sup>128</sup>

For wet-side specialists, the most important changes to this common heritage concerned land rights and systemically distributing bumper crops and other forms of wealth that sedentary households did not routinely give away like their cattle-keeping counterparts. In 1400, less specialized communities could tolerate the privileges of “owners of the soil”, but wet-side specialists who became increasingly sedentary over time created a situation where landowners acquired a meaningful monopoly on the means of production. This monopoly allowed landowning elites to acquire an arbitrary power that nineteenth-century European observers equated with their own kings.

Le roi du les Schellouk ... sortit de son palais, tenant sa pipe d'une main et son bâton	The king of the Shilluk [ <i>collø</i> ]... exited his palace, holding his pipe in one hand and his rod
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<sup>126</sup> J. A. Heasty, *English-Shilluk Shilluk-English Dictionary* (Philadelphia: American Presbyterian Church, 1937).

<sup>127</sup> Conrad Perner, *Anyuak: A Luo-Language of the Southern Sudan* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Inc, 1990).

<sup>128</sup> As discussed later in this chapter. The fact that *thok naath* has retained *wac* for father's sister supports the already unavoidable conclusion that an initial *w* once marked all patrilineal kinship terms.



de l'autre...

ils marchèrent dans la direction du roi ...  
puis s'agenouillèrent en marchant sur  
les pieds et les mains, selon l'usage ...

Les Bondjak ont un roi très-puissant, dans  
le genre de celui des Schellouk inférieures.  
La manière de l'aborder est la même,  
seulement le roi des Bondjak ne marche pas  
sur la terre, ou pour mieux dire,  
ses pieds ne touchent jamais terre.  
Il marche toujours sur des peaux de boeufs ou  
autres qu'on a soin de placer sur son passage.

in the other...

they [his subjects] walked in the king's direction ...  
then knelt down to walk on [their]  
hands and feet, as is customary ...

The [*anywaa* of] Bonjak have a very powerful king in  
the fashion of those lower Shilluk [*cøllø*].  
The way to approach him is the same,  
only the king of the Bonjak never walks  
on the earth, or for a better [use of] words,  
his feet never touch the ground.  
He always walks on cow hides or  
other [objects] placed in his path.<sup>129</sup>

Matriarchs who inherited these same titles also required that “whenever any male of the tribe passes near her, he walks by with his back bent and his head inclined horizontally down to the level of his hips”.<sup>130</sup> Clearly, the right to own the land mattered a great deal in wet-side communities, and, though nineteenth-century European travelers did not observe it, members of wet-side communities who endured these degrading inequalities also developed ways of holding those entrusted in principle with this tyrannical power accountable to their larger communities in practice.

The *cøllø* (“Shilluk”) on the banks of the White Nile protected themselves by domesticating the interests of their “king” (*rādh* often anglicized as *reth*) by compelling him to hold his title on behalf of them all. Each new “king” not only had to belong to the proper lineage but also had to endure an installation ceremony where the spirit of their common ancestor (NYIKAD) seized his body. This encounter transformed the “king” into a literal embodiment of the *cøllø* collectivity with responsibilities toward all “his children”, including a duty to curb the

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<sup>129</sup> Jules Poncet, Adolphe Male-Brun, and Ambroise Poncet, *Le fleuve Blanc: notes géographiques et ethnographiques et les chasses à l'éléphant dans le pays des Dinka et des Djour* (Paris: Librairie de la Société de Géographie, 1864) p. 21, 30.

<sup>130</sup> C.W.L. Bulpett, *A Picnic Party in Wildest Africa: Being a Sketch of a Winter's Trip to Some Unknown Waters of the Upper Nile* (London, 1907) p. 82, 127.

abuses of local landowners. Older lineages of “owners of the soil” did not disappear but, whenever *cøllø* grew displeased with these local aristocrats, they invited members of this royal lineage to move in and supplant them.<sup>131</sup>

Communities of *anywaa* developed a similar strategy of replacing any unpopular local “chief” (*kwārò*) by inviting one of many “kings” (*nyèyè* or *nyèya* singular) or their descendants to assume his position as a kind of trustee. Not content merely to play one kind of authority off against another, wet-side communities also reserved the right to elect the person within the lineages of these local “owners of the soil” and the royal family who would take the title. Wet-side communities also encouraged continual intrigues within the lineages of both kinds of rulers to improve their bargaining positions. Thus *cøllø* became famous for legally mandating the execution of a king found unfit, and *anywaa* replaced their chiefs and kings so often that they ritualized “revolutions” (*agem*) to the point that villagers could bloodlessly replace an unpopular ruler with any nephew who promised to distribute wealth (principally food) more equitably.<sup>132</sup>

Beyond these spiritual-political restraints on abuses of power, wet-side communities based their whole sense of being true “people” on combating the jealousy endemic within their profoundly unequal economies, a disease they described as “the evil eye”. In addition to the linguistic example noted earlier, that *anywaa* come from *anywak* (“sharing together”), the name “Luo” that refers to wet-side specialists in general also literally means “not devil-eyed”.<sup>133</sup> Communities of *cøllø* reinforced their ideals about sharing by promoting a potent fear of both the

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<sup>131</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) p. 499-500.

<sup>132</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (New York: Percy Lund, Humpries Co., 1940) p. 43-47.

<sup>133</sup> Conrad Perner, *Anyuak: A Luo-Language of the Southern Sudan* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Inc, 1990) p. 1, 192, 398.

evil eye's power to blind its victims and the eternal stigma it brought on families who possessed it, as American missionaries observed in the early twentieth century.

The Shilluk [*cøllø*] have a custom that when a person is threshing his grain, they go to beg from him. Sometimes they go in such numbers that the man has very little left for himself, but he does not dare to refuse for fear someone in the party may cast the evil eye on him. He gets even by going to beg from some other person.<sup>134</sup>

Wet-side specialists were not the only teeth-removers to attribute such power to the evil eye, but, because of the profound inequalities they generated by tightly controlling access to productive land, only Luo-speakers made this discourse the defining feature of the moral communities they crafted as distinct ethnic identities.

Dry-side “people” (*naath* and *jiěěη*) developed contrasting political traditions and descriptions of moral community that reflected their differing ecologically inspired concerns. Constantly needing fresh green pastures (*toic* in both languages), dry-side communities had to coordinate semi-annual movements between wetter lowlands and drier highlands and oversee the annual burning of tall stalky grasses in the early dry-season to promote fresh growth before the soil lost all moisture. Communities of *nei ti naath* entrusted this responsibility to men from special lineages, whom they called the “father” or “owner” of “grasses” (*guan juacni*). Though a kind of “king” for one day each year, these title holders determined only the timing of their annual move toward the lowlands.<sup>135</sup> Alternatively, communities of *jiěěη* entrusted this responsibility to a “master of dry-season camps” (*beny wut*), who exercised a more general authority to govern affairs at their dry-season cattle-camps.

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<sup>134</sup> D. S. Oyler, “The Shilluk’s Belief in the Evil Eye” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1920) p. 127.

<sup>135</sup> Douth Dɛŋ Balan, Interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (February 6, 2013).

Gabriel Giet Jal, “History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” PhD. diss. (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987).

Dry-side communities were constantly on the move and used different pastures from year to year as rainfall and flood patterns varied. As a result they had to negotiate with their neighbors constantly. This environmentally defined competitive political context motivated highly mobile agro-pastoralists to create various neutral authorities, who helped them resolve frequent disputes over pastures or about who owned highly moveable (and thus easily stolen) cattle. Communities of *jiëëŋ* living west of the Bahr el-Jebel resolved these disputes by respecting the arbitration of men known as “masters of the fishing-spear” (*beny bith*), whose supernatural powers they attributed to a divinity name RIŊ (that is “FLESH”). Various confederations of *jiëëŋ* east of the Bahr el-Jebel (known collectively as Padaŋ) turned to an official they called the “master of blood” (*beny riem*), whose power also came from FLESH, as well as to a “master of the clan-divinity” (*beny yath*), who maintained local shrines.

Both western and eastern *jiëëŋ* “masters” also drew legitimacy from many of the same legendary figures, especially a culture-hero named Aiwel Loŋar.<sup>136</sup> Tales of Aiwel Loŋar state that his mother conceived him when a divine power (*ɔk*) living in the river impregnated her. This supernatural paternity ensures that descendants of Aiwel Loŋar have no patrilineal kin whom they might favor in a dispute. For western *jiëëŋ*, all masters of the fishing-spear inherited the emblem of their office from men whom Aiwel Loŋar had gifted with sacred spears. Thus they inherited by extension a neutrality that placed them outside of the local lineages party to these disputes and encouraged popular sayings like “no man has a master of the fishing-spear all to his own”.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Paul Howell, “Appendix to Chapter II” in Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 97-104).

Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 38-44.

<sup>137</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 169, 171-218.

In the east, *jiëëŋ* officials in Padaŋ confederations achieved a similar neutrality in different ways, primarily through shrines located on patches of high ground.<sup>138</sup> These shrines are generally a set of houses near a very large mound of earth and bear more than a passing resemblance to those that their *collø* neighbors erected near the residences of their “kings” (*rädh*). The Padaŋ cluster of *jiëëŋ* relied on a “master of the clan divinity” (*bany yith*) to resolve conflicts by channeling the divinity of each mound, much as the *rädh* unified the *collø* by channeling the spiritual power of divine ancestor NYIKAD.<sup>139</sup> *Nei ti naath* also had their own variation on the same political-spiritual principle to ensure their neutrality. They referred their quarrels to a “father” (or “owner”) of “the earth” (*guan muon*) who wore leopard skins as tokens of his office and belonged to weak or foreign lineages not involved in local rivalries.<sup>140</sup>

Dry-side communities also positioned an expansive definition of kinship at the very heart of their sense of moral community as real “people”. Dry-side communities used fear of “incest”, or marriage with an individual of any identifiable shared kinship, no matter how remote, to ensure that every marriage would expand their families’ kinship networks by allowing unions only between complete outsiders to local politics, in much the same way that wet-side communities used fear of the evil eye to compel wealth redistribution. Dry-side communities used different terms for incest (*ruaal* in *thok naath* and *akeeth* in *thuŋjjäŋ*) but developed very

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<sup>138</sup> One example of a shrine in the Machar Marshes is Luanj Kerjok, maintained by the Eastern Njok who controlled the district of Yom (in the western part what is now Longechuk County) until the nineteenth century. Some members of the lineage of Adura, the traditional caretakers for the shrine, still reside in the area but they have fully integrated themselves within various *nei ti naath* lineages of the Gaa-jak section of the Eastern Jikäny. Howell also provided a brief description of the Donjol shrine of “Ayong Dit” [sic] located north of Malakal

Paul Howell, “Pyramids’ in the Upper Nile Region” *Man* (1948) p. 52-53.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Howell, “Appendix to Chapter II” in Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 97-104).

This “island” is the strip of land between the Bahr el-Jebel and Bahr el-Zeraf Rivers most of which is now occupied by various *nei ti naath*.

<sup>140</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 291-293.

similar beliefs which they embedded at the heart of the origin stories discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Forbidding marriage between distant relatives was only part of this prohibition, which grew to preclude marriage with the children of close friends and age-mates, persons who already had common in-laws, someone from a community that shared the same spear call, and basically anybody who shared any meaningful bond that might be invoked in the event of local conflicts. Both *nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ* came to believe that cases of minor “incest” caused horrible skin diseases (and various other misfortunes), while major violations would bring certain death unless the local arbiter (a *beny wut* or *guan mucn*) presided over a highly ritualized (and expensive) sacrifice.<sup>141</sup> Among *nei ti naath* this ceremony meant literally reenacting *tuk naath* by cutting a sacrificial steer in half. In other words “people of the people” had to recreate exogamous kinship to escape the likely lethal consequences of a death.

Dry-side communities, as with their wet-side counterparts, created spiritual-political leaders and discourses about moral community which differed as much from place to place as from language to language. The most famous example of these slight differences is the term *ciëŋ*, which means “abide” in *thuŋjäŋ* and “abode” in *thok naath*. Ultimately the choice to use this word as a verb (“living together in harmony”) or as noun (the “people or place they lived in harmony with”) did not amount to a significant difference.<sup>142</sup>

One meaningful difference that developed between *nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ* between 1400 and 1700 was that *nei ti naath* elaborated a gendered discourse about “mothers” as conduits of all human relationships and “fathers” as the masters of political-spiritual power. Both “people”,

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<sup>141</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972) p. 94-95.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 183-184.

<sup>142</sup> Various scholars have translated *ciëŋ* with different English terms and dedicated full chapters to their explanations. In truth “living in harmony” and “home area” might better capture the way “people” have used these terms. The choice to translate them here as “abide” and “abode” is designed to highlight verb-to-noun relationship between the way *jiëëŋ* and *nei ti naath* use the exact same term.

though treated ethnographically as “patrilineal”, thought of kinship as essentially uterine, but not to the same degree. The word “kinship” in *thuɔŋjäŋ* clearly derives from the word “uterus”, and the *thok naath* term “kinship” literally means “my mother”, but in *thok naath* all words for friendship and immediate family derive from “mother”.<sup>143</sup> *Nei ti naath* also developed a more pronounced difference between themselves and all their neighbors as they developed another gendered discourse of kinship and power and they abandoned older terms for father and patrilineal kin that resembled *wa* in every other River-Lake Nilotic language (see previous chart on pages sixty-five and sixty-six). This pattern of using a different word for father also corresponded with their choice to use the word “father” to describe all their political officials, even as their neighbors used non-kinship terms for “master”.

#### Motherhood and Kinship Terms

English	<i>thok naath</i>	<i>thuɔŋjäŋ</i>
uterus		<i>adieth</i>
vagina	<i>muur</i>	<i>muur</i>
my mother	<i>maar</i>	<i>maar</i>
kinship	<i>maar</i>	<i>dhieth</i>
friendship	<i>maar</i>	<i>määth</i>
my brother	<i>dämaar</i> (son of my mother)	<i>mënhkäi</i> (brother of firstborn)
my sister	<i>nyamaar</i> (daughter of my mother)	<i>nyankäi</i> (sister of firstborn)

#### Spiritual-Political Leadership Terms

Community Role	<i>thok naath</i>	<i>thuɔŋjäŋ</i>
father (3rd person)	<i>guan</i>	<i>wän</i>

<sup>143</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) p. 156.

Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas* (University of California Press, 1996) p. 178-181.

arbitrator of disputes	<i>guan muɔn</i> (literally “owner of earth”)	<i>beny bith</i> or <i>beny riem</i> (“master of fishing-spear”) or (“master of blood”)
migration master	<i>guan juacni</i> (“owner of grasses”)	<i>beny wut</i> (“master of dry-season camp”)
master of a divinity	<i>guan kuoth</i> (“owner of divinity”)	<i>beny yith</i> (“master of clan divinity”)

These patterns of either using father/owner (*guan*) or “master” (*beny*) as titles show that even though *nei ti naath* and *jiěēŋ* developed very similar commitments to exogamous kinship, and created leaders who solved the same basic political problems that strong kinship created, they conceived of their parallel innovations through different paradigms.

## Conclusion

The uniquely gendered discourse of *nei ti naath* suggests that their recognized history as a distinct “people” began with kinship in an even deeper sense than the kinship rites described in their origin stories. All dry-side specialists concluded that their mobile lifestyles called for exogamous marriages, but early *nei ti naath* were particularly adamant that political and spiritual leadership, and the bonds of blood and friendship that both held their communities together and defined the fault lines within them, literally flowed through their fathers and mothers. With regard to others living around the Sudd, dry-side herders’ extremely expansive style of the politics of exogamy helped them gradually achieve dominance across most of the region between 1400 and the 1700s, but their kinship-based ontology was not entirely egalitarian and eventually generated enough inter-communal competition to inspire more ongoing dramatic reforms.



## Chapter 2

### Marking Marriageability:

#### Reconstructing a Gendered History of the Era of “Turning-Hearts” (1790s-1828)

Although [manhood] initiation is a crucial step in age-stratification, marriage is a necessary condition to becoming an adult of full legal capacity. It is the threshold of independence from the family and the founding of a new line ... Foremost is the goal of procreation which, being a means to other values, pervades the social system. It creates a web of values and institutions crowned by the overall goal of immortality through children, preferably sons.<sup>144</sup>

Francis Mading Deng

Dinka living near the Nuer have adopted the Nuer pattern of head cicatrization “because the Nuer girls laugh at the Dinka marks.”<sup>145</sup>

Godfrey Lienhardt

#### Chapter Overview

*Nei ti naath* knowledge of the past comes into more directly historical focus with the development of initiations of generational cohorts of men (*riëc*, or *ric* singular) named “Hornless-White-Steer” (*Cot-Bör* circa 1800), “Turning-Hearts” (*Gær-loic* circa 1810), and “Pulling-Out” (*Yuac* before 1828). These turn-of-the-nineteenth-century marriageability-sets appear to have been among the first to use a particular kind of facial scarification called *gaar*. Names like “Turning-Hearts” and “Pulling-Out” reflect the collective experiences of communities that attracted and assimilated outsiders, apparently with these *gaar*, and then began to expand into neighboring territories. This chapter presents a historical reconstruction of why dry-side herders invested so heavily in marking male marriageability and discusses what made *gaar* particularly effective, both generally among *nei ti naath* and particularly for subgroups of

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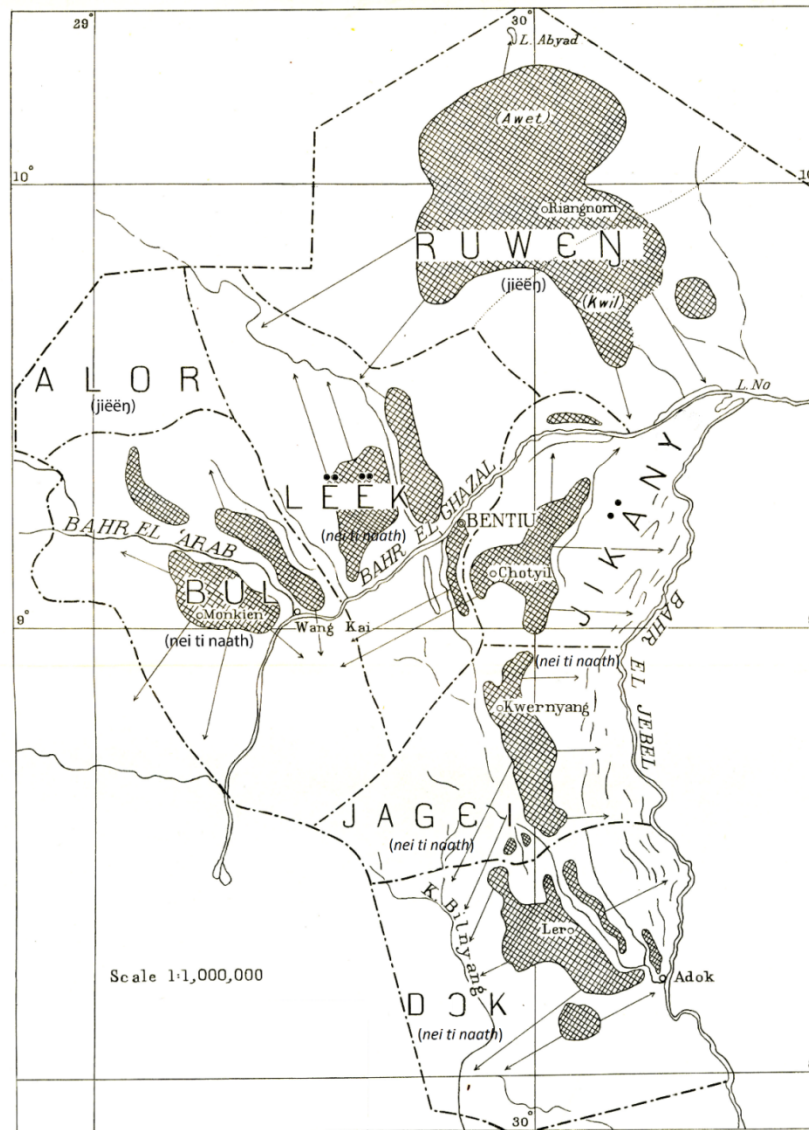
<sup>144</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972) p. 93-94.

<sup>145</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 204.

them who moved east of the Nile River in the 1820s. The ironic consequences of these successes form the focus of the succeeding chapter.

## Map 2.0

### *Nei ti naath* Homeland in the North-Central Sudd



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<sup>146</sup> Shaded areas represent wet-season settlements and arrows indicate where each confederation moves in a typical dry-season. Map adapted from

Jongeli Investigation Team, *The Equatorial Nile Project and Its Effects on the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan vol. 1* (Khartoum: Mefit-Babtie, 1954).

## The Dry-Side Logic of Male Marriageability-Sets

Dry-side herders who invested their sense of being “people” in extensive ties of kinship may seem highly egalitarian, especially in comparison to the landowning elites among their sedentary neighbors, but relationships among herding kindred were not entirely balanced. In fact, dry-side communities intentionally leveraged profound inequalities between patriarchs and matriarchs on the one hand and subservient “children” on the other to help their communities thrive. Youths in these mobile communities could generally evade landowners’ attempts to monopolize the means of production in any particular patch of the Sudd by affiliating themselves with welcoming matrilineal kin, so dry-side elders found other ways to keep them under control. Senior *jiēñ* and *nei ti naath* focused their political energies on controlling marriages, and kinship ties that marriages created, because communities built on exogamous kinship prized marriage as their primary legitimate means of patrilineal reproduction and as the surest way of creating irrevocable ties among otherwise isolated families. Elders depended on children both for physical work and to extend the lives of their ancestors beyond the grave and compelled youths to labor (and go into labor) by promising them the chance eventually to attain these parental privileges.

These inter-generational arrangements worked as long as youths accepted their elders’ terms, but dry-side communities struggled to design effective incentives to attract their men. Unlike women, whose efforts to have as many children as possible rarely harmed others, one of the best ways for polygynous patriarchs to become heads of larger houses was to claim fertile young women by preventing younger men from marrying. Consequently marginalized bachelors often resented powerful patriarchs.

Patriarchs who managed to manipulate male marriageability in their favor by disqualifying youths did not lower local birthrates, as girls usually married shortly after they were able to bare children, whether to older or to younger men. However, greedy elders weakened their communities' coherence, as their corrupt behavior alienated the young men, who defended the communities' herds, and encouraged them to join any neighboring group that promised a less restrictive path to parenthood. This conflict between young bachelors and older men compelled dry-side communities who wanted to send their youths out to defend their herds (or raid their neighbors) to invent new ways of limiting patriarchal monopolies on marriage at home and of attracting disaffected male youths from neighboring communities. Most of their methods for achieving these goals revolved around creating gender-specific generational groups, called "marriageability-sets" (*riëc* or *ric* singular), to qualify young men who played by the rules to marry, or even to guarantee them wives.

Except for one ethnographer, named John Burton, every previous scholar has translated *ric* as "age-set". This gloss is problematic because it conflates *ric* with a considerable diversity of other generational cohorts elsewhere across Africa that have operated in radically different ways, and have sometimes even served the opposite purpose of institutionalizing older men's polygynous opportunities. This diversity of age-related distinctions is evident in the considerable literature on the Maasai, where ethnographers describe age-sets as military units, while anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard have stated that *ric* had no military purpose for *nei ti naath*. Burton noted that almost every tradition associated with *ric* worked to ensure that all the men who joined would eventually find a wife (even posthumously if necessary) or expressly prohibited elders from taking younger brides. Nevertheless, Burton's constructive translation of *ric* as "marriage-set" has yet to overcome the academic inertia behind continuing uses of "age-

sets”.<sup>147</sup> This dissertation refines Burton’s basic idea and speaks of “marriageability-sets” to stress that joining a *ric* made men eligible to marry but did not have any direct connection to the elaborate processes of courtship, betrothal, and eventual marriage.

No matter how one translates *ric*, River-Lake Nilotes seem to have practiced modest forms of controlling male competition for wives even before the late the eighteenth century when a few dry-side communities west of the Bahr el-Jebel began experimenting with using standardized patterns of forehead scarification to mark membership in a *ric*. *Jiëëŋ* living all across the Sudd developed varying means of retaining and recruiting youths in different areas, while *nei ti naath*, who all lived on the Bahr el-Jebel’s west bank, increasingly focused on a single set of successful solutions built on a style of scarification (*gaar*) that incised six parallel lines across the forehead.<sup>148</sup> In general terms, *jiëëŋ* who lived west of the Bahr el-Jebel found a way of guaranteeing marriage that satisfied their natal sons. Conversely eastern *jiëëŋ*, known generally as *Padaŋ*, developed less effective methods of marking marriageability that left them at a disadvantage in retaining the loyalty of younger generations even before a severe flood called *Amol Magook* (circa 1820) made them especially vulnerable.

*Nei ti naath* who practiced *gaar* took advantage of these vulnerabilities and moved eastward into open areas vacated during the deluge. *Nei ti naath* migrants who settled in these relatively unoccupied areas then used their distinctive forehead inscriptions of six horizontal lines to encourage mass defections of bachelors from *Padaŋ* (that is eastern *jiëëŋ*) communities, until virtually everyone in the eastern Sudd either joined their ranks or imitated their particularly effective strategy of scarification. Communities of both *jiëëŋ* and *nei ti naath* seem to have

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<sup>147</sup> For a fuller description of why a *ric* functioned more as “marriageability-set” than a classic “age-set” see John Burton, “Atuot Age Categories and Marriage” *Africa* (1980) p. 146-160.

<sup>148</sup> In many dialects of *Thuɔŋjäŋ* the term *gaar* is pronounced *gɔɔr*.

attracted marginalized males to adopt *gaar* by offering cattle to finance marriages for rich and poor alike. The inscribers also made marriage more difficult for men who refused their marks by raising their own daughters to mock any youth with a clear forehead as a mere “boy”, or someone without standing, or respect, among men. Thus communities that augmented their *ric* traditions with *gaar* also exploited their practice of polygyny (which made males expendable in terms of a community’s reproduction) and exogamy (which required marrying outsiders) to help them incorporate other men’s sons. This policy allowed communities with *gaar* to siphon off their neighbors’ economic, spiritual, and military potential.

The ways that *nei ti naath* communities used this new method of marking marriageability to assimilate foreign men allow scholars to understand how they gained control of most of the eastern Sudd between 1820 and the 1860s. However, this gendered history was nothing like the reified ethno-linguistic “Dinka versus Nuer” conflict that scholars have used to describe the process. Communities of *nei ti naath* never managed to absorb, or even meaningfully displace, communities among western *jiëëŋ* that had their own versions of *gaar*, even when local versions involved a different number of lines or a chevron pattern. Many confederations of *jiëëŋ* in the eastern and the southern Sudd also survived this era by adopting *gaar* for themselves before they could be absorbed. Furthermore, during the nineteenth century the Agaar confederation of western *jiëëŋ*, who use this same six horizontal line pattern, also assimilated thousands of *nei ti naath* (known today as the Pakam Agaar of northern Lakes State).<sup>149</sup>

Dry-side communities who became heavily invested in *gaar* began ordering their lives around this practice and also began using *ric* and *gaar* to literally mark their histories. Unlike the *cøllø* (who measured time by memorizing the names of each pseudo-monarchical *rådth* and the –

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<sup>149</sup> Stephanie Beswick, *Sudan’s Blood Memory* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004) p. 75-76.

at least attributed – lengths of their reigns), these herders used each *ric* as a temporal marker and memorized their sequential order so they could carefully ascertain the relative seniorities of all males (including deceased ancestors). At times, the orderings of these names shows the extent of collaboration across confederation boundaries, as when ancestors of the Jikāny, Thianj, Lāk, Lōu, and Gaawäär confederations of *nei ti naath* all agreed to create a common *ric* named “Hornless-White-Steer” (*Cōt-Bör* initiated circa 1800).<sup>150</sup> However, some *ric* names, like “Turning-Hearts” (*Gēer-Loic*), also have historical value because they allude to subjective historical experiences of a sort not communicated in other ways of referencing the same moment in time, like a Gregorian date (in this case, circa 1810) or the name of the reigning *rādh* (in this case, Yör wa Kudīd).

### Historicizing the Anthropology of *Gaar*

Although *gaar* obviously has a history (or histories), cultural anthropologists and other researchers have treated *gaar* as an undifferentiated and relatively timeless “tradition”. This structural approach has encouraged a lamentable lack of historical depth in academic research on the *nei ti naath*. For example, Evans-Pritchard’s observation, a full eighty years ago, that “the cuts [of *gaar*] are distinctly visible on the skulls of dead Nuer” still has not inspired archaeologists to attempt to date this rite.<sup>151</sup> Working within the problematically static ethnic paradigms of “Nuer” and “Dinka”, ethnographers have also ignored differences between *gaar* and other kinds of scarification, even in the ethnographic present. This oversight has obscured

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<sup>150</sup> Though Jackson and Stigand, who did not speak Nuer, misspelled this set’s name as *Shod Bur* among the Gaawäär, Lāk, and Thianj and as *Shot Bor* for the Lōw and Jikāny, they were clearly describing the same *ric*, the *Cōt-Bör*.

Chauncey Hugh Stigand, “Warrior Classes of the Nuers” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1918) p. 116-118.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Age-Sets” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 247-248.

Henry C. Jackson, “The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1923) p. 59-190.

<sup>151</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Age-Sets” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 240.

how the different patterns of *gaar* actually fissure, transcend, and generally confound categories based on attributed ethnicities. Even when scholars have produced very useful descriptions of *gaar*, ahistorical and hyper-ethnicized analyses have also eclipsed much of the historical knowledge that communities' most reputable elders have maintained in their lists of these names.

Understanding herders' decision to invent *gaar*, and others' reasons for adopting it, requires cultural and historical background. First, at the cultural level of analysis, academics cannot begin to track *gaar* through time and space until they abandon their vague allusions to “scarification”, which conflate *gaar* with other ways of marking skin that have had held entirely different social meanings. The good news is that River-Lake Nilotes have already provided information of this historical sort by inscribing alternative paradigms on their own foreheads for everyone to see.

Residents of the Sudd assign radically different meanings for different bodily markings and reference each of them with a distinct, and distinguishing, term. In broad terms, River-Lake Nilotes' body markings fit into three general categories: circumcision, long lines inscribed across the forehead, and a variety of dot patterns (on almost any body part) created by repeatedly puncturing the skin. In many languages “cutting” is actually a synonym for “circumcision”, and terms for *gaar* are similar (and especially similar to the *thok naath* term) to words used today for “engraving”, “writing”, and “inscribing”.



English	thok naath	thuɔŋjäŋ <sup>152</sup>	dhø cøllø <sup>153</sup>	dhók anywaa <sup>154</sup>
to cut (meat or flesh)	bak	ŋot	ŋɔl / ŋɔt	ŋòl
to circumcise (men)	cuɛl	cuol / ŋot	cwɛl / ŋɔl	daŋ / ŋòl
to engrave / to write / to inscribe	gɔar	gɔt	gwɛt	
to create lined scars (verb)	gaar	gɔr / gǝǝr	göro	gör
lined scars on forehead (noun)	gaar	gɔr		
dot-pattern scars (various designs)	bieer / toŋjɔl / biɛl	yuath	tai <sup>155</sup>	käde
a scar, burn mark, or boil (unintentional)	piaar	piar	balo	pöò

This list is not a complete catalogue of River-Lake Nilotes' numerous body markings, and, since most others have nothing to do with marriageability, describing them would be subjects for separate studies. The important distinctions regarding marriageability are that dot-pattern marks are not *gaar* and that all these other kinds of marking, so obviously different to anyone looking at them “in the flesh”, have their own histories that have been obscured by classing them in an undifferentiated English category of “scarification”.

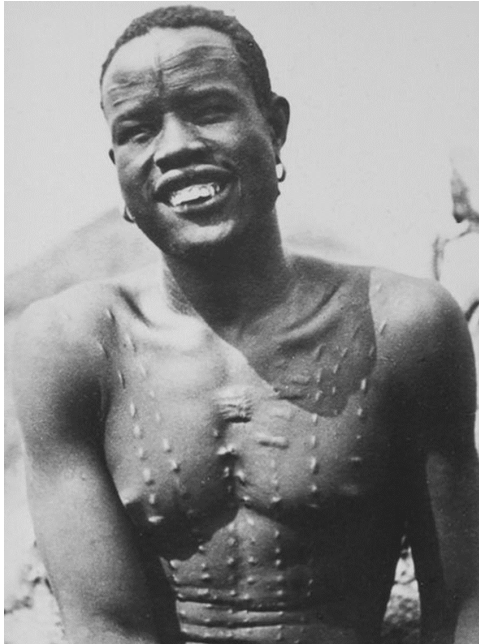
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<sup>152</sup> Roger Blench and John Duerksen, *Dinka-English Dictionary* (Washington D.C.: SIL International, 2005)

<sup>153</sup> J. A. Heasty, *English-Shilluk Shilluk-English Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Mission Board, 1937).  
Diedrich Hermann Westermann, *The Shilluk People: their language and folklore* (Philadelphia: Board of Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1912) p. 258.

<sup>154</sup> Conrad Perner, *Anyuak: A Luo-Language of the Southern Sudan* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Inc, 1990).

<sup>155</sup> Charles Seligman and Brenda Seligman, *The Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932) p. 72.



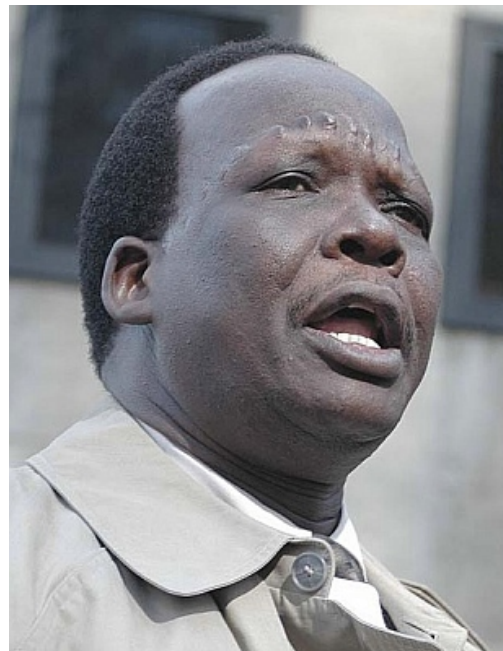
Nei ti naath: forehead *gaar* and dot markings (1900)



Cuol Kuek has *gaar* without dot markings (2013)



cøllø man with cøllø forehead marks (1910)



Simon Aban Denj with cøllø markings (2007)

<sup>156</sup> Photograph by Richard Storch, "Nuer man. Shambe, Al Buhayrat, South Sudan " [ca. 1900 – 1909], Numbre de gestion, PP0031686, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.

<sup>157</sup> Photograph by Charles Seligman, "Shilluk Youth" [ca. 1910], Accession Number: 1998.348.18, Box of negatives in envelopes # 1-242, Pitt River Museum, University of Oxford.

<sup>158</sup> Photograph produced by Simon's organization, Sudan Freedom Walk

Elders in the Padaŋ cluster of confederations east of the Bahr el-Jebel agree that their ancestors did not practice *gaar* until *nei ti naath* immigrants from the west introduced the practice.<sup>159</sup> According to elders in the Rut, Thoi, and Luac confederations living along the White Nile, these *nei ti naath* immigrants arrived only after these eastern *jiëëŋ* had endured a series of raids organized by Akwøt wa Yör (*rādh* of the *cøllø*, circa 1817-1827), while a certain Bul Aweau (who died around 1820) was still the “shrine master” (*beny yath*) at Luanj Dəŋ in the Zeraf Island.<sup>160</sup> Elders from the Eastern Dook confederation of *jiëëŋ* (who now border the Eastern Jikāny to the north) testify that their communities adopted a six-line pattern of *gaar* only after they began to intermarry with new *nei ti naath* neighbors. Other *jiëëŋ* who live near *nei ti naath* east of the Bahr el-Jebel also claim to have adopted this six-line pattern from the same sources, particularly the Nyarruweŋ and Yøl confederations of Duk Ridge in what is now Jongeli State. These claims are not mere reflections of present politics, since elderly Padaŋ support their narratives by naming specific forefathers who lacked *gaar* and lived through the catastrophic *Amol Magook* flood (circa 1820).<sup>161</sup>

Elders in other confederations corroborate this narrative, regardless of whether they view *gaar* in a negative or positive light. For example, a man from the Agæer confederation (who live beyond the northeastern edge of the Sudd and have never bordered any *nei ti naath* directly)

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<sup>159</sup> The Padaŋ are often referred to as “Northern Dinka” or “Northeastern Dinka” but these terms mainly reflect the relative positions of these communities that still exist today. Before the events described in this chapter Padaŋ communities also inhabited most of what is now central Jongeli State and southern Upper Nile State, well south of their present territories.

<sup>160</sup> Akwøt wa Yör translates “Akwøt son of Yör”. Yör was often known as Nykuaci so the Akwøt Nykuaci named by Douglas Johnson is indeed the same person.

Douglas Johnson, “Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1992) p. 633-634.

<sup>161</sup> *Amol Magook* was the name of a man from the Thoi confederation of *jiëëŋ* who died in this flood. Other communities refer to the same flood by different names.

Douglas Johnson, “Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1992) p. 632-635.

insisted that “we never had any *gaar*, it is a Nuer idea”.<sup>162</sup> Eastern Jikāny elders confirm this story, as roughly half of them still admit that their ancestors were uninscribed *jiëëŋ* or *anywaa* whose sons became *nei ti naath* after adopting *gaar*. One elderly man in Mathiang County, whose ancestors were Padaŋ from the Ɖoɔk confederation, explained the shift in this way.

Guaŋ guar cɔɛ Wɛr.	My father’s father was called Wɛr.
Ricɛ Boi-loc.	His age-set was White-Hearts [marked in the 1860s]
Guaŋ Wɛr cɔɛ Duŋdit.	Wɛr’s father was called Duŋdit.
Duŋdit /kanɛ gaar ke yöö jɛn ɛ Ɖoɔk.	Duŋdit did not [have] <i>gaar</i> because he was Ɖoɔk.
Ɖoɔk /kanɛ gaar nhiam	Ɖoɔk did not [practice] <i>gaar</i> before
Latjɔɔr cɛ ben.	Latjɔɔr [a Jikāny leader] came. <sup>163</sup>

Most of Eastern Jikāny men who acknowledge descent from these uninscribed *jiëëŋ* trace their lineages to the nearest Padaŋ confederations, the Eastern Ɖoɔk, Doŋjɔɔl, and the Luac, but a considerable number tell the same stories about unmarked ancestors from more distant confederations, suggesting that in 1820 all Padaŋ lacked the institution of *gaar*. These similarly uninscribed ancestors hailed from the geographically dispersed Rut and Thoi confederation (who are northwest of contemporary Eastern Jikāny) and the Yɔɔl and Nyarruweŋ (to their southwest).<sup>164</sup> Other Eastern Jikāny elders also tell similar stories about ancestors from the Tuic East and Bor confederations of southern *jiëëŋ*. However, since Evans-Pritchard encountered assimilated *jiëëŋ* from Tuic East and Bor who had endured a second scarification in the 1930s, it also seems possible that some of these assimilated men may have already had something like the four-line style of *gaar* that the Bor practice today but were nonetheless “re-inscribed”.

Communities of *jiëëŋ* in the far western Sudd, like the Padaŋ in the 1820s, also appear to have lacked *gaar* in the eighteenth century, or at least between 1793 and 1796 when an English

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<sup>162</sup> Awer Dau Agany, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 13, 2013).

<sup>163</sup> Tap Luak Wɛr, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 1, 2013).

<sup>164</sup> This remarkable diversity exists even within very small groups. For example, among the Eastern Jikāny, the cien Wau community in the Thɔɔc region of Maiwut County includes persons who claim grandfathers and great-grandfathers from every one of the confederations of *jiëëŋ* listed above.

adventurer in the Sahara, William Browne, encountered some of them during a stay among the Fur (that is, in Darfur). Browne was a careful observer of outward appearances, despite his other shortcomings as a writer, and recorded this description of bodily markings (including Nilotic teeth-exaction) in the midst of a longer discussion of female circumcision around Darfur.

One race of idolatrous negroes, near Fûr, has a habit of extracting two or more of the front teeth of children before puberty...

Among some tribes of blacks, there exists a practice of piercing the skin in certain forms by way of ornament. Each of the punctures leaves an indelible scar, as distinctive as colour, which is not used. This practice, which is of the same description as that of some of the South-sea islands, is used on the face, breast, loins, &c.<sup>165</sup>

Browne clearly described dot-pattern markings instead of the lined inscriptions that constitute *gaar*. He also did not note any gender specific patterns, even though he was generally quick to include such details. Given his strong track record with observations of this kind, Browne's silence on facial lines suggests that teeth-extracting Nilotes in the far western Sudd (presumably the Malual confederation of western *jiëëŋ* who border Darfur) generally lacked *gaar* in the mid-1790s.

The only place where dry-side herders seem to have practiced *gaar* in the eighteenth century was in the North-Central Sudd (the northern half of what is now Unity State), near the confluence of the Bahr el-Ghazal and the Bahr el-Jebel. The Bul and Jikāny confederations of *nei ti naath* may or may not have been experimenting with this concept when they initiated sets named "Altar Pole" (*Riäk*) and "Spirit" (*Jök*) at some point before the "Hornless-White-Steer" set (*Cɔt-Bör*) in 1800. However, neighboring *jiëëŋ* like the Western Dook seem also to have taken up this practice at an early date. The North-Central Sudd is also the place where the most

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<sup>165</sup> William George Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from 1792-1798* (London: T. Cadell Jr., and W. Davies et al, 1799) p. 347-349.

diverse patterns of *gaar* co-exist today, which further suggests that *gaar* originated there, because they would have had the longest time to undergo modifications to reflect ongoing local historical realignments.<sup>166</sup> Eastern Jikāny elders unanimously agree that neither the legendary founding ancestor, Kiir, nor any of his sons or grandsons had *gaar*, so, even at this original location of *gaar*, it was probably an innovation of the late eighteenth century.<sup>167</sup>

Communities near this epicenter of diversity in scarification appear to have longer histories with *gaar* also because they have done the most to intensify *gaar* over time, much as Nilotes of ancient coherence in the Sudd have intensified dental extractions far more than Nilotes of more recent arrivals, and lesser differentiation, in Kenya and Tanzania. The Western Dook of the Abeyi region on the far northern edge of the North-Central Sudd became the Sudd's most intense inscribers, initiating men with seven to ten lines. Farther south and east *nei ti naath* and *jiëëη* along the banks of the Bahr el-Jebel adopted the now-standard six-line pattern and only occasionally honored an individual with a distinguishing seventh mark.<sup>168</sup> Other *jiëëη* still farther to the south (as well as the Bari-speaking Mundari) have used four, or in some cases only three, lines. This same four-line style also predominates in the far western Sudd, and, as mentioned earlier, some confederations of *jiëëη* on the outermost fringes of the Sudd never adopted *gaar* at all.

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<sup>166</sup> Just as biologists find the most haplogroups of human mitochondrial DNA where Homo sapiens originated (eastern and southern Africa) and scholars use this pattern of linguistic diversity to locate proto-language homelands, *gaar* presumably originated in the area where the most variations now co-exist.

<sup>167</sup> Several Eastern Jikāny communities do name Kiir's great-grandsons as their first ancestor who adopted *gaar*, but, even if taken at face value, this genealogical attribution can inspire historians to produce only a fairly vague sense of time. Assuming that these claims are historical facts rather than ways of glorifying one's own clan by aggrandizing a particular ancestor, and that no ancestors were omitted from these genealogies, an average gap of thirty-five years between the birth of a father and whichever son carried on that particular lineage, *gaar* would date back only to the mid-seventeenth century.

<sup>168</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, "Nuer Age-Sets" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 240.

This inflationary pattern suggests that agro-pastoralist communities invested heavily in *gaar* at the Sudd's center, where they had to compete most intensely with fellow dry-side specialists as well as with one another, while herders on the more open edges of the Sudd have had less intense resort to this excruciating rite. The dry-side communities who have shown the least enthusiasm for *gaar* have also lived closest to sedentary cultivators (either near the Ironstone Plateau to the south and the west, at the base of the Ethiopian Plateau to the east, or to the north on the arable flood-free banks of the White Nile below Malakal), which further highlights the link between *gaar* and rivalries among mobile cattle-keepers.

### **Earlier Methods for Marking a *Ric* and *Gaar***

Most dry-side herders adopted *gaar* only as the *nei ti naath* moved out from the Bahr el-Jebel after the turn of the nineteenth century, but this new method of marking men's marriageability was just one way of adjusting a much older tradition of initiating men into a *ric*. Just as scholars' imprecise generic translation of *gaar* as "scarification" has muddled its history, abstract terms like "age-set" or "age-class" have elided the process, and even the purpose, of adopting *ric* by conflating these marriageability-sets with other kinds of peer cohorts that have served radically different purposes.

The problem with defining a *ric* only as a generic "age-set" becomes evident immediately when one sees how ethnographers described differing practices among "the Bari" and "the Nuer" in the same 1936 edition of *Sudan Notes and Records*, with an equivalently aggregative term.

Despite the ceremonial surrounding the forming of an Age-Class [among "the Bari"], there seems to be no chosen person to decide when this shall be done ... The decision seems to be made by the fathers of the boys ... a general agreement is reached to send their sons to the tooth-extractor and form a new Age-Class. [Any] sexual intercourse between [male and female] initiates [of the same

set] is supposed to bring down an evil spirit on the Classes ...  
Many of the girls, moreover, are already betrothed to older men.<sup>169</sup>

Clearly these “age-classes” (known in *Kutuk na Bari* as *ber*) empowered older generations to collude in arranging marriages with much younger women while cursing any male youth audacious enough to challenge their marital monopoly. These *ber* also employed the unisex Nilotic tradition of dental evulsion to mark them. They were employed for essentially the opposite purpose of the “Nuer age-sets” that Evans-Pritchard observed as ensuring marriages among men and women of roughly the same age.

[O]ne of the actions of the [Nuer] age-set system is the regulation of marriage... No man may marry the daughter of an age-set [sic] ... When I asked what would happen if a man were to marry the daughter of an age-mate, I was told that his comrades would appeal to the *kwoth ricdien* [sic]<sup>170</sup>, the spirit of their age-set... [then] He would die... Doubtless the prohibition is re-enforced by the fact that there would always be a very great difference in age between a man and the daughter of an age-mate, for marriage between people of about the same age is usual in the Nuer society and marriage with a girl of the age of one's children is exceptional.<sup>171</sup>

Both “the Bari” and “the Nuer” were (and are) fellow Nilotes living along the Bahr el-Jebel in what is now South Sudan, and the *beron* (singular of *ber*) and their *ric* both meet anthropologists' definitions of an age-set as a group of peers. However these superficial similarities were irrelevant to the differing purposes of the communities involved, since they use terms (*beron* and *ric*) that clearly have separate etymologies and use them to serve opposite

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<sup>169</sup> A. C. Beaton, “The Bari: Clan and Age-Class Systems” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 109-145.

<sup>170</sup> Evans-Pritchard's quotation was correct but bears clarifying. The word *kuoth* means “divinity” while *ricdien* is “their *ric*”.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Age-Sets” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 264-265.



goals. Scholars' abstract criteria for an "age-set" matter far less than the reasons why Nilotes valued a *ric* (or, for that matter, also a *beron*).<sup>172</sup>

Both dry-side and wet-side River-Lake Nilotes have consistently used *ric* to extend intra-familial rankings of siblings, whose birth order determined the order in which sons could marry, to children in a wider community beyond the boundaries of a single household.<sup>173</sup> The basic idea of a *ric* has been that all the members of a preceding set ought to marry before any of their "younger brothers" in the next cohort, even if some families within a community could afford to pay bride-wealth for a younger son before some of their neighbors who also had older children.<sup>174</sup> As far as anyone can ascertain, the practice of *ric* has always involved gendered rites of passage marking social and sexual maturity. It has never relied on unisex initiation rites like teeth-extraction that have nothing to do with marriage.

For River-Lake Nilotes generally, initiations into "womanhood" (that is, rites that marked post-pubescent girls as marriageable) have usually been comparatively low-key affairs that followed their first menstruation. Women often underwent these rites in small groups that only sometimes rose to the level of organizing a formal *ric*-like cohort (most notably among the Western Ḍɔ̣k). River-Lake Nilotes worried less about clarifying female marriageability through public rituals because senior wives had little to gain by trying to prevent young women from marrying their husbands (and much to gain from a junior wife's labor). Moreover, even if they might have hoped to deny their neighbors' sons' access to their daughters' reproductive powers, they would have a difficult time refuting the bloody biological evidence of female fertility.

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<sup>172</sup> By the time Evans-Pritchard visited them, "The Nuer" did have a different tradition which might possibly share some common historical origin with this Bari tradition, since he reported that initiated men would gather in "these camps (called *nāk* or *kanar*) [which] are a custom separate from the age-set system". Edward Evans-Pritchard, "Nuer Age-Sets" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1936) p. 245.

<sup>173</sup> Many confederations of western *jiëñ* use the terms *ric* and *rem* fairly interchangeably.

<sup>174</sup> Paul Howell, "Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile" *Africa* (1953) p. 98.  
Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 17.

Males, on the other hand, lacked a similarly dramatic testament to their virile maturity. Some communities have recognized dropping testes as a partial sign of maturity, but elders have also had much stronger motives to contest the marriageability of younger males and have made a practice of exploiting any ambiguity as to the “adulthood” of male youths.

River-Lake Nilotes clarified this equivocal status, and limited patriarchal abuses of their seniority, by crafting very public and intentionally gendered rites of male-gendered initiation. The most common ways that River-Lake Nilotes declared that the marriageability of “men”, at least before the *nei ti naath* elaborated *gaar*, was granting men the right to participate in particular dances, wear certain ornaments, or refrain from tasks like milking that they classified as the work of women and their subordinate children. River-Lake Nilotes who both did and did not adopt *gaar*, have maintained these other ways of marking marriageability, which suggests that the *nei ti naath* added an even more public, permanent and unambiguous rite of *gaar* by intensifying these older rites.

The wet-side *cøllø*, who live just beyond the northeastern edge of the Sudd, have practiced some of the most modest ways of marking marriageability. For the *cøllø* a *ric* of peers has generally encompassed only a single village, and men assemble by their sets only at funerals, or to drink beer, and at other ceremonies of minor collective significance.<sup>175</sup> Their ceremonial dance where *cøllø* boys became men by donning animal skins and other regalia for the first time was not considered an especially important rite by ethnographers of the twentieth century,

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<sup>175</sup> Audrey Butt Colson, *The Nilotes of the Sudan and Uganda* (London: International African Institute, 1952).

This relative antiquity seems probable but is of yet unproved. Certain groups, including all *anywaa*, also lack any similar tradition associated with the word *ric* or any apparent cognate.

though they did note that it did forged sets that helped mitigate localized inequalities in young men's marital prospects.<sup>176</sup>

Other River-Lake Nilotes living at the opposite edge of the Sudd, such as "the Atuat" (known properly as *reel*) in modern-day Lakes State and who speak *thok naath* but do not identify as *nei ti naath*, or use six-line style of *gaar*, also exemplify the same limited significance of initiation rites. At some point during the mid-twentieth century, these *reel* adopted a non-institutionalized, unisex, four-line style of *gaar*. However, *reel* men in the 1970s told Burton that they still considered an older, and clearly gendered, rite of "forsaking milking" (*pēl ḡaac*) as the true mark of men's membership in a *ric*.

We know *ric* according to *pel ngac* [sic]. You will never be in the same *ric* as the brother ahead of you because you have not gone through *pel ngac* together. If that were to happen, then you could claim the same rights when it is time to marry. When we are in the cattle camp together we send a younger *ric* to look after the cattle while we sit and talk. The *ric* is for marriage and this is so for two reasons. Any older *ric* speaks before the younger one. People of the older *ric* are the first to be given the cows for marriage. Then, it works this way: if the people of your *ric* have been married and you have not, you go to your father and bring a word that it is now your time for marriage too.<sup>177</sup>

These examples highlight how many River-Lake Nilotes of the Sudd have consistently treated a *ric* as a marriageability-set that ensured relatively equal marital opportunities for their communities' bachelors, even though different communities have experimented with varying rites of such initiation over time.

Some strategies for ensuring marriageability for all men within in a *ric*, such as the Western Dök practice of pairing each male set with a female counterpart, caught on only in

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<sup>176</sup> Paul Howell, "Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile" *Africa* (1953) p. 98.  
Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 17.

<sup>177</sup> John Burton, "Atuat Age Categories and Marriage." *Africa* vol. 50 no. 2 (1980) p. 151-152.

certain areas. However, many of the rights men accrued by joining a *ric* did become fairly universal across the Sudd. For example, all *jiëëŋ* and *nei ti naath* seem to have agreed that any man who joined a *ric* deserved a share of the family herd and that his kin ought to announce his growing financial freedom by giving him a steer (which anthropologists have dubbed a “personality ox”).<sup>178</sup> Another shared innovation that fascinated later ethnographers was the practice that Evans-Pritchard termed “ghost-marriage”. This pseudo-levirate arrangement promised all men that, if they died childless, a relative would use the family’s cattle to marry a wife in the name of the deceased and sire sons who ought to carry the name of their (departed) legal parent rather than of their biological father.<sup>179</sup> In a spiritual landscape where ancestral ghosts lived among or within their descendants, “ghost-marriage” was unremarkable and ensured a certain kind of eternal life. This policy paralleled, and extended the principle of ending feuds by compelling murderers’ families through a payment of “blood-wealth”, which was supposed to be equivalent to a typical bride-wealth payment. Bereaved families who received a blood-wealth payment used the cattle to marry a wife to the name of the dead man or, if the deceased already had sons, to endow their eventual marriages.

Dry-side communities demanded far lower blood-wealth payments for the deaths of uninitiated “boys” than for initiated “men”, since initiates had earned the right to a marriage (even posthumously). These different valuations made male youths acutely aware that joining a *ric* quite literally increased how much their lives were worth. Unsurprisingly, youths were extremely eager to achieve the status of social maturity. If they felt spurned, they could

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<sup>178</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972) p. 80.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) p. 254.

<sup>179</sup> While typically a male affair, women could also be “husbands” if they supplied the cattle and preformed the same legal function while sending their wives to find children “in the bush”.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) p. 109-112.

circumvent the elders who delayed their initiation by leaving one mobile agro-pastoralist community and joining another that promised better terms. By transcending any particular community, *gaar* prevented neighboring settlements from tempting away ambitious young men.

The unmistakable marks of *gaar* also gave initiated men a degree of personal protection during local quarrels. Combatants who knew the high cost of blood-wealth penalties might beat an initiated man but hesitate to kill him if they feared the death costing them the cattle they and their kin needed to marry. By the same token, without *gaar*, unmarried daughters from neighboring settlements (and their parents) might not know about less obvious markers of maturity. Presumably herders in extremely exogamous communities often did not know whether a local lad still milked cows or not, or if he had worn ostrich feathers at the last dance, but they could hardly miss large lines inscribed across his forehead.

Unlike other rites, dry-side communities who used *gaar* could also exploit the politics of exogamy to recruit other men's sons. Exogamous herdsmen who were eager to marry the daughters of men with *gaar* had to put on permanent, public markings that associated them with their scarified in-laws rather than with their natal communities. Men who accepted these marks could not take them off like an ostrich feather. By giving these marks to their own sons, and requiring them of anyone who married their daughters, *nei ti naath* worked to brand as many men as possible as permanent members of their communities. All these advantages help explain why *gaar* ultimately out performed other *ric* initiation rites.

### ***Gaar*, Specialized Officials, and the Invention of Mega Marriageability-Sets**

All dry-side communities who have used *gaar* have entrusted a single officiant with administering this key communal interest. This logic mirrored the way that a "father of the

grasses” (*guan juacni*) transcended lineage and other rivalries to decide the best time for all to head for dry-season pastures together and thus prevent a destructive rush between neighbors who would otherwise be tempted to race off and exploit precious pastures before others could reach them.<sup>180</sup> Both *nei ti naath* and western *jiëëŋ* entrusted the duty of inscribing men foreheads to officiants who already had other powers, a “man of cattle” (*wut yɔɔk*) among *nei ti naath* and a “master of the fishing-spear” (*beny bith*) among western *jiëëŋ*.

Ethnographers have generally portrayed a man of cattle among *nei ti naath* in the east as an official of a very different kind from the master of the fishing-spear, who generally controlled *gaar* among western *jiëëŋ*. However, the single lineage that has held the title of man of cattle among the Eastern Jikāny for the last two centuries has based its legitimacy on the immaculate conception of their founding ancestor, Muɔŋ (“Waves”), in a tale that clearly parallels the legend of Aiwel Loŋar (the first master of the fishing-spear).

Nyal kəl cə wa yieer we puək.  
Ci ruat ɛ gaat,  
ɛ gaat kuoth naam.  
Gaat ɛmɔ cɔlə Muɔŋ.  
Mi Muɔŋ ca dap, kuoth cə ben.  
Cə Muɔŋ moc kɛ ŋɔɔm kanɛ dual  
kanɛ puot kanɛ dɛp kan.

A daughter went to the river to bathe.  
She conceived a child,  
a child of a river divinity.  
That child was called Muɔŋ (“Waves”).  
When Muɔŋ was born, divinity came.  
He gave Muɔŋ a knife, and a goatskin,  
and a cattle rod and a palm rope.<sup>181</sup>

Just as Aiwel Loŋar bequeathed a fishing-spear (*bith*) to each “master of the fishing-spear” among western *jiëëŋ*, the divine gifts in this tale serve as hereditary emblems and tokens of various powers, including creating a new *ric* by ceremonially “bringing out the knife” (*ŋɔɔm kam raar*) and closing the *ric* after a number of years by hanging it back up. Moreover, both tales feature an immaculate conception that defined these officiants as unconnected to any of the rival

<sup>180</sup> See discussion of the offices of *guan juacni* and *beny wut* in the preceding chapter.

<sup>181</sup> Goanäär Jɔk Mut Jaan Win, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 15, 2013).

lineages within a confederation or its constituent communities. Therefore these officiants were neutral leaders who could be trusted to seek the common interest.

From a historian's perspective, the most interesting aspect of this oral tradition is that the lineage members who repeat it also tell a second (superficially contradictory) story about a particular great-great-great grandson of Muoŋ named Jaən Win Dowäär. Unlike the first story, which suggests the knife of Muoŋ continued to belong to his lineage for generations, this second tradition places Jaən Win, in a much more recent generation, as the first man of cattle to exercise the power to create *gaar*.

Ni wal, Jaən Win tɛ thilɛ ŋɔɔm.  
Man Lɛŋ tɛ ŋɔɔm Muoŋ.  
Cɛ kam Jaən Win.

Long ago, Jaən Win had no knife.  
Man Lɛŋ had the knife of Muoŋ.  
She brought/gave [it] to Jaən Win.<sup>182</sup>

Unlike the demi-god Muoŋ, both Man Lɛŋ and Jaən Win are verifiably historical individuals. Man Lɛŋ was a queen dowager of the Jikäny lineage that keeps Kiir's most powerful relic (*mut Wiu*, the spear of the divinity WIU). Man Lɛŋ successfully claimed rights to the relic and leveraged its reputation to become the most revered spiritual-political figure among all Jikäny until her death (circa early 1820s).<sup>183</sup> Jaən Win also exists within verifiable historical space as the man of cattle whom Eastern Jikäny elders' credit with initiating the *Yuac* set (pre-1828), as well as various subsequent sets, until his death in the early 1860s (shortly after he "brought out

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<sup>182</sup> Goanäär Jɔk Mut Jaən Win, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 15, 2013).

<sup>183</sup> In 1983, a certain Jɔk Jaən living in Nasir told Giet Jal that a Dol Thian was Man Lɛŋ's husband (Giet Jal, 1987, pp. 351-55). In 2013, members of the actual lineage that still keep the spear near Larɛ town across the Ethiopian border repeated the same names that Major Stigand recorded in 1919 but did not confirm Giet Jal's account. The only "Duol" mentioned in their lineage, a member of the *ric* Wejaən who was initiated in 1979 and was still the spear's custodian in 1983.

The name "Thian" is a regular way of shortening "Mathian", the oldest son of Kiir, and, for a Gaa-jioke man in Nasir, merely indicates that he was describing a Gaa-jak lineage. Given this evidence, it seems more likely Man Lɛŋ's husband was actually Diet Kuoth, reported to have been the custodian of *mut Wiu* just prior to Man Lɛŋ's career.

the knife” for *Boi-loic*).<sup>184</sup> These memories suggest that the practice of entrusting *gaar* to a man of cattle may date only to the early nineteenth century.

Before the initiation of *Cɔt-Bör* (circa 1800), the Jikäny apparently coordinated their marriageability-set system with their *nei ti naath* neighbors in the Bul confederation, since in separate lists recorded in 1915 and 1923 both the Eastern Jikäny and the Bul listed *Riäk* and *Jök* as the first two marriageability-sets ever initiated, presumably during the late eighteenth century.<sup>185</sup> The Bul never adopted the six-line pattern of *gaar*, using a dot-pattern instead, so these two sets probably predated *gaar* or belong to a period when communities were still experimenting with various markings and initiation rites.<sup>186</sup> This overlap between Bul and Jikäny before *gaar* contrasts with the completely separate names these two confederations list once the Jikäny had clearly adopted *gaar*, starting with the set *Cɔt-Bör* (circa 1800). In fact the Jikäny, *Lak*, *Thiaŋ*, *Lou*, and *Gaawäär* confederations (all of whom use the six-line style of *gaar*) named the exact same marriageability-sets from *Cɔt-Bör* through *Boi-loic* (1860s) and clearly allowed this institution to transcend boundaries between them. Taken together, these independent bits of evidence suggest that, by the initiation of *Cɔt-Bör*, *nei ti naath* had begun marking different marriageability-set networks with distinguishing ways of marking the forehead. It also suggests that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, they had already expanded the network associated with the six-line pattern to create “mega-marriageability-sets” transcending divisions between otherwise independent confederations.

These expanded marriageability-sets would have put pressure on wealthier families to help finance the marriages of poorer initiates farther and farther from their own homes, because

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<sup>184</sup> It remains unclear exactly who initiated *Cɔt-Bör* (circa 1800) and *Gær-loic* (circa 1810). Eastern *nei ti naath* elders describe *Jaŋ Win* as an unprecedented figure because he was the one who traveled to the eastern Sudd.

<sup>185</sup> For a discussion of sources see the Table of Age-Sets / Marriageability-sets.

<sup>186</sup> In 2013, no Eastern Jikäny elders seemed to have any memory of these two pre-*Cɔt-Bör* sets.



the younger sons of even the wealthiest families had to wait for the entire, much larger cohort ahead of them to marry before they could have their turn. Because *nei ti naath* recognized that an “age-mate may claim a cow” from a fellow member of his *ric* to help finance his own marriage, larger sets also empowered bachelors to pool their resources on greater scales.<sup>187</sup> In a redistributive context, where marriageability-sets operated like a source of credit for bride-wealth, communities who created larger pools by uniting around the same officiant did a better job distributing expenses and making marriage affordable. In contrast, smaller *ric* networks simply could not afford to underwrite the marriages of as many of the Sudd’s marginal men, which limited their ability to assimilate outsiders.

Using special officiants to create mega marriageability-sets also facilitated male youths’ efforts to unite and plead their case for initiation before a single figure instead of petitioning councils of local patriarchs who could collude against the youths. According to Jaaj Win’s descendants, Jaaj Win and his son Gaac would wait until youths showed the initiative of forming a nascent marriageability-set (called a *riäw*), encamped outside the residence of a man of cattle, composed their own praise songs, and called for the chosen man of cattle to “bring out the knife”. The man of cattle then studied these youths’ resolve, noted their numbers, and considered whether or not the community had the considerable reserves of food required for the ceremony (and initiates’ lengthy recovery from their scarification) before he opened a new *ric*. This idea of entrusting a revered arbiter to serve the whole community’s interests, rather than allowing a local gerontocracy to control initiations to their own advantage, seems to be another key reason why *gaar* outperformed other initiation rites in most dry-side communities.

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<sup>187</sup> Eward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 34-35.

Both *nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ* who have used *gaar* to initiate a *ric* have continued to adjust, and to localize, this practice over time. *Nei ti naath* first began to reduce the size and scope of a single *ric* in the 1860s. By the 1930s, a marriageability-set rarely exceeded the borders of a single confederation, and the institution of *ric* itself began to dissolve in the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars can make sense of these moving targets by thinking of *ric* as a strategy rather than as a tradition. The size of *ric* networks, far from being stable, or the inevitable result of particular ethnographic practices, reached their zenith during the period when it proved most effective as a means of assimilation and has waned when and where these earlier successes became unsustainable.

### Refugees from Rains: The Eastern Sudd in the 1820s

Me ci nhial ðem ka Rupbuot medan, cu Padaŋ gāk kē nhial. Cu kēn nyieny kē nhial. Cu kuoth gāk. Cu ney ti ŋuan liw thin medan. Me ci puor rōdiēn tuok cu kēn rōdiēn rialika. Me ci nhial wa piny ðem cu kēn wā kōr, nyieny kē kē nhial. Me terke kōr ɛmō ŋuot Latjōor kanē ni ben.	When rain fell in Rupbuot long ago, Padaŋ [eastern <i>jiëëŋ</i> ] quarreled with rain. They fought rain. Divinity quarreled. Many people died there long ago. When the clouds assembled themselves they [the people] also mobilized themselves. When rain came down they waged war, they fought the rain. When they were in that war Latjōor had not come.
Cu mään ti ŋuan liw, ɣow, det, gaat, amani wutni, cu kēn liw.	Many mothers died, cattle, goats, children, as well as men, they died. <sup>188</sup>

(Oral Tradition of the Aɣɔl Donjɔl)

In the years before 1828, dry-side communities that practiced *gaar* as a gendered and institutionalized rite absorbed their neighbors. This trend was most pronounced in the eastern

<sup>188</sup> Deŋ Nhial Nay Kier, interview with author, Ulang South Sudan (January 30, 2013).

Deŋ's grandfather was the first member of his lineage to adopt *gaar* and integrate into the cien Laan communities of the Gaa-jiok Jikāny. Accommodating the author's inability to speak *thuŋjāŋ*, Deng provided the above translation of his families' tradition into *thok naath*.

Sudd, where local *jiëëŋ* who confronted this effective social strategy were also struggling to reconstitute new communities from a hodgepodge of mingling refugees displaced in 1820 by a major flood.

Seasonal flooding is an annual experience for communities in one of the world's largest wetlands. However, around 1820 a one-hundred-year flood engulfed much of the eastern Sudd and wrought devastation among dry-side communities on a scale not seen again until 1917.<sup>189</sup> This cataclysm, called *Amol Magook*, struck the northern communities generally known as the Padaŋ (the Ruweŋ/Nyarruweŋ, Rut, Thoi, Eastern Luac, Eastern Ɔock, and the Donjɔl) but spared those to the south and west along the Bahr el-Jebel (Twic East, Bor, and all *nei ti naath*).<sup>190</sup> Soil samples from Lake Tana suggest that heavy rains upstream over the Ethiopian Plateau (and presumably within the eastern Sudd as well) initiated this flood by causing the Baro, Pibor, and Akobo Rivers to swell. Once these tributaries emptied into the Sobat, all the region's tributaries to the west and south backed up, sending a so-called "creeping flood" oozing across the eastern plains.

Localized memories in this region match the overall history of the Sudd's shifting hydrology. The Padaŋ living north of the Baro and east of the Sobat were the flood's first victims. As the deluge moved north across the Machar Marshes, the Donjɔl evacuated the banks of the Yal (a seasonal stream also known as Khor Adar). The Eastern Ɔock also forsook their home district of Yom (now part of Longechuk County) and the Luac abandoned the low plains of Malou (now northern Nasir County). All these refugees regrouped as best they could among

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<sup>189</sup> As with the names of persons and marriageability-sets, the names of floods carry historical meaning. For example, The Eastern Jikāny and Lɔu confederations call their flood of 1917 *Nyɔc in Djiit* or "big flood" to contrast it with the smaller flood of the previous year while communities close to the Bahr el-Jebel name their flood of 1917 *Pi-lual* or "red water" because of the tint the eroded carried from Uganda soil gave this particular flood.

<sup>190</sup> The Abialaŋ, who are also considered Padaŋ seem to have avoided this flood completely. Also the Nyiel and Ageer sections of the Donjɔl also seem to have avoided much of the devastation suffered by the Aʏɔl Donjɔl.

kindred spread out along the higher banks of the White Nile itself, which seem to have remained habitable, especially downstream from the modern town of Melut.

Once the surging Sobat reached its confluence with the White Nile at Dolieb Hill (near the modern city of Malakal), the swelling river caused the White Nile to back up as well, which blocked its usual hydrology upstream. The Khor Fulluth, the Khor Atar (near the modern town of Fangak), the lower Bahr el-Zeraf, and other tributaries of the White Nile could no longer drain properly and began to overflow their banks. As all these rivers rose, Padaŋ then living in what has become northern Jongeli State (other Luac communities, the Thoi, the Rut, and the Ruweŋ/Nyarruweŋ, who were still one) also had to evacuate.<sup>191</sup>

Watching helplessly as catfish devoured stalks of submerged sorghum while the hooves of their increasingly diseased cattle began to rot, Padaŋ communities decided to disperse and subsist by gathering water lilies and hunting game in the wild. Since the flood came from the Sobat, the Thoi and Rut theorized that their enemy in that region, Akwøt wa Yör (still *rādh* of the *collø* at that time), had persuaded some *anywaa* to unleash this supernatural torrent (which is also how the Eastern Jikāny understood the *Nyɔc Duɔp Oker* flood in 1946).<sup>192</sup> Scattered and starving on tiny mounds, Padaŋ refugees were easy prey for flotillas of *collø* raiders, who capitalized on the disaster by snatching up large numbers of women and children with their famous long canoes. Some Padaŋ, including many Ruweŋ and Luac, fled south over one hundred

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<sup>191</sup>H. G. Lyons, *The Physiography of the River Nile and its Basin* (Cairo, 1906) p. 132-141.

Douglas Johnson, "Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992) p. 613.

Morrice, Winder, Ferguson and Clow, *Third Interim Report, 49-51; Jonglei Investigation Team* (Khartoum: The Equatorial Nile Project) Vol. I, p. 10-11.

C.T. Wilson and R.W. Felkin, *Uganda and the Egyptian Soudan* (London, 1882) Vol. I, p. 242-8; Vol. II, p. 14.

J.M. Gray, "Emin's Diaries-Extracts IV," *Uganda Journal* vol. 26 no. 2 (1962) p. 123.

<sup>192</sup> In the religious traditions of *anywaa*, a man can lay a powerful curse upon his enemies which takes effect when he dies. Duɔp Oker was an *anywaa* whose home had been destroyed by some Eastern Jikāny.

kilometers to the sandy hills of the Duk Ridge, where they gradually regrouped and formed the Nyarruwej confederation (that is Ruwej with the prefix *nyar*, a word for “grazing-in-the-morning”).<sup>193</sup> So many Padaŋ perished that traumatized survivors could not perform their necessary funeral rites. Fearing the ghosts whom they had not propitiated, for several decades these surviving communities refused to reoccupy many lowland pastures.<sup>194</sup>

Farther west along the Bahr el-Jebel, the Ethiopian runoff that spawned *Amol Magook* had essentially no impact on the *nei ti naath*. The Bahr el-Jebel flows from the Great Lakes Region in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, which in fact were experiencing a drought at that time. The Egyptian Nilometer, which measured annual floods on the lower river determined mostly by its southerly source, recorded low river levels from 1825 until the 1840s, and confirmed the downstream effects of this reduced rainfall.<sup>195</sup>

Ironically, decreased flow in Bahr el-Jebel generally causes hyper-localized floods that appear to have accelerated local processes of assimilation, overcrowding, and exodus from the west to east bank of the Bahr el-Jebel in the 1820s. Because the Sudd is a massive flat marsh blanketed in floating plants, it tends to clog with vegetation as its water level falls each dry-season, creating miniature dams at narrow bends in the main stream. When the rains return, these new dams force the Bahr el-Jebel and Bahr el-Zeraf to inundate areas that may have been completely dry the year before. These shifting flow patterns can also leave low areas that had been fairly deep pools in previous years as ditches that remain dry year round. The clumps of floating plants that create these dams vary in size and shape and form up at different spots. When

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<sup>193</sup> Stephanie Beswick, *Sudan's Blood Memory* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004) p. 56-57.

<sup>194</sup> Douglas Johnson, “Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992) p. 632-634.

<sup>195</sup> Douglas Johnson, “Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992) p. 607-649.

water levels fall especially low, as they must have during the 1820s, the Sudd gets especially clogged, often trapping large pockets of water in one place even as areas both upstream and downstream from that spot run drier than usual. These mini-floods do not generate the demographic and economic devastation, nor the social and spiritual traumas, of an event of *Amol Magook*'s vast proportions, but they do force herders to relocate locally.

### ***Nei ti naath* On the Move**

According to various accounts recorded by British Major J. W. G. Wyld in the 1920s, anthropologist Paul Howell in the 1940s, and historian Douglas Johnson in the 1980s, the Gaawäär were the first *nei ti naath* to begin crossing the Bahr el-Jebel to the east in the early 1820s.<sup>196</sup> These movements were far from an organized effort. Individual families who found that their pastures were inundated and that they could wade across the unusually low Bahr el-Jebel took up residence first in unoccupied parts of the river's east bank that, until then, had been submerged. Around the same time that some of the Gaawäär began to emigrate, other *nei ti naath* farther north started moving in the same direction, as population growth prompted an exodus that the *ric* name *Yuac* (meaning to "remove/ pull out") summarizes effectively.

First the Renyan confederation began to split up, with some Renyan remaining among the Jagei confederation in what is now Koch County, while others crossed the Bahr el-Jebel, which they also remember as having been unusually shallow. These Renyan migrants, initially only a few colonists, rapidly grew to become their own confederation called the Lou (which is now far

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<sup>196</sup>J. W. G. Wyle, "Bor-Duk District" in C. A. Willis (ed.) *The Upper Nile Handbook: A Report on Peoples and Government in the Southern Sudan, 1931* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 212-214.

Jongeli Investigation Team, *The Equatorial Nile Project and Its Effects on the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Khartoum: Mefit-Babtie, 1954) p. 207-208.

Douglas Johnson, "Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992) p. 634-635.

larger than any other *nei ti naath* confederation). Shortly thereafter, the entire Thian and Lak confederations also crossed over, which compelled the Lou and Gaawäär to keep moving farther east, where they began assimilating local Padañ. Finally, and most dramatically, the Jikāny at the confluence of the Bahr el-Ghazal and Bahr el-Jebel (modern-day Guit County) also split up. As with the Renyan/Lou, some Jikāny remained in their former territory. Some of those who departed initially headed north toward Jebel Liri, the southern edge of the Nuba Mountains. However, prospects of success to the north soon dimmed, and they too turned east and joined other Jikāny who in traversing *collø* territory, crossed the White Nile, and settled between the Sobat and the Machar Marshes (circa 1828).

In one sense, these movements were a perfectly ordinary part of mobile and opportunistic life on the flood plains, where from one year to the next the grass really was greener on the other side. After all, the main reason dry-side agro-pastoralists had committed to exogamous kinship in the first place was that they needed to maximize their bonds with distant relations who could take them in as they moved from place to place. And, as ethnographers would later observe, “guests” (*rul*) in any given locality usually outnumbered the “landowners” (*diel*), but each community still looked for their political cohesion to *diel* from lineage credited with first settling the area. In these routine circumstances, each *nei ti naath* community (*ciēŋ*) also used the name of a local lineage of *diel* as a collective term for all the residents of the settlement and generally ignored a person’s actual descent when dealing with outsiders.<sup>197</sup> As the tale of *tuk Kiir* demonstrates, an entire community like the early Jikāny could move across the Sudd and still retain a sense of their political cohesion. However, even in these cases, newcomers generally adopted their hosts’ languages and outward identities. Thus, *Kiir* (or the larger community this legendary figure

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<sup>197</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 220.

presumably symbolized) became *jiëëŋ* after settling among the Ruweŋ and/or Ɖɔɔk and then became *nei ti naath* after moving in amongst the Lëëk and Bul.

The unusual outcome of these 1820s migrations was that *nei ti naath* immigrants did not join their hosts as *jiëëŋ*. In fact when the first Egyptian Ottoman mission reconnoitered the region in 1839 and 1840, Selim, the mission's bimbachi (equivalent to a lieutenant colonel) reported the opposite state of affairs between the "Nouvirs" (Nuer) and local "Dinnkhah" (that is *jiëëŋ* of the Padaŋ cluster).<sup>198</sup>

se trouvait la tribu des Nouvirs avec  
lesquels ils ne cessaient d'être en guerre  
et qu'ils avaient toujours à redouter

[there] was found the tribe of "Nouvirs" with  
whom they [Padaŋ] never cease to be at war  
and whom they had always feared.<sup>199</sup>

This account became the first of many taken to describe the migrations of the *nei ti naath* as "the Nuer Conquests" of "the Dinka", a cliché that still defines much of the historical background in anthropologies of "the Nuer".<sup>200</sup> While superficially valid, in that the eastern banks of the river became "Nuer" from the 1820s to the 1850s, the entire premise behind this narrative suffers from the same fatal vagueness that has limited scholars' grasps of "scarification" and "age-sets": namely, the idea that any change in (attributed) ethnicity must mean that the new group expelled a region's earlier inhabitants by military force.

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<sup>198</sup> "Dinka" became a general term for all *jiëëŋ* only in the twentieth century. Originally this ethnonym referred only to the Padaŋ (the prefix "pa" meaning "place of" while both "daŋ" and "din/den" apparently derive from ƉEN, the name of the rain divinity who held the highest place the Padaŋ pantheon). This distinction between Dinka/Padaŋ and other *jiëëŋ* is particularly clear in Kaufmann's 1862 description of the "Denka" as living along the White Nile and the lower Sobat while the "Cic" and the "Bor" lived near Gondokoro on the upper Bahr el-Jebel.

A. Kaufmann, *Schilderungen aus Central Africa oder Land und Leute im obern Nilgebiete am weissen Flusse* (Brixen: A. Weger, 1862) p. 1.

<sup>199</sup> Selim Bimbachi, "Premier Voyage a la recherche des sources du Nil-Blanc" *Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie* (1842) p. 64.

<sup>200</sup> The clearest example of this cliché of "conquest" is Raymond Kelly's 1985 monograph entitled "The Nuer Conquests", which fueled a rather pointed debate with Sharon Hutchinson that played out in the pages *Current Anthropology* during the 1990s. Most recently, Dereje Feyissa's 2011 monograph devoted most of a chapter to various authors' divergent views.



Most *jiëëŋ* who “lost” territory to the *nei ti naath* immigrants belonged to the devastated Padaŋ communities, whose old haunts were haunted and consequently left vacant. *Nei ti naath* immigrants settling in uninhabited areas setting themselves up as owners of these lands were either blissfully ignorant or unconcerned about the ghosts around them. Thus these newcomers faced little of the opposition that *jiëëŋ* in a different era would have posed.

The only western *jiëëŋ* who clearly lost territory to *nei ti naath* in the nineteenth century were the Ciec, who initially lacked *gaar*. However, when the Nyuoŋ confederation of *nei ti naath* absorbed communities around Palual (near the modern-day town of Nyal), the Ciec instituted their own markings and held onto the rest of their lands. As this case demonstrates, *jiëëŋ* who were not harmed by the flood were generally able to adapt. The Bor and Twic East confederations did not lose any territory in the nineteenth century, nor did the northerly Padaŋ in the Agɛɛr and Abialaŋ confederations below Melut. Following in the disaster’s wake, small bands of *nei ti naath* migrants could establish themselves as landowners (*diel*) in particularly flood prone plots of pastureland because of vacancies created by the deluge. Thanks to *gaar*, they could also assimilate their more numerous neighbors, which explains why *nei ti naath* territory quadrupled during the nineteenth century.

Just as the victims were not “the Dinka” but rather *jiëëŋ* communities who lacked *gaar* and were dispersed by flooding, “the victors” were only certain *nei ti naath* who had already refined the strategies associated with *gaar*. Most “conquerors” were northern *nei ti naath* and, since *gaar* had originated in their area, presumably had more experience than their southern counterparts with recruiting young men from their neighbors. Using Koat Liç, the site of the legendary tamarind tree, as the dividing line, almost all these *nei ti naath* migrants belonged to the northern cluster. That is, they self-described as children of Gëë or Kiir, one of the two

brothers remembered as halving the primordial steer at Koat L̥ic. The only exception to this rule were the Gaawäär, who happened to be the northern-most contingent of the children of the other brother, Ẓaak. Not only did *nei ti naath* living south of the Gaawäär fail to capitalize on opportunity in the vacated lands to the eastward, but in the mid-nineteenth century they actually lost some territory on the western bank. *Jiëëŋ* of the Agaar confederation (known for using a six-line pattern of forehead inscription as an institutionalized rite of manhood) seem to have assimilated thousands of the children of *nei ti naath* bachelors who were children of Ẓaak. Clearly the prerequisite for assimilationist success was not ethnicity per se but the gender-specific strategies of *gaar*.<sup>201</sup>

## Conclusion

At turn of the nineteenth century, dry-side communities in North-Central Sudd, including many *nei ti naath* and some *jiëëŋ*, developed a more intense and effective method of initiating men into a marriageability-set (*ric*) by cutting marks known as *gaar* across their foreheads. Dry-side communities that honed this rite began to expand into the territories of neighboring communities and to attract and assimilate bachelors from them, at least until they developed equally effective rites. Initially the Bahr el-Jebel had shielded eastern *jiëëŋ* communities from this assimilationist arms race, but in the 1820s upstream droughts made the river easier to cross to the abandoned lands of Padaŋ communities of eastern *jiëëŋ* that a devastating flood from Ethiopia had transformed into refugees. Certain *nei ti naath* immigrants were able to step into the void they left and to establish settlements amongst weakened and scattered Padaŋ, who had no experience with, or defense against, the assimilation strategies they brought from the west.

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<sup>201</sup> Stephanie Beswick. *Sudan's Blood Memory* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004) p. 75-76.

## Chapter 3

### Marking Costly Assimilations:

#### Losing Battles, Recruiting Bachelors, and the Erosion of Moral Community (1828-1860s)

Me cii Nuääri ben kä Rupbuot,  
cu Nuääri je tuok en γöö bi kën  
nyier Padañ kuen, me cu nyier Nuääri  
je guic en γöö Padañni kanε gaar.

Cu Padañni je lar en γöö “nyiekun  
jiak kε, bi nεy nyiekε kuen  
kën kä rɔadaa”.  
Cu Padañni rɔ muoc kε ɲuɔt.  
Kën banε jop bul, mi wee wä tuak  
banε cu thiel ruaal. Cu Padañni jop bul,  
cu job tuak kui kel. Cu kën ε cu lar en γöö  
/cii ruaal thiel.  
Cu kε rɔ cu kuen.  
Nemε ruac Kier.

I ɔ Ney loken ruac emɔ.  
Ney tε gaar kä kuen ε  
nyal Cieñ Laañ.  
Wutni tete,  
kën diaal naarä.

When Nuers came to Rupbuot [near Ulang],  
the Nuers began saying that they will  
marry Padañ daughters, but Nuer daughters  
saw Padañs had no manhood marks

[and rejected Padañ men].  
[Then] Padañs said “your daughters  
are bad/ugly, we will marry our daughters  
to our own selves.”  
The Padañs brought out a rule.  
We burned an axe, if it melted we  
would have no incest. Padañs burned an axe,  
one axe side melted. [Then] they said that  
“we have no incest”.

They married themselves.  
This was the speech of Kier  
[my great-grandfather]  
Later Ney [his son] rejected this speech.  
Ney got gaar and married a  
daughter from Cieñ Laañ [Gaa-jiok Jikāny].  
[That is why] these men [sitting beside us],  
all of them are my maternal uncles.<sup>202</sup>

Dεñ Nhial Ney Kier (Jikāny man from an Aγɔl-Donjol lineage)

Cieñ guari kä lap nε rölee?  
Cieñ guari lap nε rölee banε yieth.  
Cieñ guari bi ɲa ku pek dhoac?  
Thiow Tañ raw ε bä ni mää.  
ε ram mi dhom kuäär, dor diaal bia wee riath.

[Why does] the community of our fathers  
have different territory?  
The community of our fathers has  
different territory [and] we will fight.  
Who left our fathers’ kin behind?  
[We] ignored hearth and kinship.  
A person ambushed a chief,  
all communities will be afraid.<sup>203</sup>

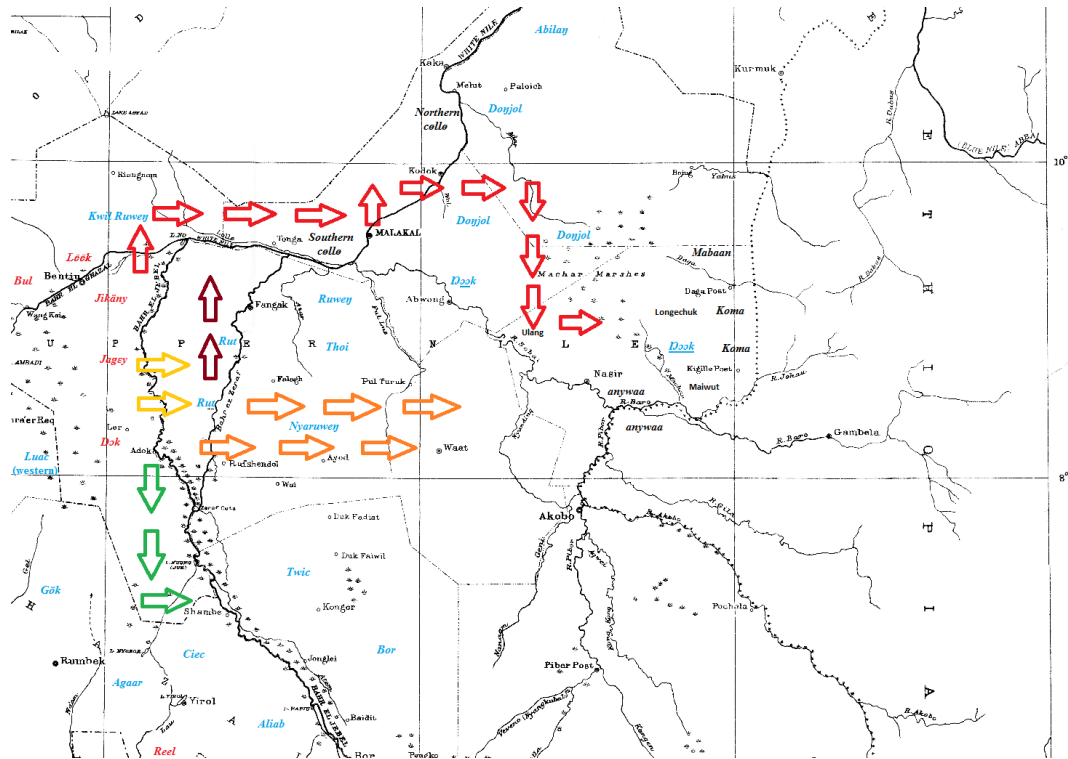
From the Song of Gaac Guic Rial (anthem of the Cieñ Laañ section of the Gaa-jiok Jikāny)






<sup>202</sup> Dεñ Nhial Ney Kier, interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 30, 2013).

<sup>203</sup> Simon Kueth Reeth, Jok Luak Duop, Tɔɲyik Ruot Khor, Pal Juɔc, Thomas Tut Thon, and John Gaac Cuɔl, interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 28, 2013).

## Map 3.0

### Early *Nei Ti Naath* Migrations in the Sudd



- |   |                                    |               |                          |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
|  | Jikany Migration of 1828           | <i>Jikany</i> | a “Nuer” Confederation   |
|  | First Gaawäär Migration Circa 1820 | <i>Rut</i>    | a “Dinka” Confederation  |
|  | Nyuon Migration                    | <i>anywaa</i> | Other Nilotic “People”   |
|  | Second Gaawäär and Lou Migration   | <b>Koma</b>   | Non-Nilotic Ethnic Group |
|  | Lak and Thian Migration            |               |                          |

#### Chapter Overview

<sup>204</sup> Map template derived from Jongeli Investigation Team, *The Equatorial Nile Project and Its Effects on the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan vol. IV* (Khartoum: Mefit-Babtie, 1954).

Between 1828 and the mid-1860s, various parties of *nei ti naath* moved east of the Bahr el-Jebel. These relatively small parties greatly intensified the gender-based strategies of assimilation developing in the era of “Turning-Hearts” by absorbing tens of thousands of uninscribed Padaṅ, *anywaa*, and other non-Nilotic groups like the Koma within their lineages.<sup>205</sup> *Nei ti naath* achieved astounding demographic and territorial successes during this period, but these successes came at a great cost. Contrary to European travelers’ mythology of “Nuer Conquests”, *nei ti naath* immigrants were not militarily superior to autochthonous communities. Marriageability-sets named “Gushing-Fishing-Spear-Wound” (*Yilbith*, initiated after 1828) and “Eagle’s-Carrion-Cry” (*Cuēt-Cuor*, initiated circa 1840) testify to battlefield defeats that captured how *nei ti naath* warriors experienced much of this era.

This chapter opens with Deṅ Nhial’s tale of how *nei ti naath* newcomers became the local majority, even after Padaṅ elders resorted to ritually melting an axe to defuse marriages once viewed as incestuous in an unsuccessful attempt to keep their sons from adopting *gaar*. Clearly *jiëṅ* elders who resorted to endogamy did not enjoy the transformations of this era, even when they sons assimilated for love of *nei ti naath* daughters rather than fear of their warriors, but people on both sides of this process experienced hardships.

The staggering demographic successes of *nei ti naath* assimilation strategies, though relatively bloodless, still came at a cost. Persons raised within *nei ti naath* lineages began to

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<sup>205</sup> Few people have recognized “the Koma” on their own terms. Both *nei ti naath* and *jiëṅ* have used the term *Cai* that conflates many distinct ethnic groups including those who call themselves Mabaan with a host of entirely different groups of people generally glossed as “the Koma”. Arabs have used the term “Burun” (برون), and Abyssinians “Shangalla” as equivalent catch-all categories. To make matters more complex, Koma is a problematic ethnic category also since it encompasses a number of communities whose languages are not always mutually intelligible, but these further distinctions go beyond the scope of this study.

James, Wendy, *Kwanim Pa The Making of the Uduk People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

James, Wendy, *The Listening Ebony: Moral Knowledge, Religion, and Power Among the Uduk of Sudan*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) p. 16.

become minorities within communities swelling with initiates born as Padaŋ. Initially small bands of newcomers in the east absorbed so many local youths that they grew into the Lɔu and Eastern Jikāny confederations that dwarfed every counterpart in their original homeland and severely tested their ability to govern themselves with the conventional *cieŋ* political discourses of common ancestry. The Lɔu and Eastern Jikāny became increasingly loose, and often fractious, political entities united by little other than *gaar* and the marriageability-sets based on that rite.

By the 1860s it had become impossible for these confederations to operate in a manner anything like the stable, static, almost mechanistic descent-based groupings that the scholarly literature makes them seem. Fighting-age Padaŋ youths who had become *nei ti naath* through *gaar* showed growing disregard for “their ancestors” and for the authority of traditional *nei ti naath* officiants like the “earth masters” (*guan muɔn* singular), who had previously resolved disputes *among nei ti naath*. By the 1860s, both ostensibly “victorious” *nei ti naath* and “vanquished” Padaŋ autochthons counted the cost of their forbears’ historic demographic successes in violent dissention among their youth, shared losses to lung sickness among their cattle, and a general sense of socio-spiritual chaos among communities built by then more around *gaar* than through any discourse of common descent.

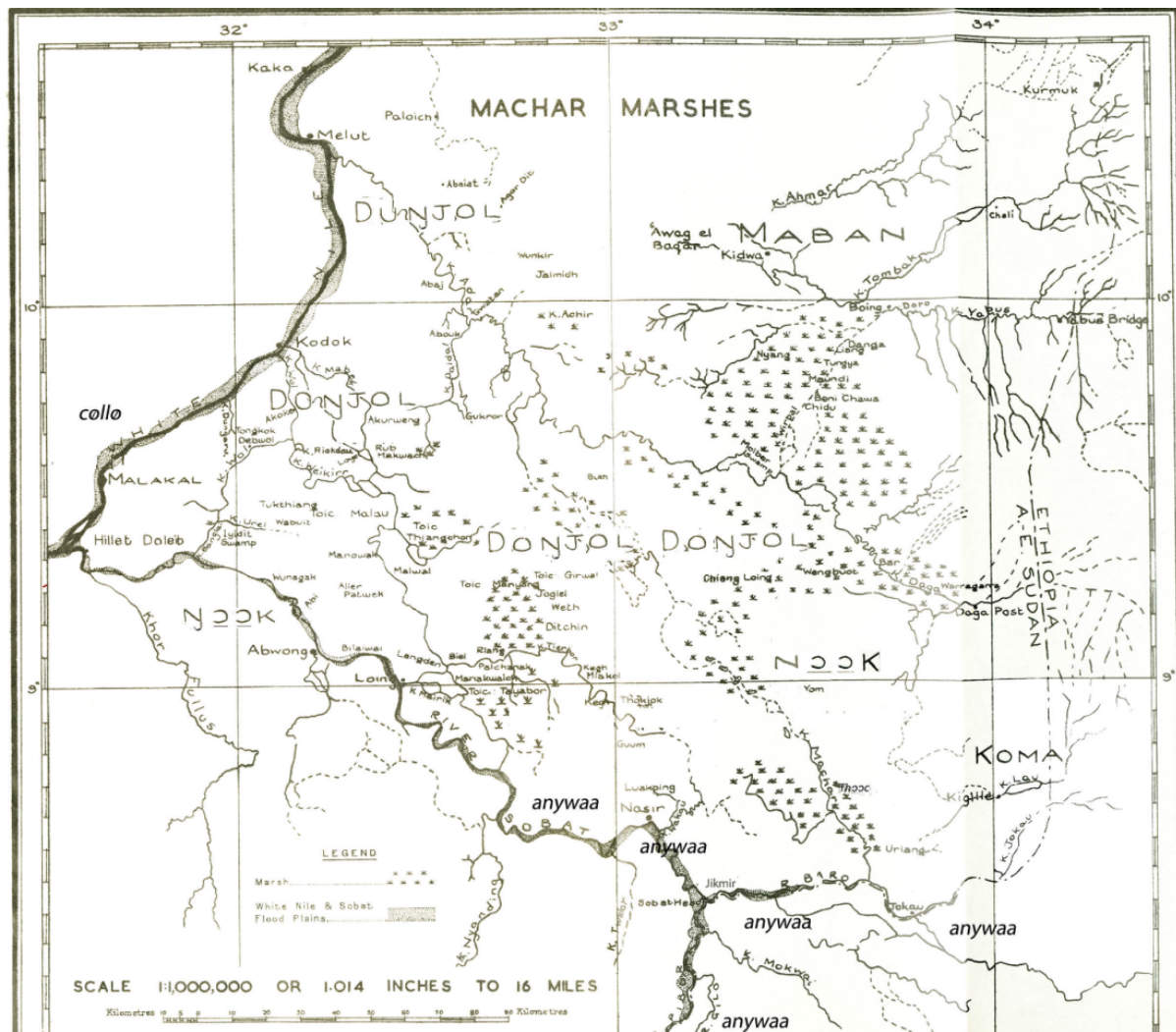
### **Side-Stepping Local Opponents: The Example of Latjɔɔr, Nyaguëc, and Padiet Gakgak**

*Nei ti naath* from the Gaawäär and Lɔu confederations who first crossed the Bahr el-Jebel in the early 1820s did not initially embark on a grand conquest. In fact they do not seem even to have coordinated epic sojourns across Upper Nile Region, or even of the immediately adjacent “Zeraf Island” (the land in the main valley of the Nile between the Bahr el-Jebel and Bahr el-Zeraf), where they initially settled. According to their traditions, many of them crossed to the

east bank provisionally, one cattle-camp at a time, and owed their initial successes to the absence of local competition in areas that had been evacuated in the deluge of *Amol Magook* in 1820.<sup>206</sup>

### Map 3.1

#### Map of Malbu, Yom, the Machar Marshes, and the Sobat Before 1828



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<sup>206</sup> Douglas Johnson, "Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan" *The International Journal of African Studies* (1992) p. 607-649.

<sup>207</sup> Map template derived from Jongeli Investation Team, *The Equatorial Nile Project and Its Effects on the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan vol. IV* (Khartoum: Mefit-Babtie, 1954).

Some of the uninscribed “Dinka” (*jiëëŋ*) living east of the Bahr el-Jebel took advantage of this limited *nei ti naath* presence to begin repopulating the pastures east of the Sobat River that they had abandoned to the flood, and, by 1828, *nei ti naath* could no longer simply move in and take over lands east of the Bahr el-Zeraf. Some of these *jiëëŋ* were Padaŋ returnees (mostly from Doŋjol, Eastern Doök, and Luac confederations who drifted back from the high banks of the White Nile and repopulated some of the plains northeast of the Sobat and parts of the Machar Marshes (especially in the modern-day counties of Ulang, Nasir, and Longechuk). Others also came from Bor Twic confederations to the southwest and settled on the north bank of the Baro River (now the border with Ethiopia) in the regions of Thooc and Urien. By 1828, only the extremely flood-prone plains of Malou (now located in northern Nasir County) remained entirely vacant.

These communities of *jiëëŋ* began reoccupying lands on the northeast bank of the Sobat before *nei ti naath* because they were closer and because they did not have to navigate hostile territory to reach them. *Nei ti naath* who lived west of the Bahr el-Jebel could not reach the Sobat River Valley without traversing the densely populated “Shilluk” (*cøllø*) kingdom on the west bank of the White Nile to the north or the lands of Padaŋ communities on the high banks on the White Nile’s eastern bank that had escaped the flood of *Amol Magook*. Because of this geopolitical barrier, the eastern Sudd might never have become home for *nei ti naath* if members of the sets named “Hornless-White-Steer” (*Cøt-Bör* initiated circa 1800), “Turning-Hearts” (*Gøer-loic* initiated circa 1810), and “Pulling-Out” (*Yuac* initiated circa 1820) had not begun to mobilize far more ambitious expeditions around 1828. Many of these venturesome probes failed, but some who side-stepped local resistance through guile or luck (or the favor of their ancestral guardians) did establish themselves in lands east of the Zeraf Island. There they began



assimilating locals with *gaar* and gradually transformed their small bands into the large Lōu and Eastern Jikāny confederations that dwarfed the migrant communities they had sprung from.

Around 1828, migrants from the ancestral Jikāny confederation launched the most fortunate of these sojourns. Contemporary Eastern Jikāny (for whom this storied sojourn is equivalent to tales of Jamestown and the Mayflower in the U.S.) have distilled their collective understanding of their ancestors' migration to their present lands, after consolidating the spiritual, logistical, and political resources necessary to mobilize a migration to the relatively open area in the east beyond *cōllō* territory, in a lengthy ballad called *Diit Latjōor* (the Song of Latjōor). Named for its chief protagonist, the leader of the group, the song's verses actually describe events before the Jikāny left their homeland of Cieŋ Taŋ west of the Nile (also known as Ŋuenyiēl, equivalent to modern-day Guit County) and describe the alliances and spiritual-political arrangements that Latjōor leveraged to mobilize migrants for the venture. In this song, as well as in elders' other accounts, Latjōor first established an understanding in the east vital to the success of this early mission with an autochthon host (a certain Padiet Gakgak) and then secured the supernatural support of a powerful Jikāny spiritual figure (Nyaguēc) to bless and protect the new Doŋjol-Jikāny community. Latjōor's alliances with Padiet and Nyaguēc established a precedent for collaboration with resident communities that migrants (or at least those who succeeded) continued to emulate throughout the following decades.

Contemporary elders who can remember Latjōor's *ric* ("age-set" or "marriageability-set") agree that he belonged to "Hornless-White-Steer" (initiated circa 1800) and that he was still a relatively young man when he set out to explore the eastern Sudd. The Song of Latjōor says that his wanderlust began when he saw birds (whom *nei ti naath* associate with the heavens and divinity) flying eastward and decided to find the country they had come from. Latjōor reached

the low plains of Malou between the Sobat River and the Machar Marches in the far eastern Sudd shortly after the flood of *Amol Magook*, where he discovered rich open grasslands that the Padan of Donjol confederations still avoided as haunted by the spirits of ancestors they had been forced to abandon. While wandering in this area, Latjor befriended a certain Padiet Gakgak, a warrior from the Ayol section of the Donjol, who encouraged him to settle.

Padiet Gakgak came from a prominent local family and had a reputation as a fearsome warrior who carried a unique and supernaturally lethal weapon (a conventional Nilotic spear with an axe head attached, somewhat reminiscent of giant tomahawk).<sup>208</sup> Jikany elders claim that Padiet Gakgak was impressed with Latjor's bravery, and it is certainly true Latjor had less reason to worry about the unpropitiated Donjol ghosts haunting Padiet Gakgak, but Padiet Gakgak seems to have been more interested in recruiting allies to replace some of the many Padan lost in the early 1820s to the deluge and to *collo* raiders. According to Eastern Jikany elders, the two men then made a pact that gave Latjor access to the empty floodplains east of the elevated banks the Sobat River and west of the seasonal Yal (or Khor Adar).<sup>209</sup>

After securing these rights, Latjor returned to his home lands of Cien Tan, where his fellow Jikany could no longer support their herds on their old pastures. The Jikany initially looked westward for space to their "kinsmen" in the Bul confederation. However, the overcrowded Bul prevented (or in some versions merely restricted) Jikany grazing instead of honoring the old alliance symbolized by tales of their first ancestor, Kijir, marrying a Bul

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<sup>208</sup> Keliec Yut, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (January 29, 2013).

<sup>209</sup> Arabs, the colonial administration, and contemporary oil companies have used the name Khor Adar, but local Padan and Jikany called this seasonal stream the Yal long before these outsiders arrived. The obscure English word khor is derived from an Arabic term (خور) for a river bed that dries up for a portion of the year. In the Sudd these seasonal streams flow out from various permanent rivers in the rainy season to flood the surrounding plains. They then empty back into the permanent river in the dry-season, eventually becoming nothing more than dry trenches until the rains return.

daughter named Nyaböra.<sup>210</sup> Many influential elders openly opposed Latjɔɔr's risky negotiations with this mysterious Padiet Gakgak from a distant land, despite their pressing need for open pastures, so Latjɔɔr began looking for a credible spiritual authority to persuade would-be migrants of the future success of his new ally in the east.<sup>211</sup>

Latjɔɔr's fellow Jikāny were particularly concerned about that their inability to “see” this alien land or the long road between Cieŋ Taŋ and Malou, so Latjɔɔr began looking for someone to bless his mission who had a reputation as a seer (that is, *tiēt* or “diviner” known for their ability to see and converse with spirits inside gourds). According to the Song of Latjɔɔr, Latjɔɔr held a contest to see if any “seer” could find an axe head that he pretended he had lost. Numerous diviners failed to find the missing axe, until a post-menopausal matriarch named Nyaguēc (“daughter of seeing”) proved her worth by “seeing” that the axe was not lost but hidden within his thick, matted hair.<sup>212</sup>

Ci Nyaguēc ε jïök ε ɲu  
 ɲɔɲɲi naath kε gōöre mɔ  
 kǎ tε kε ji Latjɔɔr Duǎc?  
 Liŋ ruacdǎ dul ɛmɔ  
 theriε piny, a gua jɔp ε thin.  
 /Cu we guǎth mi dɔŋ  
 jɔpdu biε jek mi puɔnydu.

Nyaguēc said “Why [do]  
 you disturb people to hunt for that  
 [which is] yours Latjɔɔr Duǎc?  
 Hear my speech, that long hair [of yours],  
 comb it down, a good axe is present.<sup>213</sup>  
 Do not go to another place  
 your axe you will find on your body.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Elders in Korenge Payam describe a Bul “prophet” (*gōk*) who allowed the Jikāny to graze their cattle only on particular days. Douglas Johnson has suggested that the office of *gōk* was a later innovation, so that these elders may have retrospectively applied this gloss to some other kind of spiritual leader. Gabriel Giet Jal's unpublished dissertation from 1987 reported that a Bul leader known as Cuɔl Gεε flatly refused to allow the Jikāny entry.

<sup>211</sup> Dɔk Biciok, the senior patriarch of the Wankec community within the Gaa-jioŋ Jikāny is said to have opposed the migration until Latjɔɔr's marriage to Nyaguēc.

Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer Before 1920” Ph.D. diss (London: School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 1987) p. 36-38.

<sup>212</sup> It seems probable that Nyaguēc was not her birth name but one she acquired when she became a “seer”.

<sup>213</sup> Dry-side herdsmen have a particular method of using cow urine to both dry their hair and sculpt it into raised matted masses which are sometimes large and thick enough to conceivably conceal an axe head.

<sup>214</sup> Koat Riam Chany, interview by Noel Stringham. 2013. *Diit Latjɔɔr* (January 12).

After Nyaguëc demonstrated her clairvoyance Latjɔɔr began looking for a way to secure her spiritual powers for the venture to the east and eventually found a way to do so by altering *nei ti naath* ideas about marriage. *Nei ti naath* often spoke of marriage as one family acquiring the right to benefit from the procreative powers of another family's daughter, as her sons would "belong" to the grooms' lineages. Latjɔɔr was not interested in having children by Nyaguëc, who in any case was past child-bearing, but he did respect her supernatural insights and sought the right to benefit from them through an unorthodox proposal recorded in one of the ballad's later stanzas.

Latjɔɔr cɛ jien kut Nyaguëc.  
 Wë dhɔɾɛ.  
 wë ɣɔɔk nɔŋ kuɛɛ Nyaguëc.  
 /Cii riɛk kɛ ɣöö diite  
 gööɾɛ je ba guic ɣɔw  
 thiɛlɛ mi guɛɾɛ puɔnyɛ.

Latjɔɔr left Nyaguëc's hut.  
 He went to his home.  
 Going to bring cattle he married Nyaguëc.  
 No problem because she was big/old  
 he wanted to see the world  
 nothing did he want [from] her body.<sup>215</sup>

This bethrothal had no precedent in a community built around reproduction, and Latjɔɔr supposedly had a very hard time selling her relatives on the idea, even after he mustered an extraordinary number of cattle, enough to enable, as bride-wealth, several of Nyaguëc's adult sons to marry. Nevertheless, the Jikány eventually recognized this marriage as a legitimate means of Latjɔɔr acquiring the right to benefit from Nyaguëc's supernatural powers.

After the wedding, Nyaguëc's prophecies that Latjɔɔr's party would acquire large herds convinced many Jikány, and a number of Bul to the west, to join his troop. Nyaguëc and Latjɔɔr also recruited important officiants they needed to organize a *nei ti naath* colony, including Jaan Win (a *wut ɣɔɔk* or "man of cattle: who had the authority to preform *gaar*) and a Bul war-song

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<sup>215</sup> Koat Riam Chany, interview by Noel Stringham. 2013. *Diit Latjɔɔr* (January 12).

leader (*kit*) named Wɛcyiel Gual. Contemporary elders also remember that Nyaguëc and Latjɔɔr secured the support of the most powerful of all Jikāny divinities, WIU, by persuading the current guardian of this sacred spear, Diet Nyak, to bless their venture.<sup>216</sup>

The couple also scored a strategic victory when they convinced some of their northern neighbors in the Kwil (sometimes written Kuel) section of the Ruweŋ confederation of *jiëëŋ* on the Sudd's northern edge to join their expedition. Some Jikāny legends claimed that their archetypal ancestor Kiir had once lived among the Kwil. This distant relationship offered more than a numerical boost, since they could secure safe passage among their kin in Ruweŋ areas to facilitate the party's crossing to the north bank of the Bahr el-Ghazal and their movement eastward.<sup>217</sup> By moving north through friendly Ruweŋ territory before turning east, Latjɔɔr and Nyaguëc avoided confrontations with both *nei ti naath* (Lak and Thiaŋ confederations) and *jiëëŋ* (Rut, Thoi, and Luac) whose territories lay across the more direct route eastward. Other Jikāny were also looking for *Lebensraum*, but not everyone along the route of the others initially welcomed Latjɔɔr and Nyaguëc as the Kwil did for Latjɔɔr and Nyaguëc. A separate Jikāny band apparently also set out that same year, finding the same path of least resistance to the north, since it was the only direction where they did not border entrenched confederations of other *nei ti naath*. They ignored Latjɔɔr's mission beyond the Sobat to the east and instead attempted to invade Jebel el Liri, at the southern edge of the Nuba Mountains, to the north (in the modern Republic of Sudan).<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer Before 1920" PhD. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 1987) p. 39-40.

<sup>217</sup> Among contemporary Eastern Gaa-jiok Jikāny, Cieŋ Luom and cieŋ Paduom claim descent from Danbil Luom and Paduom Dok respectively, both from the Kuel section of the Ruweŋ confederation.

<sup>218</sup> Stigand, Chauncey Hugh. 1919. "The Story of Kir and the White Spear." *Sudan Notes and Records* 224-226.

Latjɔɔr's and Nyaguɛc's band proved remarkably adept at avoiding local resistance and was so obviously "blessed" that, after each successful movement, other migrants looking for land and cattle began to believe in Nyaguɛc's prophecies and joined Latjɔɔr's party. Wooing some of the Kwil Ruwen, who negotiated safe passage with their kinsmen, had been a fairly straightforward achievement. Traversing *cøllø* territory (known to its residents as *Pacøllø*) beyond, where the party had no local connections, presented a more daunting challenge. In 1828 the *cøllø* were formidable foes and controlled the White Nile at least as far downstream as their settlement of Eleis deep within the modern-day Republic of Sudan. The *cøllø* were able to rally large armies around their "king" (*rädh*) or mount ad-hoc raiding parties of war-canoes as they saw fit. They were secure enough in their riverine domain to run a regular ferry service for trading caravans passing through Eleis as they trafficked wares between the desert-edge sultanates of Sennar and El Obeid. Even these Muslim merchants from well-established trading communities lacked the strength to refuse *cøllø* demands and had little choice but to pay their tolls. Various *cøllø* boatmen also pillaged some Islamic schools downstream of Eleis near what is now Khartoum with impunity until the Ottoman khedive (pasha or viceroy) in Egypt, Muhammad Ali, began pushing Turco-Egyptian traders and troops into the region and organized a raid on the *cøllø* at Eleis in 1826. Even after this first raid, long canoes filled with *cøllø* raiders continued to dominate the upper White Nile and disturbed various Padaŋ, Berta, and Arab herders throughout the 1830s.<sup>219</sup>

Fortunately for Latjɔɔr, the *cøllø* *rädh* Akwøt wa Yör, who had helped his people dominate all their neighbors for the previous decade, died in 1827. Latjɔɔr's band reached the

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Jackson, H. C. 1923. "The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province." *Sudan Notes and Records* 59-190.

<sup>219</sup> Mercer, Patricia. 1971. "Shilluk Trade and Politics from the mid-seventeenth century to 1861" *The Journal of African History*, 418.

Ruweṅ border with the *cøllø* at a moment of disunity propitious for slipping through this network of control. Awin wa Yör, the leading candidate to become the new *rädh*, hailed from the northern half of *Pacøllø* (known as *Gerr*) and had not consolidated his position in southern *Pacøllø* (known as *Luak*) where Latjōor entered the *cøllø* domain. Since Awin had not convinced the southern *cøllø* of his legitimacy, a “nobleman” (*nyirädh*) named Ator Akol from the southern village of Pabur had exploited the political vacuum following Akwöt’s death to tap into the underlying divisions between southern and northern *cøllø*, igniting a civil war.<sup>220</sup> A united force of *cøllø* could have crushed Latjōor’s intruding band, but, because of this war, the *rädh*-pretender from the north, Awin wa Yör, welcomed Latjōor’s party and encouraged them to pillage his southern rivals.

Latjōor’s party evidently embraced this opportunity, crossed from Ruweṅ territory into southwestern *Pacøllø*, and began to rustle cattle and take captives from *cøllø* communities along the Nile around Panyikaṅ. Fortunate yet again, the Jikäny faced limited resistance because many fighting-age men in Panyikaṅ had moved off in the opposite direction to confront the *rädh* near the royal seat at Fashoda on the border between northern and southern *cøllø* lands. Latjōor and Nyaguëc then took credit for their easy victories and convinced the other party of Jikäny migrants (who were having a much harder time invading Jebel el Liri in the Nuba Mountains) to join their kindred in southern *cøllø* land. Contemporary Jikäny elders also maintain that refugees from the Mor section of the Lōu confederation (whom the Lāk and Thiaṅ confederations of *nei ti naath* had recently expelled from the northern Zeraf Island) decided to join up with Latjōor.<sup>221</sup> These various additions transformed the migrants into a more formidable and populous force, but

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<sup>220</sup> Though descended from a *rädh*, Ator Akol had weaker qualifications to become *rädh* because his father had not held the office.

<sup>221</sup> Duoth Deṅ Balan, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (February 2, 2013).

also seem to have made it more difficult for Latjɔɔr and Nyaguëc to maintain operational control. Sections of the migrant party began intruding on villages loyal to the northern *rädh*-pretender Awin, with whom they had been allied as they moved northeast along the White Nile's west bank (past what is now Malakal) and forfeited their earlier advantage.

Awin does not seem to have expected this betrayal and apparently evacuated Fashoda temporarily to muster his fighting men on the west bank of the main river around Kodok to crush these foreigners who had turned invaders. The migrants had little chance of defeating this large *cøllø* force, much less establishing themselves in densely populated *Pacøllø*, and so hastened on downstream in search of a place to escape with their cattle and captives by fording the river. They discovered that, in spite of the droughts in northern Uganda, the White Nile at that point in its course remained a considerable barrier for a party slowed by young children and the flocks of sheep and goats taken from the *cøllø*. Fed by the combined flows of the Bahr el-Ghazal, the Bahr el-Jebel, and the Bahr el-Zeraf, the White Nile's steeper banks created a deep channel infested with crocodiles and hippos that posed a considerable challenge for herd animals and for people who lacked canoes. Some Eastern Jikāny elders say that a delegation arrived from their Cienj Tan homeland asking Latjɔɔr to return while the migrants were trapped between the White Nile and Awin's armies; other elders claim that the migrants discussed abandoning the quest, until Nyaguëc threatened to slay them with a man-eating beast (*ley*) that she controlled.<sup>222</sup> Everyone seems to agree that this hour was the migrants' darkest and that Latjɔɔr's band began offering sacrifices to inspire divine intervention to save them.

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<sup>222</sup> Gaa-jiook and Gaa-jak elders throughout the eastern Upper Nile have various traditions about Nyaguëc, but her ability to command this beast to waylay Latjɔɔr's enemies is a consistent theme. In 2013, the *ley* of Nyaguëc figured most prominently in the traditions of the *cienj* Biciok of Nasir County and the *cienj* Nyijaani of Longechuk County, both of whom would have had particularly strong kinship ties with communities remaining in the west. This tradition might reflect the extent to which Latjɔɔr relied on fear of Nyaguëc to keep certain factions within the migrating party.



The migrants eventually reached a place opposite a *jiëñ* settlement called Jal-γṛṛk (modern-day Melut County, then in the territory of the Nyiel section of the Donjol confederation of the Padañ), spotted a blue heron (*ḡöök*) standing on a mid-stream sandbar, and christened this revealed shallow part of the river “Blue Heron Ford” (*Wath Ḍöök*). Eastern Jikāny elders now recall that Nyaguëc helped them through this crucible by securing divine favor, but only after the community paid a horrible price.

Rëy Wath Ḍöök Nyaguëc cë lar  
 ba raan nāk kē kuic jal ba  
 thiole ba kam raar ba yir juaac.  
 Ram en caa nāk cōle Tiam Dhōr Joc,  
 ε wut Cieṅ Rēṅ.  
 Naath cike nyuur thok yieer  
 dualkē kē yieer.  
 cii ḡöök ben jal rēy yieer  
 cu naath cu we yieer  
 cua cu cōli Wath Ḍöök.

At Blue Heron Ford Nyaguëc said  
 to kill a person for the journey and  
 take out the bile and smear it on the grass  
 The person slain was called Tiam Dhōr Joc,  
 a man of Cieṅ Rēṅ [from Gaa-jak Jikāny].  
 People sat beside the river [because]  
 they feared the river.  
 A blue heron came and walked in the river.  
 People entered the river [and]  
 it was called Wath Ḍöök.<sup>223</sup>

Tiam Dhōr Joc, the sacrificial victim, became the most famous casualty of a campaign that had avoided human resistance so successfully that its greatest test proved to be a natural one, the White Nile. Today, only elders with a particular passion for the details of the past recall that Latjṛṛ led any raids at all in *cōllō* land, but virtually all Eastern Jikāny know the name and circumstances of the place where the group crossed the White Nile, Wath Ḍöök. So strong is the popular association of the place with a safe journey that in 2013 Wath Ḍöök was the name of Longechuk County’s largest hotel.

The migrants who reached the territory of the Nyiel and Ageer sections of the *jiëñ* Donjol confederation on the east bank of the river in 1828 enjoyed one last stroke of luck (or

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<sup>223</sup> Tap Luak Wer Dunḡit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 7, 2013).

A member of the Cieṅ Nyijaṅni community of the Gaa-jak rather than Cieṅ Rēṅ, Tap Luak presumably had little interest in manipulating this narrative.

favor of Nyaguëc's spirits). Turco-Egyptian troops sent into the Sudd by Muhammad Ali had launched their first mounted military expedition into Padaŋ territory in 1827, the year before Latjɔɔr arrived, and their indiscriminant brutality seems to have left a trail of disruptions that made it easier for the Jikäny to pass through the region.<sup>224</sup> The Turco-Egyptians reported heavy resistance from the Padaŋ throughout their march but managed to shoot their way upstream to the mouth of the Sobat before they turned back to re-brutalize the populations they had already devastated.<sup>225</sup>

The Turco-Egyptians did not leave a truly vacant space in the Doŋjol territories along the White Nile, and, as with the *collø*, these communities remained too numerous for Latjɔɔr's band to displace. However, the very first gun-bearing slavers from the north to target the Padaŋ presumably created a degree of chaos that the Jikäny migrants could exploit.<sup>226</sup> Some Padaŋ did resist these intruders, and contemporary Eastern Jikäny elders can name particular men whom the Ageer-Doŋjol killed as Latjɔɔr's party traversed their territory. However, the migrants also off-set these modest losses by incorporating Ageer captives, including unmarried teenagers who decided to undergo *gaar* after the growing group finally reached the plains of Malou.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Though Muhammad Ali, the self-declared Khedive of Egypt, had ordered raids into what is now South Sudan in 1821, this 1827 raid was the first to target any *jiëëŋ*.

<sup>225</sup> Richard Hill, *On the frontiers of Islam : two manuscripts concerning the Sudan under Turco-Egyptian rule, 1822-1845* (Oxford: Oxford Studies in African Affairs, 1970) p. 7-8.

<sup>226</sup> Giet Jal reported that the Jikäny arrived in 1827 and helped local Padaŋ fight these raiders. Despite finding detailed accounts of other wars against Turco-Egyptian raiders, in 2013 I was unable to find any memory of such an alliance. Of course, many of the elders interviewed by Giet Jal three decades ago have passed away and may not have transmitted the tale to their successors. Scholars should also note that Giet Jal collected his account in 1982, when both *jiëëŋ* and *nei ti naath* were preparing to unite against the northern government, while I conducted my research after the split within the SPLA between John Garang and Riek Machar during that war had fostered a sharp Nuer sense of anti-Dinka nationalism.

<sup>227</sup> For example, the cieŋ Nyijaarŋni section of the Gaa-jak Jikäny lost Lop Dup Tiacyarŋ and Kuiny Cuuonŋ from the *Cɔt-Bör* set in fighting on the White Nile's east bank. However the Jikäny (Cieŋ Wau to be specific) also captured

## Jikāny Movements on the Margins: (1828-1859)

Latjōr's campaign marked the dawn of a fairly brief period when *nei ti naath* warriors of the sets named Hornless-White-Steer, Turning-Hearts, and Pulling-Out (who were all initiated before 1828) made serious, but unsuccessful, attempts to advance themselves through large scale invasions of *jiēñ* communities to the south, west, and east of their old homelands. Contrary to standard narratives found in virtually every European traveler's report about invincible *nei ti naath* invaders and their helpless victims, many of these attacks were stunning failures. The Jagei, Lak, Thian, Gaawäär, Lou, and Jikāny during this era still gave common names to their marriageability-sets, and these names clearly highlight their shared military setbacks. Sets named "Gushing Fishing-spear Wound" (*Yilbith* initiated circa 1830) and "Eagle's Carrion Cry" (*Cuēt-Cuor* initiated circa 1840) commemorated catastrophic defeats when *nei ti naath* tried to invade *jiēñ* territories. The only dramatic *nei ti naath* territorial successes began with parties that found their way into marginal pastures and gradually absorbed their neighbors in the manner described by Deng Nhial, rather than defeating them.

The eastern and southern Sudd were the only areas where *nei ti naath* enjoyed any success in these less violent ways, and these were also the only places where local *jiēñ* did not use *gaar* to mark male marriageability or initiate new sets. Though their practice of marking male marriageability with *gaar* clearly gave *nei ti naath* like the Jikāny a long-term assimilationist advantage, it did not initially equip them to seize the best pastures. Consequently, *nei ti naath* migrants first settled in abandoned flood zones like Malou and moved only gradually

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youths near Wath Njök including Yööl Luacrial and Yööl Nyal Deñ (both Ageer) youths who eventually received *gaar* and assimilated within the cieñ Wau section of the Gaa-jak Jikāny.

Tap Luak Wer Dunjit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 7, 2013).

Nhial Kuek Yio, Gaatluak Tun Tut, Gaatluak Lual Ruac, and Wiyual Dhoang Rik, interview by author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 17, 2013).

from these margins into the rich pastures along the Machar Marshes, and the Nyikan, Sobat, and Pibor Rivers, which today remain the major centers of the L̥ou and Jikāny confederations.

One advantage these *nei ti naath* newcomers originally enjoyed was a strong sense of moral community and consensus regarding the rights of landowning lineages (*d̥iel*) to allocate pasture, which helped them amicably handle sensitive issues of allocating grazing rights to their new lands. After reaching the abandoned Mal̥ou floodplain, the migrants accepted Latj̥ɔ̃r's claims, on the basis of an accord he reached with land's original owners, the Donj̥ol community of Padiet Gakgak, to act as the "landowner" (*d̥iel*) of the flood zone. Latj̥ɔ̃r's colony quickly began to grow, both because unmarried local men accepted their *gaar* and because news of the *nei ti naath* successes encouraged further *nei tin naath* immigration from the west. *Nei ti naath* of the original migrant party who were not Jikāny had the weakest claim to the area because Latj̥ɔ̃r was a Jikāny, and so, as the colony's population grew, the Mor-L̥ou moved off to follow a L̥ou man of cattle (B̥ɛc Cuol) to the west side of the Sobat. Within Latj̥ɔ̃r's Jikāny confederation, herders from its Gaa-jiok section had a stronger claim on Mal̥ou than their Gaa-jak brethren because Latj̥ɔ̃r belonged to the Cieŋ Yual section of the Gaa-jiok. The Gaa-jak accepted their relative marginality and voluntarily moved off to the east shortly after the Jikāny man of cattle Jaan̥ Win opened the *Lajak* marriage-set in the late 1840s.<sup>228</sup>

The departing Gaa-jak reached the northern edge of the Machar Marshes and discovered that the Donj̥ol there, who had reoccupied the middle Yal east of a place called Cabore, were prepared to fight for their pastures and the right to spear fish in the stream. The Gaa-jak invaders were buoyed by bachelors they had already assimilated and by a still-steady stream of arrivals from the west, who helped them kill the local Donj̥ol leader (a certain C̥ɔm Nyit̥ɔŋ) in battle, but

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<sup>228</sup> Roughly a dozen different traditions I heard purport to describe one conflict or another between the Gaa-jiok and Gaa-jak that precipitated this split, but all generally agree that no one was actually killed.

they still paid a price for their victory. Gaa-jak elders can still recall the names of specific warriors from the sets named Hornless-White-Steer, Turning-Hearts, Pulling-Out, and White-and-Yellow- Steer, who died in this offensive against a relatively weak and unsettled Padan community.<sup>229</sup>

A differen Padan group from the Eastern *Ḍḍḍ* confederation who lived south of the Gaa-jak in the fertile plains of Yom were far more formidable at that time than the Donjol communities of the middle Yal. These *Ḍḍḍ* had maintained their cohesion in spite of the *Amol Magook* flood by anchoring their collective moral identity unity in the centuries-long Padan tradition of building sacred mounds, heaps of earth and ashes contributed from worshipers' hearths, in this case dedicated to the divinity KERJIOK and located at a village called Buḍriak. This shrine closely resembled other sacred mounds that served as primary gathering places for Padan throughout the eastern Sudd but was distinguished by belief that it housed the remains of someone named Kur, who had been entombed in it alive beside various sacrificial objects, including a sacred drum and a bull.<sup>230</sup> In this sense the mound of KERJIOK drew on the same spiritual logic as the larger and more celebrated mound of Luanj Aiwel, where Padan worshipers told very similar tales about live burials, as described by various scholars including Douglas Johnson.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> The Gaa-jak dead from the cien Nyijaḍḍni section alone included Lop Dup Tiacyan and Kuiny Cuuonj. The Gaa-jak credit Tḍḍ Wel Nyaduḍḍ Jut from cien Thianj Tar with killing Cḍm Nyitḍḍ.

Tap Luak Wḍr Dunḍit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 8, 2013).

<sup>230</sup> Tap Luak Wḍr Dunḍit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 8, 2013).

<sup>231</sup> For other relevant discussions of this Padan tradition see Godfrey Lienhardt's discussions of Aiwel and his chapter entitled "Buried Alive".

Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: the Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 189-191, 288-319.

In one [version of the myth] ... The Sun appeals to the Moon, who spears Aiwel through the head and body with a fishing-spear, transfixing him to the ground. Aiwel is not killed, but his people come and bury him alive – some say by his own instruction – by constructing a huge mound over him, a mound which the Nuer now call Puom Aiwel or Puom Longar, but which some Dinka also still call Luang Aiwel, the byre of Aiwel Longar. The mound was large but did not cover the fishing-spear, whose shaft protruded from the apex. Another story is that Aiwel used to build his byre out of living people.<sup>232</sup>

The shrine of KERJIOK drew on this same tradition and became especially important after the *Amol Magook* flood. The herders who trickled back into Yom counted on this mound to give them a trustworthy link with properly propitiated ancestors interred around the Yom area, even as they sought to avoid the wild spirits roaming around Malou. These returnees hailed from various confederations of *jiëëŋ*, but Yom became known as *Ŋɔk* territory because this shrine was associated with a “shrine master” (*beny yith*) from the Eastern *Ŋɔk* confederation.

The shrine master who managed the mound at that time was named Adura, and the mound’s seemingly miraculous survival during the deluge of the 1820s helped him acquire a reputation for mastering even the massive flow of riverine waters. Contemporary Eastern *Ŋɔk* and Gaa-jak elders report that Adura did not need to dry his cattle dung on the ground to obtain fuel but rather spread the dung on the surface of the water in the morning and at sundown collected dry fuel. Donjɔl and other *jiëëŋ* who maintain traditions about a “war with the rain” have regularly used their ancestors’ inability to dry cattle dung as fuel for their hearths as a general metaphor for the devastation of floods, and legends of Adura’s prowess inverted this

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<sup>232</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 42.

familiar imagery.<sup>233</sup> In other words, Adura had the power to defy the laws of mundane nature, and his divinity KERJIOK could protect the diverse community of Yom from future torrents.

Adura worked to unify this heterogeneous community of *jiěěη* by building linkages among neighbors that ignored mutually excluding discourses of descent and focused on participatory rituals and sacrifices for anyone willing to come to the shrine at Buoriak. As his reputation grew, Adura also tried to expand his network to include persons who hesitated to make the journey but lived in the similarly mixed returnee communities in Thɔɔc (the southern edge of Machar Marshes just north of the Baro River). Adura's devotees emphasized his broad appeal as a unifying figure by developing another tale of Adura's exploits that used the limbs of his body to represent the reach of his extensive network. In this tale, Adura journeyed south to Thɔɔc with only one leg to visit the home of Dɛŋ Makër (the man who had led the largest party of Padarj Bor migrants into the area). Adura then returned home with two legs, physically whole and thus a literal embodiment of the enabling bond between the dispersed *jiěěη* who lived in Yom and Thɔɔc.<sup>234</sup>

The arriving Gaa-jak recognized the strength of Adura's network and began peacefully assimilating unmarried local men through *gaar* and intermarriage instead of attacking Yom directly. The Gaa-jak did continue conducting raids that displaced some of the existing occupants of the area, but they were very selective in their targets after they reached the banks of the Yal and targeted only sedentary non-Nilotic *Cai* to the east.<sup>235</sup> The raiders also did not risk war with

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<sup>233</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: the Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 43.

<sup>234</sup> Thɔɔc has usually appeared in print as Thojj or Thoic. Thɔɔc is a more accurate vocalization.

<sup>235</sup> Scholars have frequently argued that communities who organize themselves matrilineally adapted this system as a response to intense slaving and endemic sexual assault that causes communities to doubt claims of non-uterine kinship. Wendy James has made similar suggestions concerning the cluster of Koma now known as the

all *Cai* in general but attacked particularly vulnerable groups of Koma-speaking refugees, ancestors of the modern-day Uduk people, who only a few decades before had founded settlements with distinctly Koma names like Kolop and Banjiy in hopes of finding a refuge beyond the reach of the Abyssinian and Arab slave-raiders then descending on the region.<sup>236</sup> These Koma relied on endogamous marital practices like sister exchange that reflected their poverty in fungible goods and lacked the more extensive alliances of more coherent and formidable *Cai* like the Mabaan, who married with outsiders and paid generous bride-wealth to create and mobilize larger kinship networks.

Assimilated or semi-assimilated Padaŋ from Yom also seem to have provided much of the Gaa-jak military personnel for raids attributed to them. Gaa-jak elders do not stress this point today, but their ancestors did choose to rename the region of Kolop as *Pa-Kur*, which means “place of Kur” in *thuɔŋjǎŋ* (“mouth of the *jiëëŋ*”), and Pakur has remained the name of the South Sudanese boma (an administrative center) located today in eastern Longechuk County. The prefix “*pa*” means “place” in a number of Nilotic languages (as in *Pacollø*), but not in *thok naath* (“mouth of the *nei ti naath*”), and its appearance in this Gaa-jak place-name highlights how assimilated Padaŋ bachelors drove Gaa-jak territorial expansion, to the point of infiltrating the very language. The fact that these newcomers to the region named this place after Kur, the person entombed in KERJIOK’s shrine, also shows how pervasively these nominally *nei ti naath* communities accepted Padaŋ spirituality.<sup>237</sup>

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Uduk. It might be that these Koma-speaking communities became matrilineal only as a result of the various catastrophes they suffered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of which the Gaa-jak invasions were but one.

<sup>236</sup> F.D. Corfield, “The Koma.” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1938) p. 132.

<sup>237</sup> Tap Luak and other Gaa-jak elders in Longechuk County claim that the *Cai* called Pa-Kur “Banjiy” while Wendy James has recorded that the Uduk claim “the Nuer” renamed their old home of Kolop as “Pa Kur”. These Gaa-jak elders have never visited Blue Nile State and have personal experience only with *Cai*, who are Mabaan, and



The Jikāny who remained in Malou after the Gaa-jak departed were the Gaa-jiok and the much smaller Gaa-guonj. The Gaa-jiok and Gaa-guonj also became so numerous as their ranks swelled with kin from the west and with unmarried Padan men seeking brides that they exhausted local resources. This growth in population, and supporting numbers of cattle, forced them to look for more pasture and to come to terms with the resident communities in the valley of the Sobat River. Gaa-jiok and Gaa-guonj herders who grew too numerous for the permanent pools near Malou recognized that Latjɔɔr's closest kin, the Cienj Yual section of the Gaa-jiok, had a stronger claim to Malou and agreed to depart, just as had the Gaa-jak.

The expanding Gaa-guonj began moving south and east toward a region along the Khor Wakow (a stream that eventually joins the Sobat two miles above modern-day Nasir Town) called Thorow and toward the inland lakes of Chuathjut and Koap (in far eastern Nasir County). The Gaa-jiok also split between the Cienj Yual section that remained in Malou, the Cienj Wankeɛ section that headed southwest toward the banks of the Sobat, and the more distantly related Cienj Laan section that moved west toward the dry uplands between Malou and the Sobat.

These separate routes brought the Gaa-guonj and Gaa-jiok into the territories of different autochthons, who each dealt with the newcomers in their own ways. Padan from the Ayɔl-Donjɔl and Eastern ɔɔk confederations occupied the pastures between Malou and the Sobat, but sedentary *anywaa* controlled most of the river banks that herders sought in the dry-season.<sup>238</sup> The

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Shyita/Opouu of the upper Jokau and Lau rivers, so their term Banjiy may refer to a Komo settlement immediately adjacent to Kolop or may be another name for the same site.

Wendy James, *Kwanim Pa: The Making of the Uduk People: an ethnographic study of survival in the Sudan-Ethiopian borderlands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p. 34.

<sup>238</sup> Europeans who traveled on the Sobat at this time referred to both cøllø and Sobat *anywaa* as "Schelouk" but recognized the *anywaa* upsteam in Buonjak as a distinct group with its own language. The actual members of these Sobat communities have consistently described themselves as *anywaa*, but earlier Europeans' confusions

*anywaa* on the middle Sobat called their domain Nyium (modern-day Nasir), and their militias (known as *nyantuel*) had plenty of experience dealing the Padaŋ and were ready to repel the intruders. The Cieŋ Waŋkec section of the Gaa-jiok suffered a number of casualties when they violated Nyium's borders and eventually gained access to Nyium not by force of arms but instead through strategic marriages. The memories of this process portray a Cieŋ Waŋkec, who obtained seasonal grazing rights after a man named Gök Lotlɔa Poth (from the Cieŋ Mɪnyal section of the Cieŋ Waŋkec) gave his daughter Nyanhial to Deŋ Gucker, who was "chief" or "headman" (*kwärò*) of Nyium.<sup>239</sup> Gök Lotlɔa did not receive any cattle as bride-wealth from Deŋ Gucker, as was his due, because the *kwärò* instead gave Gök Lotlɔa the right to graze on the east bank of the Sobat. Gök Lotlɔa then became the "landowners" (*dɪl*) of a cattle-camp that the *nei ti naath* named Kuenylualthoan, located at the modern-day site of Nasir town at a place then called Nordēŋ, directly across the river from Deŋ Gucker's personal residence.

The Cieŋ Waŋkec around Kuenylualthoan discovered that, except when flooding made cattle-keeping unfeasible, *anywaa* were even easier than the Padaŋ to assimilate through intermarriage. Wet-side *anywaa* had few, if any, cattle of their own, but *anywaa* patriarchs still viewed cattle, and particularly milch cows, as a form of bride-wealth more valuable than the

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highlight how abstract ideas of ethnic difference did not capture the fluidity of identities among neighboring communities.

Andrea De Bono, "Fragment d'un voyage au Saubat (affluent du Nil blanc) 1855" *Le Tour Du Monde* (1860) p. 348-353.

Jules Poncet, Adolphe Male-Brun, and Ambroise Poncet, *Le fleuve Blanc: notes géographiques et ethnologiques et les chasses à l'éléphant dans le pays des Dinka et des Djour* (Paris: Librairie de la Societe de Geographie, 1864).

<sup>239</sup> Yöth Guāndɔŋ, interview with author, Nasir Town, South Sudan (February 9, 2013).

Also the grandchildren of Deŋ Gucker (Wal Bithow Deŋ Gucker, Dak Bithow Deŋ Gucker, and Simon Kan Deŋ Gucker) well as Kok Mut Oman and Yual Mut Oman in discussion with author, January 24, 2013 in Nordeng Boma of Nasir County, Eastern Upper Nile State.

beads that they traditionally offered on behalf of *anywaa* grooms.<sup>240</sup> Consequently, *nei ti naath* bachelors with cattle could consistently out-compete *anywaa* sons for the right to marry *anywaa* daughters. In fact, many Gaa-jiok could secure an *anywaa* bride by offering far fewer cattle to her family than any *nei ti naath* father would accept. This Gaa-jiok advantage prompted both *anywaa* and *nei ti naath* families to prefer intermarriage and encouraged persons of such a mixed background to chose the wealthier lifestyle of the *nei ti naath* herders. For many young *anywaa* men, thus left short of prospective brides, the best way to acquire a wife was to accept *gaar*. As a result, *anywaa* communities began to disappear even without dispersing after losing any battles.

Unlike *jiëñ* herders or the highly organized *collø*, these *anywaa* also had no tradition of “marriageability-sets” (*ric*) to ensure equality among men and protect young bachelors from greedy patriarchs tempted to hoard wives for themselves, marry them off for *nei ti naath* cattle, or both.<sup>241</sup> The *gaar* initiation empowered them to escape the inequality of *anywaa* settlements built on hoarding up stores of food instead of dispersing cattle and win assurances that their *nei ti naath* set-mates would contribute cattle to their own efforts to acquire wives and have children of their own. The fact that many “Gaa-jiok lineages” in Nasir County today actually go back to men with distinctly *anywaa* names, like Omot or Okello, testifies to a subsequent *nei ti naath* acceptance of foreign descent so complete that families do not bothering to hide them.

The Gaa-jiok Jikäny who assimilated their hosts with cattle also benefited from the fact that *anywaa* lived in small politically independent villages and did not make alliances on large

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<sup>240</sup> This same advantage of dry-side cattle-keepers over their cattle-less, wet-side counterparts seems to explain how the Eastern Njock gained control of modern-day Baliet County, even though its primary town, Abwong, was originally an *anywaa* settlement.

<sup>241</sup> The *anywaa* have no real equivalent to a *ric*. Their closest equivalent is the practice of young men forming an entourage that feeds off the patronage of a local *kwarò*. These entourages disband whenever their patron has exhausted his resources and have little to do with marriage.

John Burton, "Atuot Age Categories and Marriage." *Africa* vol. 50 no. 2 (1980) p. 146-160.

scales. Communities like Nyium did include a number of villages, but few *anywaa* allowed broader commitments to encroach on their local autonomy until the 1890s and, even then, remained divided between nearly a dozen groups instead of uniting behind a single *rädh*. This local autonomy meant that Nyium had only a loose association with the *anywaa* polity of Jikmir thirty kilometers upstream and felt no kinship with Buonjak south of the Baro River, even though all these were *anywaa* in terms of culture and language.

This local political autonomy allowed the Gaa-jiok and Gaa-guon Jikäny to draw on their far larger networks of exogamous kin to outnumber any *anywaa* enemy and to raid settlements in Buonjak while maintaining alliances with Nyium and Deŋ Gucker on the Sobat. In fact some contemporary Gaa-jiok elders maintain that Nyium actively enlisted their ancestors' support in raids against Buonjak.<sup>242</sup> In 2013, great-grandchildren of Deŋ Gucker living in the old capital of Nyium at Norden opposite Nasir town still harbored grievances against the Gaa-jiok, which included ruining their inherited hunting-based *anywaa* lifestyle by burning the tall grasses that supported game to improve their own pastures. However they also supported the basic narrative that the Gaa-jiok began as allies who aided them in conflicts with other *anywaa*.

This political contrast between relatively unified and inclusive *nei ti naath* and the *anywaa* balkanized by local grievances agrees with the way a Maltese traveler in the region named Andrea De Bono described conflicts along the upper Sobat and lower Baro Rivers in the dry-season of 1855. This explorer and ivory merchant reported that both *nei ti naath* and *anywaa* proposed making military alliances with him, and with the Arab gunmen he employed, but made their proposals in very different ways. De Bono recorded meeting “the Nuers” on the Sobat’s east bank (Gaa-jiok territory), who claimed (implausibly) that they belonged to a union that

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<sup>242</sup> Perhaps the most reputable elder to make this claim was Hoth Guandong, the senior judge of Nasir County.

could field fifty-thousand warriors and offered to divide cattle and captives equally among their ad hoc allies if he would join their raiding party.

On the *anywaa* side, De Bono also reported that “les Bondjaks” (in his rendering) tried to secure his support by coaxing him to erect a permanent base within the territory of particular chiefs, who made little pretense of claiming wider alliances. Some “Bondjaks” welcomed De Bono with pomp and pageantry. Others greeted him with armed stand-offs that compelled him and his men to stay awake all night clutching their rifles. A number tried to enlist his support in settling scores with their *anywaa* neighbors. In one settlement, “Bondjaks” approached De Bono asking him to pay compensation to the father of a man his Arab employees had accidentally shot, but a woman who lived in the same community intervened and told De Bono that “the Nuers”, not his men, had committed the murder. De Bono then rejoined the rest of his men, determined that it was they who had in fact shot the fellow, and paid compensation.<sup>243</sup> He also asked why the woman had lied and learned that she had devised the deception as a jealous attempt to prevent the dead man’s father from receiving any compensatory beads from De Bono.

De Bono seems to have witnessed some of the macro-political consequences of disunity (if not outright vindictive bickering) within Buonjak and among *anywaa* more generally on his return journey, when facing *nei ti naath* who could unite larger, if relatively ad hoc, groups.

9 Avril. - La solitude s’est faite autour de nos barques: je ne vois plus à en apprendre la cause. Les Nours ont exécuté une razzia sur les Bondjaks, et leur ont enlevé du bétail; à l’approche de ces terribles ennemis, les Bondjaks se sont retirés sans essayer de résistance. Ces Nours sont la terreur de tous les riverains

April 9. - Solitude [as no one came] by our boats: I could not see [why but] learned the cause. The Nuers had executed a raid on the Buonjak [*anywaa*], and took their livestock; at the approach of these terrible enemies, the Buonjak retired without attempting to resist. These Nuers are the terror of all the residents

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<sup>243</sup> Andrea De Bono, "Fragment d'un voyage au Saubat (affluent du Nil blanc) 1855" *Le Tour Du Monde* (1860) p. 348-351.

du fleuve Blanc, même des Schelouks,  
et il suffit de deux Nours pour mettre  
en fuite la population d'un village tout entire.

of the White River, even the "Shilluk" [*collø*],  
and just two Nuers are enough to put  
the entire population of a village to flight.<sup>244</sup>

De Bono clearly had not concluded from his earlier experience in Buonjak with locals lying about *nei ti naath* assailants that he should take a circumspect view of tales of the violent "Nuers". However, in this case, his report is compatible with Gaa-jiok elders' accounts that they began raiding Buonjak for cattle sometime before the initiation of the set named "White-Hearts" in the 1860s.

The fact that these raids had commenced by 1855 lends credence to the idea that *nei ti naath* from the Gaa-jiok Jikāny and the Lōu confederation who attacked Buonjak did so with the aid and encouragement of Nyium or other *anywaa* who presumably had scores to settle. The Gaa-jiok started coming to Kuenlualthoan only in the 1850s (at the initiation of *Thut*) and lingered there for only a few months of the year, making it implausible that the newcomers had already mastered the terrain fifty kilometers further south enough to conduct raids without a guide.

Another striking revelation in De Bono's account is that back in 1855 Buonjak had herds that could be rustled, even though none of the *anywaa* of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries possessed cattle of their own. The fact that these communities, which did not adopt *gaar*, lost their cattle in the second half of the nineteenth century suggests that those who refused to join in the wider networks of marriageability-sets that *nei ti naath* newcomers created in the 1850s ultimately could not muster enough manpower to hold onto this highly mobile, and thus vulnerable, form of wealth. Communities that came face to face with *gaar* could become *nei ti*

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<sup>244</sup> Andrea De Bono, "Fragment d'un voyage au Saubat (affluent du Nil blanc) 1855" *Le Tour Du Monde* (1860) p. 351.

*naath*, or they could retreat into thick forests filled with tsetse flies and fight even more doggedly against more numerous foes to become the *anywaa* as Evans-Pritchard found them in the 1930s, but no one could simply remain unchanged.<sup>245</sup>

### **Growth and the Collapse of *nei ti naath* Communities in the East (1859-1860s)**

Uninscribed *anywaa* and other bachelors continued accepting *gaar* and becoming *nei ti naath* throughout the 1840s and 1850s. However, this process began to look different in the far eastern Sudd than in the old *nei ti naath* homeland west of the Bahr el-Jebel or in the intermediate environs of the Zeraf Island. *Jiëñ* west of the Bahr el-Jebel, where *gaar* had been invented, were more resistant to its assimilationist appeal and did not rush to join *nei ti naath* communities. *Nei ti naath* confederations in the Zeraf Island, like the Gaawäär, also remained somewhat more homogenous than those further east, because they were closer to their own homelands and attracted more migrants who had been raised as *nei ti naath*. The Lou and the Jikäny in the far eastern Sudd were different from *nei ti naath* closer to the old homeland because outsiders assimilated in both these confederation became the majorities.

The rapid mass assimilation they achieved seemed at first to create very clear winners and losers, but, in the longer term, this process created a chaotic political environment where *nei ti naath* confederations, and even local communities, could not contain rising tensions between assimilated youths and the lineages of entitled “landowners” (*diel*). Many local patriarchs who initially benefited from Latjōr’s arrival (like Padiet Gakgak and Deñ Gucker) lived long enough

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<sup>245</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (New York: Percy Lund, Humpries Co., 1940).

Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

to see their original communities fade into a sea of inscribed *nei ti naath* foreheads. Eastern *nei ti naath* retained their language and many aspects of their original culture. However, following Latjɔɔr's death in the 1850s, they lost much of their political coherence, as communities that were supposedly ruled by particular lineages filled with incorporated outsiders who had little respect for these *diel*.

Many Padaŋ patriarchs were understandably upset about the possibility that the communities they ruled might disappear as their sons began accepting *gaar* and joining *nei ti naath*. These elders devised a variety of defensive strategies involving prohibitions of marriage with the women of the newcomers and worshipping divinity at central shrines to avoid disintegration. Padaŋ elders whose children intermarried with the newcomers realized that the usual patrilineal arrangements, whereby their daughters' children were expected to identify primarily with their fathers' Jikāny lineages, became problematic for them after the introduction of *gaar* created a situation where those who gave daughters away could not find wives for their own uninscribed sons. Whenever their sons accepted *gaar*, these prominent forehead markings branded them as members of a *nei ti naath* marriageability-set.

The marked sons of Padaŋ men, who were visibly different from their uninscribed fathers, often settled near their Jikāny set-mates, and their children spoke their mothers' *thok naath* language and began to identify primarily with their *nei ti naath* kin. This peaceful but politically predatory arrangement provoked the Aɣɔl-Donjol in Malɔu who lived near the Gaa-jiok to start rejecting intermarriage with any *nei ti naath* and to call their daughters "ugly/bad" (*jiakɛ*), as Deng Nhial explained in the narrative that opened this chapter of how his great-grandfather tried to resist *gaar* by turning to endogamy. The Aɣɔl-Donjol elders who burned that axehead made a dreadful choice between abandoning the sacred exogamous traditions at the



heart of their herding communities' traditional moral codes or allowing *nei ti naath* newcomers to continue seducing their sons until they ceased to exist as a community.

Even Aḡol-Donjöl elders who opted for this defensive endogamy still had a hard time preventing all of their sons from intermarrying with *nei ti naath*. This marital prohibition often required Aḡol-Donjöl families to turn down better bride-wealth offers, postpone other marriages, and remain alienated from their increasingly powerful and numerous *nei ti naath* neighbors. These conservative Aḡol-Donjöl continued to lose personnel whenever anyone chose to violate this prohibition, and they had no way of recruiting *nei ti naath* youths to off-set these losses. The Aḡol-Donjöl communities of the Sobat Valley (in what is now Ulang County) who experimented with this half-measure slowed the assimilative process but never stopped it. Aḡol-Donjöl managed to be among the very last holdouts, and some of their youths left their foreheads smooth until the initiation of set *Car-boic* [circa 1905]. Eventually even these die-hards accepted defeat and either agreed to assimilate or left to join other Aḡol-Donjöl living to the northeast along the White Nile in what is now Akoka County.

Some of the Eastern Ḍḳḳ, who bordered the Gaa-jak in Yom, took a more active approach to limiting losses of their youth to the Jikāny. These Ḍḳḳ remembered Adura's earlier successes bringing disparate groups together around his sacred mound and put their hopes for cultural continuity in KERJIOK and the communal sacrifices held regularly at Buḡriak. They did not resist *gaar* directly, and many of their sons received marks in time to join the White-Hearts marriage-set initiated in the 1860s. One Gaa-jak elder from a lineage of assimilated Ḍḳḳ explained these losses in 2013 by saying, KERJIOK “did not see” (*/kanε nin*) Latjḳḳ coming.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Tap Luak Wer Dunjit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 9, 2013).

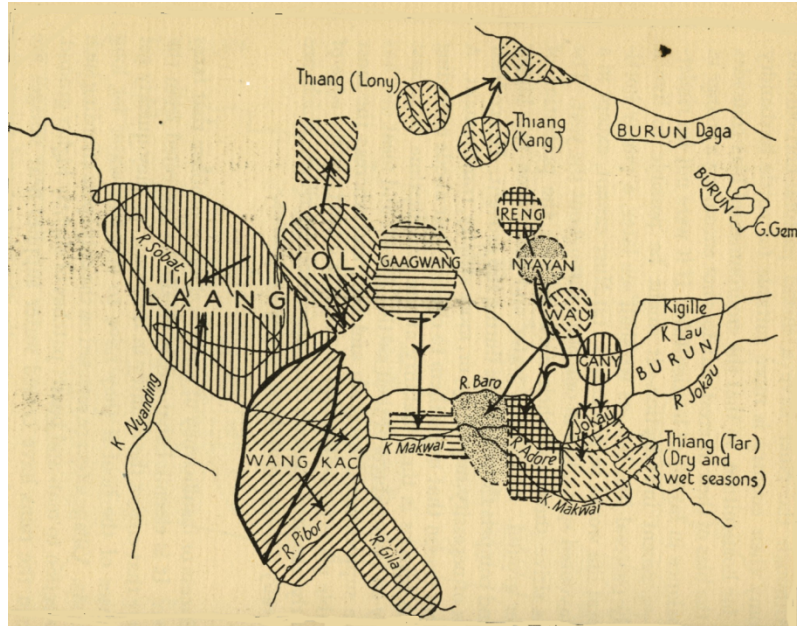
The Eastern Ɖɔɔk in Yom initially had little trouble convincing their children to participate in occasional rites at Buɔriak, but these gatherings did not leave a permanent mark on anyone's forehead. In contrast, men with *gaar* found themselves visibly associated with the newcomers in the eyes of their neighbors, even in situations where they would have preferred to emphasize a Ɖɔɔk identity, and especially when an inscribed Gaa-jak herder fought with an uninscribed Ɖɔɔk. Eventually the different registers in which these two markers of affiliation operated created a, accommodation where most men in Yom belonged to a *nei ti naath* marriageability-set but continued to hold the divinity KERJIOK in high esteem.

Incoming Gaa-jak exploited Eastern Ɖɔɔk herders' commitment to exogamy to drive a wedge between those who adopted *gaar* and intermarried with the newcomers and traditionalists who resisted their appeal. After the Gaa-jak became the de facto majority, they then drove away any disgruntled minority who refused to assimilate. Some Padaŋ who rejected *gaar* moved off to the south and the east to join the mixed community of Padaŋ and other *jiëëŋ* that Deŋ Makër had founded north of the Baro River around Thɔɔc, Urieŋ, and Kigili. Adura's own descendants numbered among a different party of die-hards who moved northwest to join the main body of the Eastern Ɖɔɔk living along the lower reaches of the Sobat (modern-day Baliet County). These Eastern Ɖɔɔk still shared a border with the Gaa-jiok who belonged to Cieŋ Laaŋ and might also have suffered assimilation except that they inoculated themselves by instituting their own *gaar* and marking their sons with the exact six-line pattern used by *nei ti naath*.

## Map 3.2

### Cien of the Eastern Jikány by 1930

(Gaa-jiok, Gaa-guon, and Gaa-jak)



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By the 1860s, as heavily invested in the logic of their marriagability-sets as the ballooning Eastern Jikány confederation had become, they developed differences that left that system as the only tradition their increasingly eclectic communitiest still agreed on. Their growing lack of consensus became especially problematic because the “man of cattle” (*wut yɔɔk*) whose responsibilities included initiating these sets did not have authority to settle land disputes like “landowners” (*diel*) or, like a *nei ti naath* “earth-masters”, to reconcile blood-feuds before they turned into major civil wars. Many assimilated Padaŋ youths of this generation, who were descendants of actual firstcomers, had little respect for these officiants, ignored their proclamations, and started civil wars. Factions who lost in these conflicts then fled away from

<sup>247</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 58.

Evans-Pritchard derived this information from American missionaries in Nasir. Aside from misnaming the Cien Nyijaanŋni as “Nyayan”, their information matches local elders’ memories and is very similar to the current distribution of territory.

landowning *diel* and found new homes among Padaŋ or in *anywaa* territories. These exiles' direct invasions of others' territories generally failed, especially in Buonjak, but those who sought refuge as respectful guests found host communities whom they could eventually assimilate, recreating the context of growing numbers that had sparked their original exodus and causing the practice of *gaar* to sweep over the region like a wave.

Jikāny oral traditions about these disputes focus on antagonisms between local *diel* who expected to retain their customary privileges and assimilated Padaŋ who, as descendants of the autochthons, found rather specious the claimed superiority of *diel* as “owners of the land”. What these traditions do not explain, but what birth names from this era reveal, is that these simmering political tensions erupted into open war primarily when drought aggravated the rivalries endemic in the process. Jikāny elders consistently assert that these Gaa-jiok and Gaa-jak civil wars commenced between the initiations of the sets named “Flatulating” (*Thut* in the 1850s) and “White-Hearts” (*Boi-loc* in the 1860s) and among very specific groups, the Cieŋ Laaŋ of the Gaa-jiok and the Cieŋ Thiaŋ of the Gaa-jak.

These two communities were the only groups within the Jikāny confederation who named sons born at this time “Drought” (Ræeth). In a randomized sample of the names of one hundred different men who joined the marriage-set *Maker* [circa 1876] sixteen to eighteen years after their births (roughly 1858 through the early 1860s), twelve percent of persons born to the Gaat Duon section of the Cieŋ Laaŋ Gaa-jiok were named “Drought”. The considerable frequency of the name is especially suggestive of local circumstances because similar samplings of names from the same set in other “communities” (*cieŋ*) among the Gaa-jiok or Gaa-guon revealed not a single instance of this name. The Gaat Duon community of the Cieŋ Laaŋ Gaa-jiok also happened to be the *cieŋ* that lived farther west than any other among the Jikāny and thus lived a

greater distance from the moist grazing lands of Malou and were the most vulnerable to drought. A similar analysis of Gaa-jak birth names also reveals that the Cien Thian Gaa-jak were the only Gaa-jak community to name any of their sons in this set “Drought”. The Cien Thian Gaa-jak lived on the far eastern frontier of Eastern Jikany territory and were more removed than their fellow Gaa-jak from the moist soils of the Machar Marshes.

This genealogical evidence suggests that Jikany communities living on higher ground to the east and the west of the haunted Malou floodplains that Latjoor had originally settled suffered a serious drought at some point between 1858 and the early 1860s. Jules and Ambroise Poncet, a pair of French brothers hunting for elephants in this region at this time, inadvertently confirmed the drought on April 4<sup>th</sup> of 1859, when they reported that their Padan guide (a certain “Madjok”) was astonished to find that the poor rains of the previous summer had reduced what was usually a lake to open plain.<sup>248</sup> The Jikany would not have suffered from this drought if they had remained within the flood-prone Malou where they had begun in 1828, but many of them became vulnerable to this drought because their demographic successes had forced them into drier areas. This environmental stress increased the tensions between senior Jikany from old lineages of *nei ti naath* “landowners” (*diel*) and assimilated youths with Padan origins, who had very different ideas about who deserved priority when pastures became scarce.

Many of the Padan youths that the Cien Thian community of the Gaa-jak had assimilated around Yom lived in the generally flood-free uplands of Pakur that they had taken from the disunited Koma and presumably felt they had earned the right to live there. The Cien Laan section of the Gaa-jioke to the west of Malou lived on the opposite side of this expanding Jikany

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<sup>248</sup> Jules Poncet, Adolphe Male-Brun, and Ambroise Poncet, *Le fleuve Blanc: notes géographiques et ethnologiques et les chasses à l'éléphant dans le pays des Dinka et des Djour* (Paris: Librairie de la Société de Géographie, 1864) p. 100-101.

colony, where assimilated Padaŋ had not fought for the land but had inherited it from their fathers and then shared it with the *nei ti naath* communities they had joined in order to marry. However, in both of these drought-stricken communities the *diel* lineages claimed that their rights of land-owners gave them priority over assimilated Padaŋ.

Under normal circumstances, assimilationist Jikāny had every incentive to accept initiates as equals to retain their loyalty so they could call on them in increasingly frequent conflicts with their neighbors. In fact, their desire to recruit young men from unrelated lineages had driven their invention of *gaar* to begin with. However, as the grasslands shrank and watering pools disappeared some *diel* resorted to asserting their dormant theoretical rights to the land so they could keep their herds alive. Assimilated youths from the most desperate communities reacted by killing *diel* who tried to keep them from precious pastures. The blood feuds that ensued became flashpoints for tensions between elites in the moist lowland and others in the drought-stricken peripheries, as well as across the divide between *diel* and assimilated youths, that *nei ti naath* could no longer easily resolve.

The present-day administrative division between Nasir County and Ulang County in Upper Nile State has its historical roots in this period, when the Cienj Laaŋ (who are now the residents of Ulang County) fought the Cienj Waŋkɛc (now residents of western Nasir County). Gaa-jiok elders consistently agree that Latjɔɔr (who, by 1859, would have been roughly eighty years old) had already died and been buried in Malou (his shrine still stands at a place called Kuithyian today) before this conflict began. Most other members of Latjɔɔr's set had also died, and members of the "Turning-Hearts" set had assumed senior leadership positions but struggled to command the deference that founding figures like Latjɔɔr and Nyaguɛc had earned by leading the migration to Malou.

The senior man from Latjɔɔr's particular section, named Yut Cam Jiok Kier, asserted the right to inherit Latjɔɔr's authority by claiming the stomach of each steer sacrificed in Malou, since that part of the animals' entrails had been reserved for elderly patriarchs, and by cooking it at his home before distributing portions to his set-mates, just as Latjɔɔr had done. Cien Laan elders had long resented this community-building ritual because they lived the farthest from Malou and were often excluded from it.<sup>249</sup> Cien Laan elders from the then-senior set named Turning-Hearts, including Both Kōr, Ruey Guac Lony, and Jiokthian Guac, began quarreling with Yut Cam even before the rains failed in 1858 and then flagrantly spurned his authority by cooking stomachs at their own dry-season campsite at Biel on the western edge of Malou. The Gaat-Duon section of the Cien Laan today remember this conflict, which did not turn violent until the drought of 1859, with a ballad called Diit Duon Manyal after the *ner*, or "steer name", of their ancestor Duon Bulbək, in whose memory they mobilized to combat their marginalization.<sup>250</sup>

Cien Laan herders tried to cope with the drought of 1859 by encroaching on pools and streams that their Cien Wankec neighbors claimed, which soon prompted fighting over these increasingly scarce resources. This recurring kind of conflict over pasture might not have developed into a major problem if combatants on both sides had recognized *nei ti naath* rules for seeking an earth master's arbitration or if they maintained the common agreement to strike a *diel* only with a club or stick instead of with a spear. However, on this occasion, an assimilated youth

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<sup>249</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer Before 1920" PhD. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 39-40, 97-99, 153-155.

<sup>250</sup> Pal Juac, Thomas Tut Thon, John Gaac Cuol, Tɔnyik Ruot Khor, Jok Luak Duop, and Simon Kueth Ræeth, interview with author, Ulang Town, South Sudan (January 28 2013).

from the Cienj Laan̄ Gaa-jiok named Bilieu Dual speared to death a *diel* named Gaac Guic Rial from the Cienj Wan̄kɛc Gaa-jiok.<sup>251</sup>

The Cienj Laan̄ did not apologize for this killing but memorialized what they took as principled revenge in a ballad called the Song of Gaac Guic Rial (usually shortened as Gaac Gu-Rial), which virtually every child raised in Ulang County still learns as a symbol, evoking something of the intense loyalty of a national anthem. This song's most oft-repeated lines emphasize the humiliating downfall of this once-privileged *diel* by celebrating how he went without a proper burial (leaving his unpropitiated spirit to haunt his descendants) and inverting this own discourse of privilege by reclassifying him as a foreign *jiëñ* from the hostile Padan̄ settlement of Wan.

ε ram mi dhom kuäär,  
dor diaal bia wee riath.  
Gaac Guic Rial bi diet di cam  
kuic kɛ ji nāk.  
Gaac Guic Rial bi diet di cam  
cɔl kɔ ji jaan̄ Wan.

A person ambushed a chief,  
all the communities will be afraid.  
Gaac Gu-Rial [carrion] birds will eat  
for they killed you.  
Gaac Gu-Rial the birds will eat  
[for] we called you a *jiëñ* of Wan.<sup>252</sup>

This killing represented far more than the murder of one man because it threatened the historical rights of *diel*, the fabric of the *nei ti naath* political order. Cienj Laan̄ elders now assert that Gaac Guic Rial had a reputation for mocking assimilated youths, thus violating the usual courtesies and respect of *anywaa-nei ti naath* accommodation. They also claim that Bilieu Dual, who killed him, had publically complained after earlier disputes about the fact that *diel*, unlike assimilated

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<sup>251</sup> Guic Rial or Guirial was the *ner*, or “steer name” of Gaac Both Buor Bec

<sup>252</sup> Pal Juac, Thomas Tut Thon, John Gaac Cuɔl, Tɔŋyik Ruot Khor, Jɔk Luak Duɔp, and Simon Kueth Rɛeth, interview with author, Ulang Town, South Sudan (January 28 2013).



Padaŋ, were merely wounded with clubs instead of fatally speared, which made his lethal assault appear premeditated and political.

Ultimately, assimilated Padaŋ within the Cienj Laaŋ prevented any reconciliation, and the entire community simply left the drought and the feud behind. The Cienj Laaŋ needed water and immediately moved to southwest to the very banks of the Sobat River, which they followed upstream to Jikmir (the place where the Baro and Pibor rivers merge to create the Sobat), where they crossed with their animals over to the southwest bank. On that far side of the Sobat the Cienj Laaŋ met up with elements of the Lou confederation who were also fleeing drought, under the leadership of a man of cattle named Bɛc Cuol or Bɛc Colith. Together both parties crossed to the east side of the Pibor and invaded well-watered Buonjak, which they had learned about in some of their earlier raids.

The Lou confederation and their Cienj Laaŋ allies were initially successful on the battlefield but soon began dying in droves when an epidemic of smallpox (*guol*) entered the area from the Ethiopian highlands. Many Cienj Laaŋ elders can still name grandfathers and great-grandfathers who succumbed to this epidemic in Buonjak, while more widely dispersed communities of *nei ti naath* who had remained farther to the north and the west avoided this particular outbreak. The Lou and Cienj Laaŋ eventually came to straits so dire that, according to their own traditions, they fully expected to be overwhelmed by the *anywaa* all around them.<sup>253</sup> Bɛc Cuol's supernatural skill of healing livestock offered no solution to human sickness. Fortunately for the Lou and the Cienj Laaŋ, a pragmatic matriarch named Nyaduor Kan rallied the survivors of the epidemic and saved both communities from eradication (or assimilation) at the hands of *anywaa* autochthons. Nyaduor Kan took up the mantle of a *kit* (war song leader) and

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<sup>253</sup> Examples of men who died of smallpox in Buonjak include Balan Jiokthian Guac (grandfather of Duoth Den Balan)

organized healthy women into a troop that continually beat drums and sang war songs to create the appearance of strength. Nyaduor Kan also organized the construction of litters for the ill from branches and cow hides, which the community's wives and mothers used to carry their suffering sons and husbands, including Bēc Cuol, back across the Pibor River, where they settled among Padaŋ who were living in the plains of Kewer there.<sup>254</sup> Contemporary Cienj Laaŋ still speak of this defeat as collective trauma and often argue that the catastrophe is the reason they are still less numerous today than the Cienj Nyalith, that is, their fellow Gaa-jiok who live in Nasir County.

The series of political and environmental disasters that fractured the Gaa-jiok and decimated the Cienj Laaŋ coincided with similarly damaging episodes among the Gaa-jak further east, where the Cienj Thiaŋ community also devolved into internal conflicts. Cienj Thiaŋ elders do not recall leadership disputes that precipitated this painful schism but instead describe the genesis of the conflict as a grazing dispute over a wet-season camp called Riam (east-central Longechuk County). Two men from the Cienj Tär community within the Cienj Thiaŋ, named Jėnyan and Pagak Wit, asked a certain Däp Bijok from the very closely related Cienj Kaaŋ community of the Cienj Thiaŋ if they could graze their cattle in his area. Däp felt that he had to grant permission to kinsmen, but, according to most contemporary traditions, he also foresaw trouble and arranged for a *jiěěŋ* magician (a *tiět*) to lay a curse on the intruders if they returned again the next year. When they did return, a stick fight over the pasture in question broke out on the far eastern edges of the well-watered Yom region (at camp called Kaijak). These combatants, observing the restraint due relatives, did not resort to using spears, but one of Pagak's sons and

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<sup>254</sup> Duoth Deŋ Balaŋ, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (February 2, 2013).

one of Jenyaŋ's grandsons still died of the wounds they received in the fight, and their deaths were attributed to the curse.<sup>255</sup>

A brother of one of the dead men “learned” of the curse when his dead brother visited him in a dream and rallied the Cien Tär youths to seek revenge. The youths, led by an initiated man of Padaŋ origin named Lər Piny, surprised and slew a very famous *diel* of the Cien Kaan community named Yuol Määr, stirring up the same antagonisms between *diel* and assimilated Padaŋ youths that had crystalized after the killing of Gaac Guic Rial among the Gaa-jiok.<sup>256</sup> Assimilated youths like Lər Piny advocated continuing the war against the Cien Kaan (after all, they were not really his relatives). On the other hand Cien Tär elders who had been raised as *nei ti naath* were horrified over Yuol Määr's death, especially once elders from other Gaa-jak communities who heard of this slaying told the Cien Tär they would not support them in this fight. The Cien Tär, who could not reconcile without alienating their own youths and could not remain in Yom without facing a more numerous foe, decided to flee nearly eighty kilometers south to Urien on the north bank of the Baro (modern-day Jokau Payam), where they found a tolerant welcome among *jiëëŋ* related to some of the youths they had assimilated.

As these civil wars tore the strained seams of the Jikāny political universe, the *nei ti naath* clung all the tighter to their familiar *gaar* and *ric*, which still gave the hope of binding even kinsmen separated by local feuds or by the vast distances between the Bahr el-Jebel homelands and the diasporic settlers in the Machar Marshes. But by the 1860s even these powerful strategies had failed. Jaan Win, the “man of cattle” who initiated each *ric* in the east, outlived Latjɔɔr by roughly a decade, but “White-Hearts” was both the last *ric* he opened before

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<sup>255</sup> Tɔŋyik Teny Macar, Interview with author, Lare, Ethiopia (April 21, 2013).

<sup>256</sup> Giet Jal's sources named the dead *diel* as “Kuei Mar” instead of Yual Määr but related a very similar tale.

Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer Before 1920” PhD. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 91-92.

his death and the last time that eastern *nei ti naath* and their western counterparts used the same names for their marriageability-sets.

The *ric* name “White-Hearts” (*Boi-loc*) described the abundance of pale, turbid fluid around the pericardial sac of cattle infected with bovine pleuropneumonia (“cattle lungsickness”) and was a fitting symbol for the last of the truly pan-confederational sets. Cattle lungsickness was a Eurasian disease that had killed roughly one hundred thousand Xhosa cattle around the Cape Colony of southern Africa after European boats brought it there in the mid-1850s.<sup>257</sup> It ravaged the herds of *jiëëŋ* and *nei ti naath* alike when it reached the Sudd in the 1860s.

Distraught communities there turned to their men of cattle, masters of the fishing-spear (*bany bith*), and other leaders but had little success against the airborne pathogen. Beleaguered herders who petitioned divinity by spearing sacrificial steers discovered that the vital organs of their cattle were thicker and stronger than usual, but the seemingly powerful beasts had slowly drowned in their own fluids as their bodies lost control of their own internal immune responses. There is no reason to believe that *nei ti naath* selected this name with any sense of the symbolic irony that strikes the modern researcher, since this cattle plague was disastrous enough to define a *ric* in its own right. But the disease’s symptoms of fatal swelling of internal organs did parallel the collapse of *nei ti naath* communities bloated by foreign sons-in-law by the close of this era of their costly successes.

## **Conclusion: Gender and the Reinvention of Ethnic and Political Identity**

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<sup>257</sup> J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*. (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1989).

*Nei ti naath* migrants who brought new notions of masculinity centered on *gaar* to the eastern Sudd after the initiation of the “Pulling Out” marriageability-set in the late 1820s lured their hosts to adopt their political and ethnic identities. However, in the process, they transformed the meaning of these categories. The *jiëñ* living in various Padañ confederations, whose agro-pastoralists’ lifestyle closely mirrored that of the *nei ti naath* newcomers, discovered that the marriages with outsiders on which they depended to build broad networks of support made them vulnerable to *gaar*. Some Padañ from the Aḡol-Donjöl tried to preserve their political and ethnic identities by forsaking this exogamy. Others like the Eastern Dɔɔk finally stemmed the rebranding of their own sons by adopting *gaar* for themselves before its appeal convinced their sons to become *nei ti naath*. The *anywaa* living along the Sobat, Pibor, and Baro Rivers also faced a choice between yielding their younger generations to the *nei ti naath* or forsaking highly mobile forms of wealth like cattle and retreating toward the thicker forests to the southeast, where their descendants became faded, poorer versions of their ancestors.

The *nei ti naath* newcomers also reinvented their core identities as the youths that they assimilated en masse undermined the authority of the original landowning *diel* lineages over grazing rights and the spiritual authority of the “earth masters” (*guan muɔn*) who had formerly settled interpersonal disputes. *Nei ti naath* in the eastern Sudd became far more invested in *gaar* and their marriageability-sets as they lost consensus about allocating grazing lands, and much else, and found they could no longer maintain order in contexts where people did not feel bound by patrilineal descent. This failure of lineage politics in 1860s inspired *nei ti naath* to turn toward the Padañ shrines like the mound of KERJIOK in Yom and the mound Aweil Lonar that had survived the assimilationist process. The unintended consequences of redefining *nei ti naath* gender through *gaar* led directly to the rise of the next generation’s syncretistic prophets, who

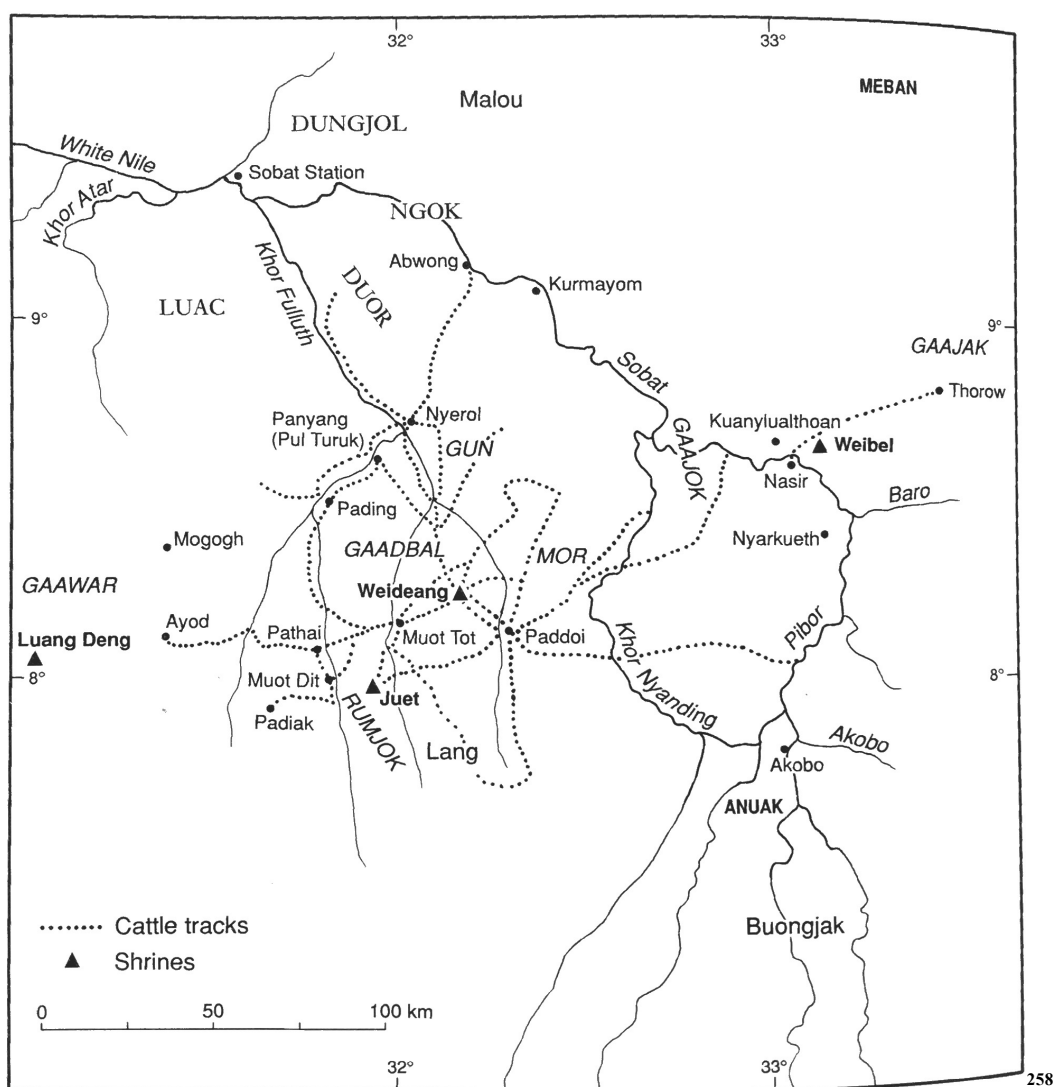
would shape *nei ti naath* politics in the final quarter of the nineteenth century and become paradigms of the twentieth-century model of ethnicity that dominates most scholarship on the Nilotes of the Upper Nile.

# Chapter 4

## Marking the “Prophet’s Rod”:

### From Chaos to Syncretistic Community (1870-1896)

**Map 4.0**  
**Eastern *Nei Ti Naath* and their Neighbors**

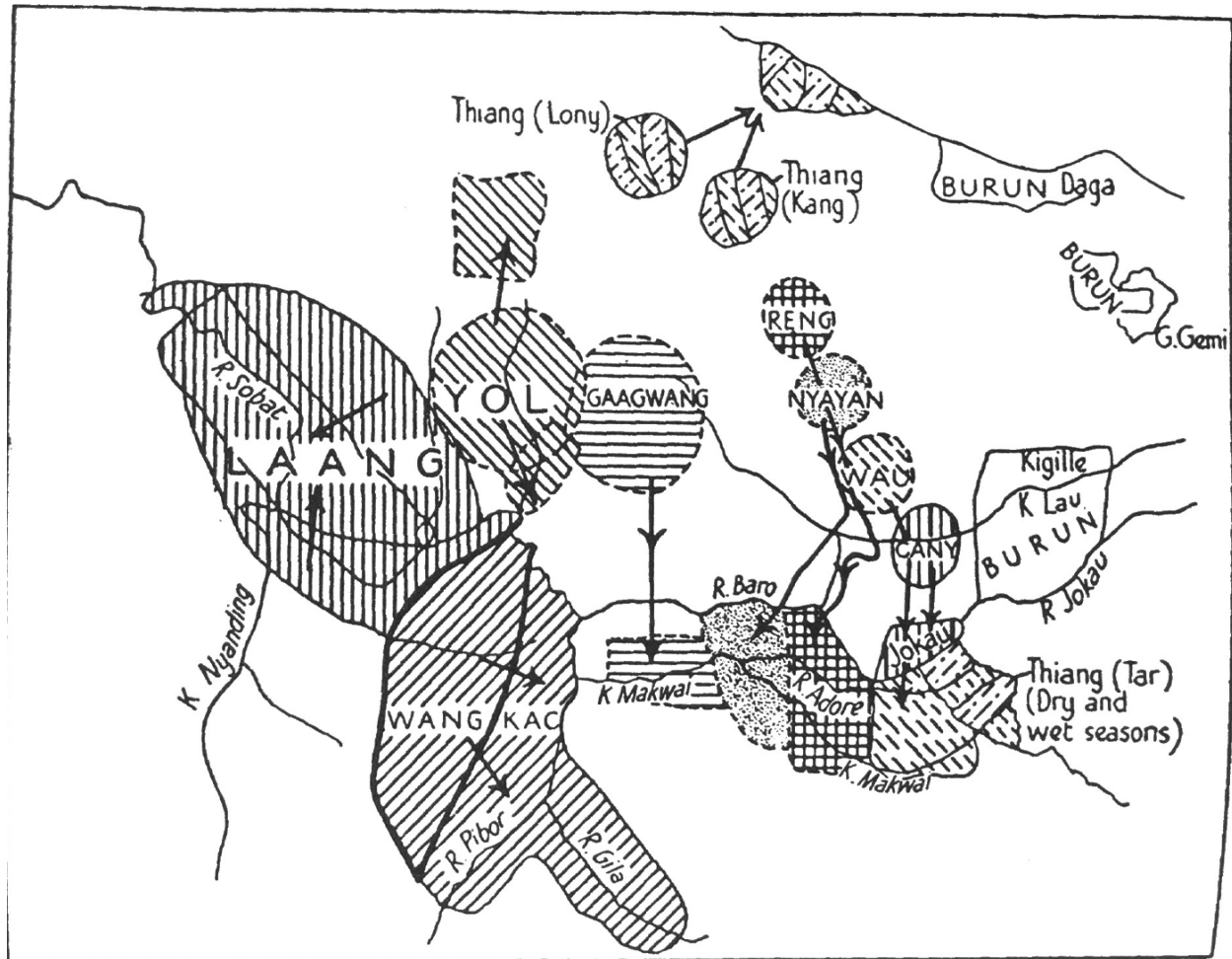


<sup>258</sup> Reproduced from Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 80.

## Map 4.1

### Divisions of the Eastern Jikäny in 1930

(Arrows Indicate Movements From Wet-Season to Dry-Season Camps)



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(Note Evans-Pritchard's map misnamed the Cienj Nyijaanji as the "Nyayan")

<sup>259</sup> Reproduced from Edward Evans-Pritchard. *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 80.

The only meaningful difference between this map from 1930 and the positions held by Eastern Jikäny by 1896 is the presence of the Cienj Wanjek on the Gilo River and the large number of Gaa-jak who crossed the Baro each year, since the Jikäny adopted these practices in 1920s as a way of escaping British rule.



## Chapter Overview

By the 1870s, exhausted *nei ti naath* living east of the Bahr el-Jebel were yearning to recreate the sense of unity that many of these communities had lost in between the initiations of “Eagel’s-Carrion-Cry” (circa 1840) and “White-Hearts” (the 1860s). Aging veterans of *nei ti naath* movements east of the Nile could make no sense of casualties they suffered in various battles, and the devastation wrought by small pox and cattle lung sickness. However, the civil wars of the 1860s, and the predations of merchant-slavers, had left them with a deeper sense of moral crisis. The blood feuds that the Jikāny fomented by slaying kinsmen like Gaac Gurial and Yuol Maar rent the very ties that had once bound *nei ti naath* together as a “people of the people”.

Both the Gaawäär and Lōu confederations suffered similar crises of disunity. Earlier generations of *nei ti naath* had relied on an official they called the “owner/father of the soil” (*guan muon*) to solve their feuds, but the autochthons assimilated by *nei ti naath* immigrants had a hard time taking the powers of these foreign “owners of their soil” very seriously. The Jikāny east of the Nile might have hoped that the priests of Kīir’s sacred spear (*mut WIU*) could mediate their disputes, but the priest of WIU hailed from the very same community that had killed Yuol Maar. Clearly, a priest who could not even keep his own Cieṅ Thiaṅ section from dividing into civil conflict had little chance of uniting all the Eastern Jikāny, let alone *nei ti naath* from other confederations.

One reason these conventional peacemakers began to fail in the 1860s was that *nei ti naath* newcomers had assimilated too many Padaṅ, who were oblivious or indifferent to the customs of their new hosts. Consequently, communities of eastern *nei ti naath* who found ways to accommodate, or exploit, “foreign” beliefs before they could reconstitute a sense of moral

community in a profoundly mixed population succeeded, and became the ancestors of modern *nei ti naath* communities. Eastern *nei ti naath* seem to have understood this challenge intuitively, and numerous innovators experimented with differing syncretistic visions of leadership throughout the 1860s and early 1870s before yielding around 1878 to a new class of prophets, or “sack of divinity” (*gök kuoth*), independent of inherited loyalties and therefore of unprecedentedly wide appeal. These new prophets found creative ways of combining the two styles of public healing in the new, compound *nei ti naath* communities that resonated with both immigrant *nei ti naath* and assimilated Padaṅ.

Prior to the prophetic innovations of the 1870s, *nei ti naath* had grasped one of two different objects that expressed their seriousness when making solemn pledges, either a spear (*mut*) or a kind of rod or baton called a *daṅ*. Oath-takers generally held a spear to signify the power of death, especially when making peace treaties and declaring that whoever broke their own word would follow the sacrificial steer they were about to spear to death to seal the deal. Oath-makers on pacific occasions held a *daṅ* to symbolize the power to give life, most commonly at marriage ceremonies, where two families celebrated the children their union would create.<sup>260</sup> In the 1870s, the man who seems to have been the first of the new *nei ti naath* prophets transformed this kind of calming rod into the primary emblem of a syncretistic ministry by carving his *daṅ* from the watery wood of a *Cordia* tree, a plant that *jiěěṅ* associated with

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<sup>260</sup> Douglas Johnson. “The Prophet Ngundeng & the Battle of Pading” in Douglas Johnson & David Anderson (ed.s) *Reveal Prophets* (James Currey, Ohio University Press, Fountain Publishers, East African Educational Publishers: Londo, Athen, Nairobi, & Kampala, 1995) p. 205.

rainmaking and the power to give life.<sup>261</sup> By the end of the decade, *nei ti naath* from the Machar Marshes in the east to the west bank of the Bahr el-Jebel had rallied around leaders who wielded these rods of composite authority, and the *day* had become the most widely recognized marker of a new age of community integration.

One clear sign of disunity was that the networks of marriageability-sets that had underwritten their earlier expansions had begun to disintegrate under the weight of their own demographic success. In the 1840s and 1850s, sets like *Lajak* and *Thut* had included everyone receiving *gaar*, from the old *nei ti naath* homeland beyond the Nile to the foothills of the Ethiopian escarpment, but this unity (or at least coordination) collapsed during the 1860s around the initiation of “White Hearts”. In the east, recognized men of cattle like Jaan Win and Bēc Coliëth (who respectively served the Eastern Jikāny and Lou) still coordinated with one another. Consequently, eastern sets like *Maker* (circa 1876) and *Day-Gonja* (literally “Prophet’s rod – Hedgehog colored steer” circa 1896) still spanned both confederations.<sup>262</sup> However, these eastern sets no longer had any affiliation with sets of the western homeland like *Day* (“Prophet’s rod” circa 1880).<sup>263</sup> Some *nei ti naath* also developed divergent traditions about who could control the marriageability-set system. Beginning in 1879, the Gaawäär who settled in the Zeraf Island began allowing prophets to supplant the traditional powers of the men of cattle to open, close, and name their cohorts of younger men.

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<sup>261</sup> One reason the significance of Nunderj using this particular wood may have eluded earlier scholars is that this same species of tree does not have the same name in the two Nilotic languages in question, being call *kot* in *thok naath* and *akoc* in *thuɲjäŋ*.

Godfrey Lienhardt. *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 52, 194, 302-317.

<sup>262</sup> Both of these famous men of cattle died before the initiation of Day-Gonja, but their sons continued coordinating set names throughout their lifetimes as well.

<sup>263</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 326.

This process of regional fragmentation did not erase communities' knowledge of their shared histories, but it did facilitate a process of recreating the kinds of lineage ties that had collapsed in the wars of the 1860s and linking them with new territorial contexts. For example, the Lɔu who had come from the west continued to call themselves children of Gëë (*Lɔu Gëëka*) but began emphasizing divisions between the two halves (the Gun-Lɔu and the Mor-Lɔu) of the unmanageably massive confederation they had grown to be. This realignment also reflected how the Lɔu had gradually lost contact with even their closest kindred in the west, the Renyan. All descendants of Kiir still thought of themselves as Jikäny, but they too began distinguishing between the "Homeland Jikäny" (*Jikäny Cier*) of the Bahr el-Jebel and "Wilderness Jikäny" (*Jikäny Doar*) in the Sobat Valley.<sup>264</sup>

One experience that continued to unite all *nei ti naath*, even as localism pulled them apart, were their similar experiences with prophets, which motivated confederations in both the west and the east to name their male marriageability-sets like *Daŋ* and *Daŋ-Goŋa* after the same sacred symbol. The prophets who wielded the new rods eventually began claiming to speak for a number of different divinities (or DIVINITY under different names), but this movement clearly began with persons seized by a spirit of the heavens named Dɛɪ.<sup>265</sup> Dɛɪ was originally a *jiëëŋ* divinity (*dɛŋ* means "rain" in *thuɔŋjäŋ*) venerated at several *jiëëŋ* shrines across the Sudd and especially at "the byre of Dɛɪ" (*Luaŋ Dɛŋ*) in northern Zeraf Island that had figured prominently in the events of the 1820s. Before the eastward exodus of the Turning Hearts era, some *nei ti*

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<sup>264</sup> Chauncy Hugh Stigand. "The Story of Kir and the White Spear" *Sudan Notes and Records* (1919) p. 226.

Edward Evans-Pritchard. *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 6.

Gabriel Giet Jal. "The History of Jikany Nuer before 1920" PhD. diss. (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 69.

<sup>265</sup> I have followed earlier scholars' habit of representing the name of divinity in capital letters because a divinity and a person can, and often do, share the same names making it difficult to distinguish between the two by designations alone.

*naath* had also begun venerating DẸḶ as a fertility god who brought coolness or softness (*kɔac*) to heated moments or hardened hearts. The “first” prophet of DẸḶ among the *nei ti naath* was a frustrated “earth-master” (*guan muɔn*), who developed a multi-cultural discourse about DẸḶ’s powers to cool hot-tempered and hard-headed antagonists as a supplement to his powers as a traditional earth-master to make peace.

The new prophets of DẸḶ benefited from the fact that *jiëḅḅ* had extremely amorphous and flexible definitions of this particular divinity, which easily accommodated local additions and modifications. The Padaṅ communities generally centered their acts of collective worship around large earthen mounds, while western *jiëḅḅ* and *nei ti naath* generally venerated the sacred spear and the clan ancestors of their particular confederations. Prophets of DẸḶ managed to encompass both these practices by creating relics that combined localized spiritual expectations with the general appeal of building mounds. An effective prophet was a spiritual decathlete who wielded a synthetic power that was greater than the sum of its many and diverse parts.

Most scholars have described the entire nineteenth century along the Upper Nile, not just the epochs that *nei ti naath* described as “Turning Hearts” and “Vulture’s Cry”, as a uniform period of ongoing “Nuer Conquests”. However, for the *nei ti naath* this Era of the Prophet’s Rod actually reversed several earlier historical trends. The most obvious differences were that this prophetic movement traversed the Sudd from east to west, the direction opposite to the earlier innovation of *gaar*, and prophets used no gendered rites of passage to encourage communities to change their ethnic identity. In the early nineteenth century, communities from the Central Sudd had exported *gaar* from the west to the east. The first known prophet, Dundeṅ Bḅṅ, was seized by DẸḶ in Gaa-jak territory at the very eastern limit of the entire *nei ti naath* universe, and his reputation and imitators then moved west, first to the border of the Gaa-jiok and then Lḅu

territory. DËŊ (or at least his prophets) continued moving west even after Ɗundɛŋ settled down. In 1879, the prophet Dɛŋ Laka launched his career among the Gaawäär of the Zeraf Island by vanquishing a notorious slave-raider.<sup>266</sup> The divinity DËŊ then crossed the Bahr el-Jebel and seized a prophetess named Nyapuka Dan, who marshalled enough followers among the Jagɛi and Dɔk confederations to help an Agaar leader named Wol Athian destroy the Egyptian garrison at Rumbek in 1883.<sup>267</sup> Finally, DËŊ began seizing persons among the western *jiëëŋ*, such the Aliab prophet named Wal, whose prophetic career began only in 1907.<sup>268</sup>

All these prophets participated in at least one major battle against the Arab slavers, who became a ubiquitous presence in this era, or their local collaborators, but they generally limited their military ambitions to ambushing invaders armed with modern rifles. Even the more aggressive prophets in the west focused on retaliatory raids that captured livestock and people and rarely aimed at acquisitions of territory. Prophets also reversed earlier leveling trends among *nei ti naath*, which had become increasingly disruptive and had contributed to the wars of the 1860s. Previous generations of *nei ti naath* had prospered by offering egalitarian alternatives to Padaŋ patriarchs' authority in the eras of Turning-Hearts, and of Eagle's-Carrion-Cry. Conceding authority to prophets was, at least in part, a communal correction for an excessive egalitarianism that had degraded communities' abilities to govern themselves. Ɗundɛŋ Bɔŋ and other prophets condemned blood feuds intensified by families' inflated personnel and strove to resolve these conflicts, while also boosting his own power. Ɗundɛŋ pursued all these goals simultaneously by suppressing all other magicians, fetishes, charms, and shrines to which

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<sup>266</sup> Dɛŋ Laka was a prophet of DIU rather than DËŋ, a deviation he was apparently forced to make because he lived directly next to the old byre of DËŋ and had to differentiate himself in order to operate independently.

Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 249.

<sup>268</sup> Charles Seligman & Brenda Seligman. *The Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1932) p. 188-189.

belligerents resorted, so that no faction could curse their neighbors or hope to shield themselves from a prophet's righteous judgements. Every man could receive *gaar* on his forehead, but only a single hand could hold the *day*.

Douglas Johnson's *Nuer Prophets* has been rightly recognized ever since its publication in 1994 as the unrivaled authority on this period, largely because of the rich quality of the interviews that undergird it. This chapter's tale of the Nuer era of the Prophet's Rod supplements Johnson's findings with data drawn from birth names among the Eastern Jikāny, whom Johnson did not consult, to describe why particular communities chose to accept or reject particular leaders. Johnson's interviews with the descendants of this generation of prophets encouraged him to stress their individual creative genius and the subsequent evolution of the oral traditions about them over time. This chapter draws on broader and less malleable birth names, and sketches the careers of several prophets whom Johnson did not mention, to explain the rise of the *day* or "rod" as a communal process.

### **The Familiarity of DED, Mound Building, and Spirituality before the late 1870s**

Dunden Bōṅ is generally celebrated and remembered among the *nei ti naath* as their first prophet, but it is more accurate to describe him as the figure who embodied most successfully the integrationist zeitgeist of the Prophet's Rod era. The *day* he fashioned from a Corita tree was only one of several innovations that Dunden eventually used to become more prominent than his numerous contemporaries, who also blended previously distinct traditions to contain the violence of the 1860s and 1870s and restore a sense of order and morality. The reasons Dunden successfully laid exclusive claim to DED, and the reasons why people responded to the towering

earthen mounds he erected, all flowed from much older metaphysical concepts on both sides of the Bahr el-Jebel.

Dunden Bɔŋ was not the first person among the *nei ti naath* to feel a spiritual connection with DED, and his birth name provides a useful glimpse into the deep historical roots that followers would have recognized and responded to. Dunden in *thok naath* literally means “gift of DED”. In the western homeland, *nei ti naath* still give this name to children whose parents made a sacrifice to DED before a barren or post-menopausal woman achieved a seemingly miraculous pregnancy.<sup>269</sup> One of Dunden Bɔŋ’s peers was a certain Riem Dunden, whose father’s name, given at his birth around the year 1800, testifies that decades before the mass assimilations of the Turning Hearts era at least some *nei ti naath* believed in DED’s ability to cure infertility and named their children as his “gifts”.<sup>270</sup> DED was not the only divinity *nei ti naath* then credited with this power. Less than five percent of men known to have joined the same *ric* as Dunden Bɔŋ were considered “gifts of DED”, and the relative novelty of the name helps in earlier times explain why *nei ti naath* were predisposed to believe in the uniqueness of Dunden’s connection with this *jiëëŋ* divinity.

The name Dunden told a story to which *jiëëŋ* who venerated DED could relate, but it was also a name that even the most conservative *nei ti naath* could recognize as sufficiently ancient to transcend its currency among-*jiëëŋ*. Only *nei ti naath* had used the word *ŋun* (“gift”) as prefix for compound names like Dunaar (that is *ŋun-naar* “gift of the maternal uncle”).<sup>271</sup> This prefix

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<sup>269</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 70.

<sup>270</sup> Nunden was a *Thut* (marked in the 1850s) and thus must have been born in the late 1830s. Any man who fathered a member of *Thut* could not have been born after 1820 and, based on the average generation gap of later years, probably would have been born in the late 1790s.

<sup>271</sup> Nunaar is a name often given today in so-called “ghost marriages” where a maternal uncle serves as the genitor for his deceased sister’s son.



was not used in *jiëëŋ* names, because *ŋun* in *thuɔŋjäŋ* means “to threaten”, and *jiëëŋ* parents have simply used the name Deŋ or Deŋdiit (big DED) for boys born after a visit to the shrine at Luan Deŋ.<sup>272</sup> Even after Dundëŋ Bəŋ became the most famous person in the entire eastern Sudd, Padan continued to avoid the menacing implications that the word *ŋun* held for them by insisting on calling him Wundëŋ (“father” or “owner” of DED) instead. Among the miraculous stories about Dundëŋ Bəŋ’s birth that contemporary *nei ti naath* tell, one popular view is that DED was within Dundëŋ from the very beginning, “hiding in his body” and waiting for people to recognize it in him.<sup>273</sup> In other words, Dundëŋ’s birth narrative gave him a syncretistic potential that had lain dormant among *nei ti naath* for generations until the 1870s, when communities discovered a need to meld the metaphysical beliefs of *nei ti naath* newcomers and autochthonous *jiëëŋ*.

One reason the Jikāny and other *nei ti naath* had left DED on the periphery of their spiritual world before they moved east seems to have been that they simply had little interest in the rainmaking that *jiëëŋ* associated with it. Agro-pastoralists living in the old *nei ti naath* homeland along the west banks of the Bahr el-Jebel worry continually about flooding but rarely fret over droughts, since in dry years the edges of marshy Sudd retreat toward the river but do not disappear. Consequently, *nei ti naath* seem to have valued DED originally for metaphorical extensions of rain’s assumed powers of life, not the risk of its scarcity, and particularly their association of it with fertility. Various *nei ti naath* ancestors and divinities like WIU could also “give” children, but *nei ti naath* did not believe that all of these invisible actors operated in the same way. DED’s particular power to bequeath fertility came from his power to bring *kɔac* (“coolness” or “softness”) to dry or hardened wombs, in much the same way that rain (*deŋ*)

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<sup>272</sup> Roger Blench & John Duerksen, *Dinka-English Dictionary* (Washington D.C.: SIL International, 2005).

<sup>273</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 7.

transformed impenetrable sun-cracked clay into moist and pliable, cultivatable soil and nutritious pasture. Coincidentally this idiom of coolness/softness was extremely similar to the discourse that *nei ti naath* used about a certain, relatively marginal medicine called *niany*, which restored social relations disrupted by quarrels. Persons who possessed this magical substance mixed it with water and sprinkled it on the ground (rather like rain) to “cool the heart of a man with whom you have quarreled ... [and as] an antidote to any magic he may make against you”.<sup>274</sup> This magic had no traditional affiliation with DED, but these connotations of coolness and peacemaking helped cast DED as one to whom *nei ti naath* might turn if old peacemakers began to fail in new lands.

DED seems to have become an important divinity for many *nei ti naath* shortly after they crossed into the drier plains to the east of the Bahr el-Jebel, where praying for rain made more sense, and began assimilating *jiëëŋ*, who revered this divinity. This newfound faith in DED was so intense among the Gaawäär by the late 1850s that foreign travelers like the Poncet brothers, apparently believed that the byre of DED, or some imitation of it, was a “Nuer shrine”.<sup>275</sup>

Les Nouair ... assusi ont des kodjours  
ou kurjurs (devins ou sorciers) ...  
qui leur annoncent la pluie et le disgrace,  
et qui rendent la santé à leurs bestiaux ....  
Un bon kodjour n'est pas même oublié  
après sa mort; on l'enterre dans hutte enorme  
qui devient un lieu sacré et d'invocation,  
et où l'on place très-souvent  
des defenses d'éléphants pour honorer le saint.

The Nuer ... also have kurjours  
or kujurs (diviners or sorcerers) ...  
who pronounce rain and curses for them,  
and who make their cattle healthy ...  
A good kujour is not forgotten even  
after death; he is interred in a large hut  
which becomes a sacred place of invocation,  
and where one very often places  
elephants' tusks to honor the saint.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, “The Nuer, Tribe and Clan Sections VII-IX” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1935) p. 72.

<sup>275</sup> These Poncet brothers ought not to be confused with C. J. Poncet who traveled through the Kingdom on Sennar in northern Sudan from 1698 until 1700.

<sup>276</sup> Jules Poncet, Adolphe Male-Brun, and Ambroise Poncet, *Le fleuve Blanc: notes géographiques et ethnologiques et les chasses à l'éléphant dans le pays des Dinka et des Djour* (Paris: Librairie de la Societe de Geographie, 1864) p. 40)

On its own, this account does not appear to reveal dual antecedents of the multi-vocal spirituality during the Prophet's Rod era. However, the details the Poncet brothers provided are consistent with what we know about Luan̄ Deṅ and do not match up with shrines built at that time by *nei ti naath*. The Poncets gathered virtually all their knowledge of "Les Nouair" while hunting elephants in the northern Zeraf Island, where the byre of DED was, and still is, the preeminent site associated with rainmaking and collections of elephant tusks.

The Gaawäär, Thian̄, and Lak confederations of *nei ti naath* had only just begun to trickle into the Zeraf Island thirty years before the Poncets made these observations in the late 1850s. Consequently the shrine of any "dead kujur" in the Zeraf Island would not have "belonged" to the *nei ti naath* newcomers, in the sense of having created it or being responsible for its maintenance and articulating its power. Eventually *nei ti naath* migrants did build shrines at the graves of leaders like Latjoor Duoc, but he was still alive in the 1850s, as were Bec Colieth and other migration leaders, and none of these later memorials to founders of new communities of the 1850s were initially connected with rainmaking. Luan̄ Deṅ not only existed already at this time, but its custodian was *the* pre-eminent priest of rain for the entire region, the keeper of the only "Stone of Rain" (*Pām Deṅ* in *thok naath*), and the one who "pronounces rains" in an annual ceremony for all who assemble at the byre to propitiate DED.<sup>277</sup> Evans-Pritchard later, and rightly, described the Gaawäär who settled around Luan̄ Deṅ as the only *nei ti naath* who had any reputation for rainmaking.<sup>278</sup> However, this observation suggests that the Gaawäär of the 1930s acquired this reputation by the time Evans-Pritchard visited them precisely because they had spent a hundred years associating themselves with this shrine of the Padaṅ.

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<sup>277</sup> Paul Howell, "Appendix to Chapter II" in Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 101.

<sup>278</sup> See (Seligman & Seligman, 1932, p. 233)

Padaŋ and *nei ti naath* elders maintain that the Rut and other Padaŋ temporarily abandoned Luan̄ Dɛŋ to the Gaawäär as they fled the flooding and fighting that began in the 1820s, so it seems that most worshipers at this shrine in the 1850s were *nei ti naath*, which may explain the Poncet brothers' apparent mistake of labeling Luan̄ Dɛŋ as a "Nuer shrine". The brothers' description of multiple shrines is also consistent with Luan̄ Dɛŋ, since this site was (and still is) a complex with numerous massive huts. These various structures venerate divinities whom *jiěěŋ* describe as the very first people (including Dɛŋ's parents, GARAN and ABUK) and who seem to fit with the Poncets' rather imprecise concept of "good kujurs". In 1907, British officers visited this powerful site and confirmed the Poncets' observations about elephant tusks, but these officers also better captured the cultural amalgamations that the shrine inspired by reporting that, at least by 1907, "Luang Deng is the Mecca of the Dinkas and the Nuers".<sup>279</sup>

The shrine at Luan̄ Dɛŋ remained extremely important throughout the upheavals of the nineteenth century because Dɛŋ was not simply another parochial deity. All *jiěěŋ* from the lower reaches of the White Nile in the far northeast to the edges of the Ironstone Plateau in the extreme southwest have venerated Dɛŋ in some fashion. Consequently Dɛŋ was not a potentially polarizing figure associated with a particular confederation, as was WIU for the Jikāny, and the fate of this divinity did not hinge on the success of any particular lineage or confederation. Local communities of *jiěěŋ* have often understood more provincial divinities as refractions of Dɛŋ, which they described as *Dɛŋ dā* ("our Dɛŋ" in an exclusionary sense) or *Dɛŋ diɛn* ("their Dɛŋ"), but this flexible discourse could also reference *Dɛŋ dān* ("the Dɛŋ of us all").<sup>280</sup> Dɛŋ could be parochial (like the scattered showers that fall randomly in April and May on particular

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<sup>279</sup> Paul Howell, "Appendix to Chapter II" in Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 100.

<sup>280</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 93-95.

patches of savanna) or universal (like the downpours that drench the entire Sudd in July) and was a perfect divinity for communities who were looking for a spirituality that could accommodate both inclusive and exclusive situations.

Prophets of DED also seem to have transformed how divine powers communicated with their familiars. Until the 1870s, DED seems to have communicated with his priests through dreams instead of speaking directly through human mouths (much less the mouths of persons who were not heirs to a particular sacerdotal line), but the idea of DED seizing a person did have some precedent.<sup>281</sup> DED had seized the mythical founders of various lineages, including the genitors of all four sections of the Ciëc confederation.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, other divinities also had a history of seizing persons, and being possessed was especially plausible in connection with the mound-building traditions of the eastern Sudd.

Residents of the eastern Sudd had been building sacred mounds for at least two hundred years by the time Dundëŋ began his prophetic ministry. The *collø* installed Tugø Dhøködh as their new *rädh*, or ruler, around 1682 and erected a mound at Fashoda which became their permanent capital and frequent abode of their deified progenitor named NYIKAD. This sacred site was the place where *collø* believed that the “spirit [of NYIKAD] may return, and entering a man, through him give warning and advice about the future”.<sup>283</sup> This belief in spiritual possession was especially pronounced within the mound’s royal enclosure of Aturwic, wherein the spirit of NYIKAD had to confront, defeat, and seize the heir-apparent of each deceased *rädh* before he could assume the office of “king”.

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<sup>281</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 47.

Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 40.

<sup>282</sup> (Seligman & Seligman, 1932, p. 182)

<sup>283</sup> D. S. Oyler, “Nikawng and the Shilluk Migration” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1918) p. 115.

The Padaŋ are the only *jiëëŋ* who border the *collø*, and also the only *jiëëŋ* who built large earthen mounds and, since the two groups constantly intermarried, all these mounds in the eastern Sudd belonged to a common tradition that transcended ethnic identity. Evans-Pritchard noted that “the small *yik* mound shrine is said to be common in Dinkaland and to be a late introduction in Nuerland”, and scholars have consistently looked on one particular mound, that of Awiel Loŋar, in southern Zeraf Island, as an inspiration for the prophet Ðundeŋ.<sup>284</sup> In fact, Loŋar’s mound was only one link in a long chain of similar sites stretching from Loŋar’s mound to the southwest to the mound of a divinity named AYON, which the Ðonjol built northeast of Fashoda.<sup>285</sup> The Machar Marshes were the physical center of this rather broad zone of mound-building, and the mound of KERJIOK was but the largest of many. In the 1930s, British officers reported the pervasiveness of this mound-building tradition by noting that “between [the Gaa-jak settlements of] Kigille and Maiwut there are some old sites that are said to be Dinka. They are recognized as slight mounds”.<sup>286</sup>

One virtue of this tradition of building mounds from the perspective of the Padaŋ who practiced it was that these eroding structures required regular maintenance that helped solidify human relationships among devotees who gathered to renew and repair the mounds. Worshipers who labored side-by-side to build, repair, or enlarge these structures also renewed bonds of moral community. These ideas of spirit possession and the community-consolidating act of mound building were not especially associated with ÐEÐ before the Prophet’s Rod era, but they were all part of the spiritual imagination of Padaŋ in general and the Ðock-Padaŋ of the Machar

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<sup>284</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, “The Nuer, Tribe and Clan Sections VII-IX” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1935) p. 63.

<sup>285</sup> Paul Howell, “Pyramids’ in the Upper Nile Region” *Man* (1948) p. 52-53.

The name AYON is especially revealing since, in *thok naath*, the word *yoŋ* means “mad” or “possessed”.

<sup>286</sup> F.D. Corfield, “The Koma.” *Sudan Notes and Records* (1938) p. 138.

Marshes in particular. Dundən's birth name, at least as subsequently attributed, laid the foundation for his link with DED, but it was the unique spiritual history and communal expectations of the mixed communities in the Gaa-jak territory in which he grew up that equipped him to begin building a mound and acting as if he were possessed by its power.

### **Earth-Masters Move and the Sky Falls: Chaos along Confederations' Expanding Frontiers**

The primary reason *nei ti naath* living east of the Bahr el-Jebel had been unable to prevent or resolve the civil wars of the 1860s was that their earth-masters had limited influence over the growing number of assimilated *jiëëŋ* within their ranks. Douglas Johnson has reported that eastern *nei ti naath* lacked credible earth-masters and suggested that was because most had remained in the old homeland. However, this rationale does not match his own excellent discussion of how the Lou and Gaawäär intentionally appointed assimilated *jiëëŋ* like Yuot Nyakōŋ and Nuäär Mər as their earth-masters, even when other men from traditional earth-master lineages were available.<sup>287</sup> More importantly, his rather structural theory distracts from the historical crux of the spiritual-political crisis. Assimilated *jiëëŋ* had not been raised to fear the curses of *nei ti naath* officials in general and, as the original inhabitants of the land, they were particularly indignant toward immigrant upstarts who presumed to claim that their leopard skins gave powers as terrifying as those of their own “father/owner of the soil”. Though earth-masters still enjoyed some prestige among traditionalist *nei ti naath*, assimilated *jiëëŋ* were

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<sup>287</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 74.

For discussion of *nei ti naath* willingness to appoint *jiëëŋ* as their earth-masters see (Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, 1940)

becoming outright majorities in many *nei ti naath* communities. It was in this tense setting that *kuoth nhial* (“divinity in the sky”) came down and seized Dundəŋ Bəŋ.

Dundəŋ Bəŋ’s biological father was a respected earth-master named Bəŋ Can Gitcuor, who had moved his family from the old Jikāny homeland to Latjɔɔr’s colony at Malou sometime before Jaan Win initiated the Lajak marriageability-set in the late 1840s.<sup>288</sup> Bəŋ Can belonged to the Gaat-Lëëk clan of the Bul confederation that had historically supplied the Jikāny with all of their earth-masters. When the Gaa-jak left Malou, Bəŋ Can moved with them and settled just a few miles from the mound of KERJIOK in a part of the Machar Marshes called Thorow. This move had fateful consequences for the young Dundəŋ, because the Cieŋ Wau section of the Gaa-jak, who were then in the process of moving from Thorow toward the banks of the Baro River, seem to have turned particularly to DEŊ as a source of fertility. Most Jikāny parents named “miraculous” boys born in the late 1850s and 1860s after divinities like ROTH and LIÉ, names that have since become obscure, but the Cieŋ Wau seem to have been among the very first to adopt Deŋ as a birth name.<sup>289</sup>

Dundəŋ was initiated in the 1850s in the set named *Thut* and inherited Bəŋ Can’s leopard skins when his father died in battle, just as the once-venerable office of earth-master was beginning to experience a crisis of legitimacy. Gaa-jak oral traditions about the war that forever split the primary Cieŋ Thiaŋ section in the 1860s consistently describe how the antagonists hired a *jǐěŋ* diviner (*tiet*) living in Thɔɔc to curse their opponents. Dundəŋ Bəŋ was living among the Gaa-jak when Yuol Määr’s death triggered the inter-Gaa-jak feud in or around 1859, but the

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<sup>288</sup> Dundəŋ was the product of what Evans-Pritchard called a “ghost marriage” and legally ought to have been known as Nundəŋ Höth in honor of his dead uncle. Nundəŋ chose to go by the name Nundəŋ Bəŋ instead to emphasize his earth-master credentials.

<sup>289</sup> Some Cieŋ Laan also named members of this set Deŋ, presumably after frequenting a Nɔɔk replica of Luən Deŋ which was close to their territory.



Gaa-jak tell no tales about approaching him or any earth-master to make peace.<sup>290</sup> If Dunden Bōŋ did try to resolve this war, or the larger Gaa-jiok conflict memorialized in the song of Gaac Gurial, he did not succeed. Soon after the Buōŋjak debacle of the 1860s, a frustrated Dunden began exhibiting manic behavior, roaming the wilderness and eating human feces as if he were possessed by a powerful spirit. He also began building a mound on the banks of the Khor Wakow at a site known today as Weibēl or Wēc-bēl (the “dry-season camp of grain”).

By the time DIVINITY began driving Dunden Bōŋ mad, the sanctity of the office of earth-master had eroded to the extent that these priestly peacemakers could no longer ensure that combatants would respect their persons, much less abide by their arbitrations. At some point prior to 1874, Dunden was crossing the Sobat when members of the Cien Laan waylaid him as if he were a partisan in their ongoing civil war between the Cien Laan and Cien Wankeac sections of the Gaa-jiok. Dunden’s descendants recall that the Cien Laan mocked him as “the fool of Wankeac”, beat him with sticks, broke his necklace, stole some of his cattle, and threw his leopard skins into the river.<sup>291</sup> Clearly this hostile reception was not the act of devout *nei ti naath* raised to believe that earth-masters were respected, even feared, officials whose curses would surely destroy anyone who offended them.

Cien Laan elders today remember the same episode somewhat differently and state that a local leader called Pinyinriin allowed Dunden to pass through their lands after Dunden mollified him with some cattle.<sup>292</sup> By 2015, Cien Laan elders were describing Pinyinriin as a “prophet”

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<sup>290</sup> Tōnyik Tēny Macar, Interview with author, Lare, Ethiopia (April 21, 2013).

<sup>291</sup> Gatkek Bol Ngundeng as quoted in

Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 79.

<sup>292</sup> Pal Juac, Tut Thoan, Gaac Cuol, Tōnyik Ruot Khor, Jok Luak Duop, & Kueth Rēeth, interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 28, 2013).

(*gök*), but the name Pinyinriiŋ (which he may have acquired as an adult) suggests that he actually practiced a different kind of syncretistic spirituality. The phrase *piny-in-riŋ* is something of a pun, since it means “earthly flesh” in *thok naath* but could also be translated “flesh descends”, as if FLESH were a power of the heavens that had come down to earth.<sup>293</sup> Like Dundəŋ, Pinyinriiŋ’s name invoked spiritual traditions among both *nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ*, because RIID (“FLESH”) is the only divinity invoked by sacerdotal lineages among *jiëëŋ*, *nei ti naath*, and *reel* (herders who speak *thok naath* but do not identify as *nei ti naath*) on both sides of the Bahr el-Jebel.

Among *nei ti naath*, hereditary associations with RIID are supposed to have enabled certain descendants of Gëë to become earth-masters and men of cattle. Moreover the *reel* of the south-central Sudd actually call their earth-masters *guan riŋ* (“father/owner of flesh”) instead of using the general *nei ti naath* term *guan muɔn*.<sup>294</sup> RIID is also the clan divinity of both the “masters of the fishing-spear” (*bəny bith*) of the western *jiëëŋ* and a similar officiant among Padaŋ known as the “master of blood” (*bəny riem*). It is RIID who pulls these *jiëëŋ* masters into a trance, causes their muscles to twitch uncontrollably, and gives them “a cool mouth and a cool heart”.<sup>295</sup> In short, Pinyinriiŋ gained the respect of the Cien Laaŋ by appropriating a discourse of power that resonated among both traditionalist *nei ti naath* and assimilated Padaŋ. This integrated posture allowed him to transcend debates about the relative merits of a *nei ti naath* earth-master or a Padaŋ master of blood by focusing on links with RIID that both could respect.

Dundəŋ’s capitulation to Pinyinriiŋ on the banks of the Sobat was hardly the only time that syncretistic innovators managed to outshine conventional *nei ti naath* earth-masters.

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<sup>293</sup> This ambiguity hinges on the word *piny* which means “soil” or “earth” when used as a noun but “downward” (as in toward the soil) when used as a verb.

<sup>294</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 58.

<sup>295</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 136-140.

Dundenj's own indignities continued even after he left Cienj Laan territory. He initially attempted to settle in a particular Gun-Lou community among some of his closest relatives, but the locals evicted him because they had already appointed an assimilated *jiëëŋ* named Ruea Kerjiok as their earth-master.<sup>296</sup> According to Douglas Johnson, the community rated Ruea Kerjiok's powers more highly than Dundenj's and feared they would "not get rain" if they harbored Dundenj.<sup>297</sup> After all, rain mattered in the drought-prone plains of Lou territory, and autochthonous *jiëëŋ* knew more of rainmaking than any *nei ti naath* newcomers.

Dundenj's various setbacks upset the well-bred earth-master enough for him to teach his children about them, but they also made perfect sense considering how the mass assimilations of the previous decades had complicated *nei ti naath* communities. The fact that assimilated *jiëëŋ* had credible claims to be the true "owners of the land" was one obvious obstacle for *nei ti naath* earth-masters, but the initiation sets that *nei ti naath* had used to entice bachelors to forsake political allegiances to their fathers' kin had created an additional problem. In a purely patrilineal world, the fact that Dundenj had a Gaa-jiok in-law (the husband of his father's sister) would not in itself have transformed him into a partisan "fool of Wankeac" to be beaten on sight. These extra-patrilineal kinship ties became a problem for earth-masters like Dundenj, because *nei ti naath* communities who built their assimilationist successes on luring sons away from their patrilineal kin had increasingly politicized acknowledged alien kinship of this sort.

Assimilationist *nei ti naath* could never have absorbed entire communities wholesale in the era of the "Eagles' Carrion-Cry" marriageability-set (1840s onward) if they had not accepted the men they assimilated, and their offspring, as relative insiders and equals. In practical terms,

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<sup>296</sup> It remains unclear if Ruea Kerjiok's family had any link with the shrine at Buoŋriak though his father's name does suggest that his grandparents might have propitiated KERJIOK before his father's birth.

<sup>297</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 79-80.

this acceptance meant that *nei ti naath* had to place greater emphasis on their matrilineal bonds with “children of [*nei ti naath*] daughters” (*gaat nyiet*) to create relationships where sons-in-law became beholden to their wives’ parents.<sup>298</sup> This kind of matrilineal discourse empowered *nei ti naath* to treat any assimilated bachelor not only as a set-mate but also as a client, and by extension a member, of the *nei ti naath* lineages with which he married.<sup>299</sup> One unintended consequence of this popular practice was that it compromised the neutrality of earth-masters like Dundəŋ Bəŋ by making eastern *nei ti naath* increasingly sensitive to possible affinal biases that no legend of immaculate conception could dispel. Earth-masters who inherited a patrilineal neutrality, but who could not avoid having a mother from a local lineage (or sisters who married), became less credible arbiters than a true outsider who had no such ties.

Speaking with the voice of a kinless divinity was one way that an earth-master could regain some of his neutrality among contending lineages, thus transcending politics. Dundəŋ’s experiences with Pinyinriiŋ and Ruea Kerjiok had shown him the utter necessity of incorporating beliefs acceptable to *jiëëŋ*. After spending two years in a different Gun-Lou community, Dundəŋ was seized by another spirit, which again compelled him to roam the wilderness and eat human feces until some of his kinsmen sacrificed a cow to appease the possessing power. The divinity then announced, through the mouth of Dundəŋ, that its name was DƏD. *Nei ti naath* who accepted this breed of prophetic leaders created a class of leaders that was both timely and new, but, at the same time, Dundəŋ’s ministry was also an obvious and acceptable extension of the familiar syncretistic experiments of other, earlier innovators.

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<sup>298</sup> Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) p. 246-256.

<sup>299</sup> This is a radical simplification of the myriad of relationships within Sudanese kinship systems, which early anthropologists like Henry Lewis Morgan considered to be the most complex on the planet. For example, every assimilated bachelor who became a “father of the children of daughters” (*guan gaat nyiet*) was expected to have a different kind of relationship with his wife’s brother than with the husband of his wife’s sister.

## The *Daŋ* Rises: Prophetic Consolidation and the Crucible of Combat

When the Lɔu began to recognize Dundɛŋ Bɔŋ as a prophet of Dɛɪ, they already had a number of earth-masters, many of whom were assimilated Padaŋ. Consequently, they initially placed greater value on his powers to bless barren women than on his abilities to resolve homicides and other inter-lineage offenses peacefully. Grateful parents gradually spread Dundɛŋ's fame by repeating (and embellishing) tales of his miraculous birth and efficacious prayers and, at his direction, erected a modest mound for him at the Gun-Lɔu settlement of Juet. Particularly desperate couples from the Lɔu, Eastern Jikāny, and Gaawäär confederations, as well as afflicted members of other communities began sojourning at this mound, but business remained slow enough to compel Dundɛŋ to travel to the homes of barren women in sympathetic Gaa-jioŋ and far-flung Gaa-jak communities.

It was during this initial phase of his ministry that Dundɛŋ fashioned his *daŋ* and made it an emblem of his prophetic authority that added to the leopard skins signaling his earth-mastery. This symbol of matrimonial oath-taking was an obvious choice for a fertility expert like Dundɛŋ because *nei ti naath* communities treated childbirth as the ultimate validation of any marriage, even more than the payment of bride-wealth, and regularly compelled childless couples to divorce. Consequently, fertility was important both in its own right and because infertile couples could not maintain the alliances their marriages had created. Dundɛŋ's reasons for using cortia wood also make sense within the context of promoting fertility, since this usually wet, soft, and cool material was both a solid metaphorical fit for Dɛɪ and because it was the same type of wood that *jiěŋ* used when burying a "master of the fishing-spear" (*beny bith*).

This matching of complementing qualities in two formerly distinct traditions suggests that Dunden had a plan for his *dan*, but the prophetic emblem soon acquired military significance that he probably did not envision when he crafted it. Dunden already owed much of his early prominence to circumstances he had not created, including his descent from an earth-master lineage and his birth narrative, and it was a war he did not initiate that ultimately helped him become the most famous personage in the eastern Sudd. Dunden might have initially believed that his benign activities would make it easy for him to avoid his father's bloody end in battle. However, his claim as DED's primary prophet became more politically charged, and thus contested, when another prophet of DED named Den Cier arose in the Zeraf Island in 1874. This Den Cier seems to have been an ex-soldier affiliated with Arab slavers who had severely disrupted the region between 1865 and 1874, and professional raiders generally had a much more militaristic vision of the potential powers of divinity than childless couples. The majority of this prophet's followers were Paden, and it is possible that they harbored some resentment over losing their ancestral lands to the *nei ti naath*, but umbrage does not seem to have been their primary inspiration. Den Cier had numerous Gaawäär supporters and never won the approval of the shrine master at Luan Den or traditionalist Paden in general.

Den Cier's professional background as a military man, his subsequent career as a prophet, and the political context of his ascendance all flowed from the collapse of the slaving economy along the Bahr el-Zeraf in the mid-1870s. The two competing prophets of DED both strove to consolidate communities that were admixtures of *nei ti naath* and Paden and, even though Dunden initially tried to avoid conflict, the eastern Sudd was not large enough for both ambitious visions of DED.

This partial militarization of both D&D and the *day* began in the 1860s within the context of significant merchant-slaver activity among *nei ti naath*. Up until that time, *nei ti naath* had occasionally encountered Turco-Egyptian merchants, but neither party had shown much interest in the other. Most merchants who entered the Sudd, beginning in 1839, viewed the White Nile and its principal channel (the Bahr el-Jebel) primarily as pathways to more profitable markets beyond the Sudd, like Gondokoro (in the south, near what is now Juba) where they could easily secure ivory, slaves, and other materials valued in Mediterranean markets from the sedentary Bari living in the region, or from the overland routes running north out of East Africa's Great Lakes region. Small-time merchants did some business in the Sudd itself, but they worked almost exclusively with people along the banks of the White Nile. Consequently, they had contacts with certain *collo* and Padaŋ from the Abialaŋ, Donjol, Dɔɔk, Ruweŋ, Luac, Rut and Thoi confederations but not with the *nei ti naath*, who lived farther from the riverbanks. This limited presence grew dramatically (but temporarily) between 1865 and 1874 when vegetation completely blocked the Bahr el-Jebel to riverine traffic heading south. This blockage came at the same time that an Egyptian cotton industry was expanding. The price of cotton had skyrocketed on account of the U.S. Civil War and Egyptian growers' appetite for slaves made captives more valuable than established exports from the region like ivory.<sup>300</sup> Merchants responded by building new posts along the Bahr el-Zeraf to supply boats sailing to and from Gondokoro and by moving east up the Sobat and various inland khors (seasonal streams) that became navigable during the rains. There they began dealing with some confederations of *nei ti naath*.

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<sup>300</sup> Ernst Marno, *Reisen im Gebiete des Blauen und Weissen Nil, im Egyptischen Sudan und den angrenzender Negerlandern, in den Jahren 1869 bis 1873* (Wien: Gerold, 1874) p. 364.

A number of scholars have argued that Egyptians sought slaves primarily for domestic, rather than agricultural, labor. In either case, the booming cotton industry increased Egyptians' purchasing power and thus slavers' profit margins.

These expanding merchant-slavers built extremely close ties with communities in some confederations of *nei ti naath* while virtually ignoring others, especially the Eastern Jikāny. A few Eastern Jikāny from one section of the Cieṅ Laaṅ can remember an earlier encounter with an unnamed *Turuk* (who may or may not have been Andrea De Bono) around 1850.<sup>301</sup> However most merchant-slavers of the 1860s and early 1870s operated only along the lower reaches of the Sobat in Eastern Ḍoḅk territory, and these outsiders did not even manage to capitalize on the Gaa-jiok civil war of the 1860s by taking sides and acquiring captives. Some merchant-slavers were active in what is now Ulang County and the territory of the Cieṅ Duḅṅ section of the Cieṅ Laaṅ, but elders of this section claim that they arrived in this region, led by a certain Lokgaṅ Cuḷ, only later, sometime after the initiation of *Thut* (1870s). Their earlier absence explains how these *nei ti naath* avoided significant predations in the 1860s.<sup>302</sup>

The Mor-Lou frequented the west bank of the Sobat in some of the areas where merchant-slavers began operating during the 1860s and early 1870s, and the competing Gun-Lou also encountered these foreigners along seasonably navigable khors between the Bahr el-Zeraf and the Sobat. By 1871, some Lou captives from these more accessible areas had found their way into the permanent *zariba* camps of the slavers visited by an Austrian traveler, Ernst Marno, but Lou leaders seem to have limited slaver activities in their territory during this brief era of intense slaving.<sup>303</sup> The primary earth-master among the Lou at that time was an assimilated Padaṅ named Yuot Nyakḱ. Yuot had been born east of the Sobat, where many Padaṅ had several decades of

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<sup>301</sup> A certain Turuk Gal Kuoth from the Gaat Duḅṅ section of the Cieṅ Laaṅ was named after this encounter. Turuk Gal was a *Boi-loc* and thus must have been born around 1850.

<sup>302</sup> Lokgaṅ Cuḷ was a Thut, a member of the same set as Ṇundeṅ.

Pal Juac, Tut Thoan, Gaac Cuol, Tḱṅyik Ruot Khor, Jok Luak Duop, & Kueth Reeth, interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 28, 2013).

<sup>303</sup> Ernst Marno, “Der Bahr Seraf”, *Petermann's Mittheilungen* vol. 25 (1873) p. 10-34.



experience with merchant-slavers on the rivers. Yuot may or may not have possessed any personal knowledge of the *Turuk* before they entered Lɔu territory, but he seems to have known enough about them to have tried to prevent slavers from instigating any fratricidal conflicts among the Lɔu, and hence captives and slaves.<sup>304</sup>

Yuot Nyakɔŋ met with the merchant-slavers who steamed up the Khor Fullth and established a zariba camp at Panyaŋ and agreed to help them traffic captives through Lɔu territory so long as the slavers confined their raids to the communities of *jiëëŋ* who lived further west.<sup>305</sup> Yuot Nyakɔŋ's brother Pakol Nyakɔŋ also served as the slavers' personal escort whenever their caravans trafficked captives and cattle from inland zariba to their riverine port at Panyaŋ (which was renamed Pul Turuk or "Pool of the Turks") and prevented any major fights between the Lɔu and the merchant-slavers. This arrangement was clearly an uneasy one. Yuot Nyakɔŋ himself does not seem to have profited significantly from raiding, and, following a heated argument with the slavers, Pakol Nyakɔŋ disappeared, never to be seen again. Yuot Nyakɔŋ then took his brother's place as the merchant-slavers' main interlocutor and continued to steer them away from the Lɔu.<sup>306</sup>

The epicenter of predatory slaving in the 1860s and early 1870s, and the place where earth-masters utterly failed to contain it, was the Zeraf Island. The primary catalysts for this disaster were that the merchant-slavers had longstanding relationships with the primary earth-master (and foremost lineage elder) of the Gaawäär and that their territory directly adjoined the slavers' primary bases on the banks of the Bahr el-Zeraf. Sometime around 1865, a wealthy

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<sup>304</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 83-87.

<sup>305</sup> Zariba or زريبة means "corral" in Arabic but also became a general term for merchant-slaver encampments in Northeast Africa.

<sup>306</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 83-86.

Turco-Egyptian named Küçük Ali established a zariba on the Bahr el-Zeraf at Jambiel, and his trading company quickly added other posts far from the river at Khandak and Ayod.<sup>307</sup>

The slavers' chief ally and supplier was an assimilated Padaṅ from the Thoi confederation named Nuäär Mer, whom the Gaawäär had appointed as primary earth-master, in the same spirit of trying to unite *nei ti naath* newcomers with assimilated Padaṅ that had led the Lou to revere Yuot Nyakōṅ. The key difference between the two men was that Nuäär Mer leveraged alliances with slavers, and especially with an Egyptian named Ali Nasir, to exercise a personal coercive force over his own Gaawäär confederation, calling on his foreign allies to shoot or enslave dissenters from his ambitions, even from his own section, Nuäär Mer, managed to accumulate a great deal of wealth, as well as a long list of enemies.

These alliances began to disintegrate in July of 1874, when boatmen reopened traffic on the Bahr el-Jebel and Charles Gordon came to the Sudd. Gordon, a British military careerist sent upriver by the expansionist Egyptian khedive Ismā'īl Pasha, arrived with orders to shut down the merchant-slaver outposts in the Zeraf Island. Gordon had built up his public persona in Britain by portraying himself as an abolitionist, and he made a show of briefly putting Ali Nasir in chains, but these actions were principally aimed at redirecting commerce to serve his Egyptian employer's imperial visions by establishing new posts upstream. Within two weeks' time, Gordon had sent a supposedly reformed Nasir Ali to build an outpost on the Sobat (which today

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<sup>307</sup> Douglas Johnson, "Deng Laka and Mut Rual: Fixing the Date of an Unknown Battle" *History in Africa* (1993) p. 120.

is still called Nasir), directly across from the Gaa-jiok settlement of Kuanylualthoan and the hitherto unmolested Jikāny, to provide “order and security”.<sup>308</sup>

Gordon’s tactics may not have been especially abolitionist in practice, but locals who had collaborated with merchant-slavers during the nine-year period when the Bahr el-Jebel was unnavigable found them disastrous. Nuäär Mēr himself seems to have told Gordon through an interpreter that “the tribes” would kill him once his Arab allies departed.<sup>309</sup> Many individuals whose wealth had depended on raiding were well aware of the ill will they had accrued and quickly relocated to a single defensible camp along the Khor Atar at Mogogh, just east of Luanj Deŋ. It was at this moment of political crisis in July of 1874 that an extremely bright comet (or *cier* in *thuŋjääŋ*) appeared all across the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>310</sup> Most of these raiders were Padaŋ, for whom “Cyer [sic] is a falling star or a comet [and] is always regarded as a direct manifestation or mode of Divinity”.<sup>311</sup> Consequently the community at Mogogh felt empowered to recognize a man called Deŋ Cier as another prophet of DEŊ.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> M. F. Shukry, *Equatoria under Egyptian rule: the unpublished correspondence of Col. (afterwards Major-Gen.) C. G. Gordon with Ismaïl, Khedive of Egypt and the Sudan, during the years 1874-1876*, (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1953) p. 40.

<sup>309</sup> Charles Gordon, *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa, 1874-1879* (London: Kessler Publishing, 1881) pp. 20-23. Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 130-131.

<sup>310</sup> The Astronomical Register described the Comet Coggia as the brightest comet to appear since the invention of the spectroscope. This comet was visible to the naked eye in Europe in both June and July of 1874 and came closest to earth on July 23. Given the latitudes involved, the comet would have appeared a bit later in the Sudd than it did in Europe and also would have remained visible until a later date.

<sup>311</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 79.

<sup>312</sup> Douglas Johnson, “The Prophet Ngundeng & the Battle of Pading” in Douglas Johnson & David Anderson (ed.s) *Reveal Prophets* (James Currey, Ohio University Press, Fountain Publishers, East African Educational Publishers: Londo, Athen, Nairobi, & Kampala, 1995).

Deŋ Cier is consistently remembered as circumcised, and thus a committed ally of Muslim merchant-slavers.

It is also possible that Deŋ Cier hailed from the distant western *jiëëŋ* of Greater Bahr el-Ghazal, who also practice circumcision, and such foreignness also may have forced him to associate himself closely with the root-less aggregations of slavers.

Numerous victims of the fading slaving economy spent the next five years looking for opportunities to avenge family members they had lost to the *Turuk* and their collaborators between 1865 and 1874, and Yuot Nyakɔŋ, who had led the Lɔu during the slaving era, seems to have been one of the first targets. Sometime after 1874, members of the Nyarruweŋ confederation of *jiëëŋ* invited the inexplicably unsuspecting Yuot Nyakɔŋ to come and help them appease an ancestral ghost. When he answered their call, the Nyarruweŋ kidnapped him, demanded a ransom, and killed him even after they were paid. This assassination left a leadership vacuum among the Lɔu, who credited Dundɛŋ Bɔŋ with warning Yuot not to visit the Nyarruweŋ and began treating the younger prophet as successor to Yuot's vacated influence.

Unlike Yuot Nyakɔŋ, the raiders assembled at Mogogh had no illusions about how their neighbors felt about their slaving activities and did not walk into any obvious traps. Nuäär Mer, Dɛŋ Cier, and their followers were initially content to conduct small raids against nearby settlements until the summer of 1878, when one of the largest Nile floods ever recorded devastated herders across the Zeraf Island and inspired Dɛŋ Cier to target the Lɔu.<sup>313</sup> Dɛŋ Cier's raiders seem to have expected an easy victory, in the belief that the Lɔu were suffering from the same malnutrition and disease that had already weakened flood-stricken Gaawäär and.

*Nei ti naath* and Padaŋ both subsequently provided accounts of the campaign that followed: to British officials in 1905, to Evans-Pritchard in 1930, and to Douglas Johnson in the 1970s.<sup>314</sup> All these accounts agree that Dundɛŋ Bɔŋ initially tried to avoid this confrontation by leading his followers toward Jikäny territory before signs from DIVINITY, convinced him to

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<sup>313</sup> Douglas Johnson, "Reconstructing a History of Local Floods in the Upper Nile Region of the Sudan" *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1992) p. 607.

<sup>314</sup> Douglas Johnson, "The Prophet Ngundeng & the Battle of Pading" in Douglas Johnson & David Anderson (ed.s) *Reveal Prophets* (James Currey, Ohio University Press, Fountain Publishers, East African Educational Publishers: London, Athen, Nairobi, & Kampala, 1995).

return and fight. Dunden had tried and failed to convince the Lou to move closer to the Jikany at numerous times in his career, and this decision to return and challenge the invaders seems to have been a choice Dunden accepted under duress.<sup>315</sup> Nevertheless Dunden eventually agreed to arrange for the Lou to ambush the raiders at a settlement called Padiñ, located west of the Khor Fulluth. At the beginning of the battle, Dunden Bñ sacrificed a carefully chosen steer and then began waving his *dan* in the air to summon DED's powers over life and death.

The Lou set up their ambush beside a large pool so that Den Cier's raiders had nowhere to run, once they walked into this trap. After putting the raiders to flight, Lou warriors used harpoons to "fish out" those who had survived the initial onslaught and then hid in the reeds. The raiders from Mogogh never again posed a serious threat to the Lou. The Lou did not exterminate all of the ex-soldiers, as a few, including Nuäär Mer, had remained in Mogogh during the raid, but they did break the military power and myth of near-invincibility that had kept their many enemies at bay. The following spring, a Gaawäär prophet named Den Laka, whose mother and sibling had been sold to Arabs by Nuäär Mer, fashioned his own *dan* and organized an assault on Mogogh, which wiped out the remaining raiders. These two battles, in which prophets used a *dan* to combat slavers, and the prophetess Nyapuka Dan's assault against the Egyptian garrison at Rumbek in 1883, established a clear cultural significance of the *dan* as an emblem of fighting slavers and their allies that went far beyond the object's original association with marriage vows or the powers of fertility that Dunden seems to have envisioned.

Before the battle of Padiñ, Dunden had been just one of many figures like Pinyinriñ and Ruea Kerjiok experimenting with ways to mobilize eastern *nei ti naath* communities by blending

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<sup>315</sup> Douglas Johnson, "The Prophet Ngundeng & the Battle of Pading" in Douglas Johnson & David Anderson (ed.s) *Reveal Prophets* (James Currey, Ohio University Press, Fountain Publishers, East African Educational Publishers: Londo, Athen, Nairobi, & Kampala, 1995).

*nei ti naath* traditions with those of the assimilated Padaŋ within their ranks. Dundəŋ's victory over men who had accrued a fearsome reputation by slaughtering numerous opponents, often with the support of *Turuk* riflemen, gave Dundəŋ a reputation as a prophet who could inflict death on his enemies as well as giving life to barren wombs. Dundəŋ had not created his *daŋ* as a weapon of war, and its pacific powers remained a very important part of its appeal, but it was also the crucible of combat that elevated Dundəŋ's "sack of divinity" over and above other syncretistic innovators.

### Prophetic Imperium and Frontier Independence (1878-1896)

It [the fishing-spear of Dundəŋ Bəŋ] was put in [the mound] because of the fishing-spear of [Aiweŋ] Longar [a *jiěěŋ* cultural hero]. The work that it does when Longar thrust the fishing-spear down, all the people were finished by him. DIVINITY said that it should be imitated.<sup>316</sup>

Garaŋ Dundəŋ (son of Dundəŋ Bəŋ)

He [Dundəŋ] told his praise-singers [*dayiemni*] "pick up this pestle and pound her [Nyakəŋ Bär, the prophetess of WIU] against the mortar". The praise-singers picked up the large pestle and swung it toward her body but it broke [*tol*] from one side to the other and the mortar disappeared. Dundəŋ saw this and told his praise-singers not to trouble Nyakəŋ Bär.<sup>317</sup>

Tale of the Cieŋ Thiaŋ-Tar

After Padiŋ, Dundəŋ Bəŋ tried once again to convince the Lou to move closer to the Jikäny, but even his rising prestige failed to persuade veterans who remembered the Buəŋjak

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<sup>316</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 94.

<sup>317</sup> Tənyik Təny Macar, Interview with author, Lare, Ethiopia (April 21, 2013).

fiasco to abandon their homes for marshier soils.<sup>318</sup> Dunden eventually decided to make the best of his limited powers of persuasion by relocating to a dry-season camp that he renamed Weiden (or village of DED), where his followers erected a third mound that eventually dwarfed all the mounds that had preceded it.<sup>319</sup> Dunden chose this location for his mound very strategically to reach an array of followers, as Weiden was the place where the border between the Gun-Lou and the Mor-Lou drew close to Jikany territory and also a spot where several seasonal cattle-herding tracks intersected with one another. Dunden also used this mound to boost his syncretistic appeal by deliberately patterning it after the mound Awiel Lonar, which was the largest shrine the Padan had ever built and honored the greatest of the *jiëëŋ* cultural heroes. As Dunden's descendants recalled in the Tale of the Cieŋ Thian-Tar, quoted above, Dunden played on the fact that actual events at Padiŋ resembled western *jiëëŋ* legends about how Awiel Lonar had used his fishing-spear to skewer a multitude of *jiëëŋ*, who had tried to hide in a river amongst the reeds, to create the first masters of the fishing-spear.<sup>320</sup> By drawing this parallel, Dunden presented himself as “the next Lonar”, whose mastery of *jiëëŋ* spirituality surpassed even the unifying powers of his counterparts. Dunden leveraged this claim to surpass all other masters of the fishing-spear, who had won followings in settled communities of eastern *nei ti naath*.

Dunden never achieved a monopoly on spiritual power among the eastern *nei ti naath*, especially since he had little control over spokesmen for more traditional *nei ti naath* divinities like WIU, but he did succeed in marshalling a growing number of supporters in communities that were composed largely of assimilated Padan, to whom he appealed. Virtually all of these settled communities had embraced syncretistic leaders even before the Battle of Padiŋ turned Dunden

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<sup>318</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 89.

<sup>319</sup> Some maps also name this region as Waat.

<sup>320</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 173-175.

into a war hero. Eastern Jikāny communities had little reason to care about this distant battle, but the priest of Luəŋ Dəŋ was extremely grateful to be rid of Cier Dəŋ. After receiving gifts of cattle from Dundəŋ, the priest recognized him as DƏŊ's prophet, honoring him with the steer-name Dəŋkur by which he was generally known thereafter.<sup>321</sup> This endorsement encouraged Eastern Jikāny to esteem Dundəŋ over a Gaa-jak prophet of DƏŊ named Rəeth Yac, until Rəeth Yac eventually accepted Dundəŋ's superiority. *Jiëëŋ* divinities like ABUK (the mythological mother of DƏŊ) and PAJOK (DƏŊ's maternal uncle) continued to appear among eastern *nei ti naath*, but persons seized by these spirits accepted junior positions as Dundəŋ's praise-singers (*dayiemni*). Eventually these praise-singers became very numerous and aggrandized Dundəŋ's reputation by spreading his songs across the countryside and delivering summonses (in the form of metal rings) when Dundəŋ wanted particular individuals to appear before him at his mound so that he could resolve local feuds.<sup>322</sup>

Thousands of patrons seem to have participated in building Dundəŋ's mound, and the divinities who became Dundəŋ's *dayiemni* testified to the breadth of the appeal of his unifying ministry, but some communities' interests ran counter to his call. Communities on the unsettled frontiers of Eastern Jikāny and Ləu confederations often chaffed at Dundəŋ's efforts to centralize authority at his mound, far from their territories and concerns. These frontier communities rejected his prohibitions against military action that would have required them to confine themselves to small marginal territories instead of moving out to seize better, but contested, pastures. Frontier communities who felt unsure about their identities also tended to prefer traditional *nei ti naath* divinities, who helped them stress boundaries between "us" (*nei ti naath*)

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<sup>321</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 96.

<sup>322</sup> Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).



and “them”. Despite these differences between Dundəŋ’s goals and those of some frontier communities, many of them were initially enthusiastic about Dundəŋ when he made a point of visiting them in the early 1880s. However, their support for the prophet began to erode at exactly the same time that he began building up his earthen mound.

Historians can map Dundəŋ’s changing popularity across time and space by examining the shifting uses parents made of the birth name, Dəŋ. Evans-Pritchard, Giet Jal, and Douglas Johnson have all described how the Ləu and Eastern Jikāny credited Dundəŋ with the births of the entire generation born in the late 1870s and early 1880s by naming this age-cohort the “children-of-the-white-steer” after one of Dundəŋ’s sacrifices.<sup>323</sup> Randomized samples of two hundred men’s names from this generation support this detailed narrative by showing that the formerly obscure and foreign personal name of Dəŋ suddenly in the 1880s became the most popular of all Eastern Jikāny birth names. More targeted samplings also reveal that Gaa-jak parents in Thorow and Cieŋ Laaŋ parents on the edges of Ləu territory chose this name two to three times more often than other Eastern Jikāny. One Gaa-jak community (the Cieŋ Cany) even composed a song to “praise the *daŋ* of the fifteen Dəŋs” (*puaaŋä Dəŋni daŋ wäl dhiec*) after one of Dundəŋ’s visits to Gaa-jak territory in the early 1880s.<sup>324</sup> This clustering of names shows that, in these early years, eastern *nei ti naath* embraced Dundəŋ most enthusiastically in areas where he had spent the most time, regardless of their proximity to the mound at Weideŋ.

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<sup>323</sup> Boys born during this period eventually joined the *Daŋ-Goŋa* marriageability-set.

(Giet Jal, 1987),

(Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, 1940),

Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>324</sup> This line was part of a much longer song, the main purpose of which was to extol one of these men, Dəŋ Döl Juoŋ who became a prophet of Dəŋ after Nundəŋ’s death and built his own mound in Thəcc.

These new naming patterns among boys born in the late 1880s and 1890s indicate that communities on the frontiers of expanding *nei ti naath* confederations, and especially those who had not secured their own territories, made a decisive break with Dunden after he stopped visiting them to build his mound in 1889. To judge by these naming patterns, parents in some Gaa-jak communities had previously credited DED with the birth of roughly thirty percent of their children, but in or around 1889 in every community living east of the Sobat the name Den virtually ceased to appear.<sup>325</sup>

These frontier communities rejected Dunden because, in addition to his neglect, his efforts to consolidate moral community and prevent conflict ran counter to their ambitions to acquire pastures of their own. The best example of this frontier rejection of the prophet comes from a particular Gaa-jiok community known as the Cien Kuek, who refused in the early 1880s to name their sons Den and credited other divinities (particularly one named RADDIIT) with empowering previously barren women to give birth.<sup>326</sup> The Cien Kuek were led by an unusually charismatic elder named Yioi Bini, who openly mocked Dunden's request that he send a steer to Waat by giving him a calf instead.

Johnson has glossed this antagonism as a personal rivalry between two leaders, and Yioi Bini is generally remembered as having a reputation for aggressive and resentful personality, but the frontier community he represented also had very practical reasons rejecting Dunden's

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<sup>325</sup> This analysis is based on contrasting naming patterns among the *Dan-Gonga* and *Car-boic* marriageability-sets which were opened in or around 1896 and 1905 respectively. Both sets remained open for a number of years, and the males were initiated into them when they were generally sixteen to eighteen years old.

<sup>326</sup> Part of Dunden's success at bestowing fertility seems to have resulted from the fact that the various wars and plagues that preceded his career had produced famine conditions, and malnutrition is a leading cause of infertility. Names like Randiit show that people who rejected Dunden had no problem finding other powers whom they could credit with the births of their children.

messages of peace and centralized control.<sup>327</sup> The Cienj Kuek were part of larger community called the Cienj Biciok, which, along with the Cienj Minyal, comprised the Cienj Wan̄kɛc community who had fought the Cienj Laan̄ after Gaac Gurial's death in or around 1859. The Cienj Wan̄kɛc had done relatively well for themselves during the tumultuous 1860s, since they had avoided the Buon̄jak debacle and had held onto valuable pastures on the northeast bank of the Sobat. After 1874, the Cienj Wan̄kɛc as a whole were also relatively successful at avoiding Ali Nasir's slavers (who crossed to their side of the Sobat only during the rainy season, when they had already taken their herds away from the river's banks), but their demographic successes eventually over-taxed local pastures.

The Cienj Minyal were untroubled by this shortage of land, because they had been the first to forge marriage alliances with the indigenous *anywaa* of Nyium (the environs of modern-day Nasir) and enjoyed an unassailable position as the original settlers (*diet*) of Kuenylualthoan and the Sobat's northeast bank. The Cienj Biciok section responded to the grazing pinch by following the Sobat upstream to the confluence of the Baro and Pibor Rivers (which blocked further advance). Some of the Cienj Biciok (the Cienj Wan̄ section) forged marriage alliances with the *anywaa* of Jikmir, who gave them grazing rights, but the rest (the Cienj Kuek and Cienj Thiep sections) remained legally landless. As these herders ran out of room, an unmarried Cienj Kuek woman named Nyakuen Wan̄ took the initiative of rallying her people by swearing that she would marry only in an *anywaa* land beyond the rivers. This prophecy galvanized popular demand for finding new pastures and compelled Yioi Bini (and a Cienj Thiep man named Kōr Lieplia) to fulfill their responsibilities as ranking elders in their communities by organizing a migration in the late 1870s, around the time *Maker* was initiated, to the Sobat's west bank.

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<sup>327</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

Sensible peacemakers, including Dundɛŋ, opposed this crossing, because it violated the clear boundaries that had allowed the Cien Laan and Cien Wankec to avoid bloodshed ever since the death of Gaac Gurial. Dundɛŋ remembered that he had received a beating simply for appearing to do what Yioi Bini now proposed, and Pinyinriin openly proclaimed that FLESH would kill anyone who crossed the river.<sup>328</sup> Contemporary Cien Kuek and Cien Thiep elders also claim that Pinyinriin prophesied that death would come to those who followed Yioi Bini's plan to settle in a place called Wandin on the southwest bank of the Pibor/Sobat. This prediction must have seemed very reasonable, since Wandin was just across the Pibor River from Buonjak, but Pinyinriin's prophecy failed to deter a frontier community that saw no viable future if they remained on the Sobat's east bank.

The aspiring emigrants took several steps to ensure a successful move and made sacrifices to acquire rights to the land. A delegation from Cien Thiep arranged a marriage between Nyakan Cany (a daughter of their most prestigious patriarch) and Wör Kan, who become the ranking elder after Both Kor's death among the Cien Laan.<sup>329</sup> Yioi Bini also secured the services of a young magician named Danbil, who gave him a magical root called DUDDIIT to protect the migrants from Pinyinriin's curse.<sup>330</sup> When Kör Lieplia developed severe diarrhea, the migrants also gave Pinyinriin some cattle, just in case DUDDIIT failed to protect them.<sup>331</sup>

As Pinyinriin had predicted, the greatest challenge the migrants faced came from local *anywaa*, many of whom were tired of losing lands to *nei ti naath* newcomers. Shortly after the

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<sup>328</sup> Nhial Dɛŋ & Kuek Kiir, interview with author, Korenge Payam, South Sudan (January 21, 2013).

<sup>329</sup> Yöth Guandɔŋ, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (January 19, 2013).

<sup>330</sup> Danbil belonged to the *Boi-loc* set which made him significantly younger than Yioi Bini, Kor Lieplia, and Njunden Bɔŋ who all belonged to *Thut*

Nhial Dɛŋ & Kuek Kiir, interview with author, Korenge Payam, South Sudan (January 21, 2013).

<sup>331</sup> Duoth Dɛŋ Balan, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (February 7, 2013).

newcomers set up settlements in Wandij at Kuoretōj and Wunthoain, an entire cattle-herding party led by Yioi Bini's eldest son (Kothnyuear Yioi) perished when they were waylaid by *anywaa* from a settlement at Konyerek, across the Pibor River. Yioi Bini accepted this loss, at least for the time being, and set up a meeting with the *anywaa* chief Jiokthianj Lual, whose men had carried out the attack. At this meeting, in a darker version of the same compensatory logic that had allowed Gök Lotlōa to give up his daughter Nyanhial so that he could graze in the *anywaa* lands around Kuenlualthoan, Yioi Bini suggested that his son's death could serve as a blood payment for the right to graze on *anywaa* land.<sup>332</sup>

Despite such theoretical niceties, Yioi Bini and his entire community never saw murder as a valid equivalent to marriage and nursed a grudge centered on the tale that the *anywaa* had skinned Kothnyuear Yioi and his companions and covered their war drums with the palms of their hands. Several years later Yioi Bini took his revenge by inviting Jiokthianj to a feast, where he assassinated the chief along with the twenty-five men and two women who accompanied him.<sup>333</sup> This incident crystalized the animosity between Yioi Bini and Dundēj Bōj, since Yioi Bini's violation of elementary Nilotic standards of hospitality did not sit well with Dundēj, and Yioi Bini resented the prophet's opposition to his aggressive movements into *anywaa* territory.

This kind of tension between Dundēj as a prophet of peace and stability and frontier patriarchs like Yioi Bini, who resorted to violence as they sought their best interests of their particular sections, became much more pronounced in the 1890s for several reasons. Frontier

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<sup>332</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 165-166.

<sup>333</sup> Nhial Dēj & Kuek Kiir, interview with author, Korenge Payam, South Sudan (January 21, 2013).

Yōth Guandōj, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (January 19, 2013).

Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987).

communities may not have appreciated Dunden's decision to cloister himself at his mound, but traditional *nei ti naath* spiritual authorities were also recovering from their earlier crises of credibility, and Dunden's message of peace was increasingly discordant with the violence of outside slave-raiders and indigenous *anywaa*.

Nyakon Bär, the prophetess of WIU, represented the primary threat to Dunden's spiritual authority among the Eastern Jikany because of her possession of the most sacred of Kiir's relics, *mut WIU* (the spear of WIU). The descendants of Mathian Kiir, who served as the spear's custodians, had lost credibility after the death of Yuol Maar, but Eastern Jikany had not stopped believing in the power of the spear itself. Nyakon Bär belonged to the household that kept the sacred spear and began dwelling in the byre containing the relic, achieving recognition around the time of the Battle of Padi as "the wife of WIU's spear".

In the early 1880s, parents in some Gaa-jak communities began naming children WIU's spear (Mut Wiu) at roughly the same rate as others commemorated Den, but the two fertility experts seem to have co-existed relatively amicably until Dunden orchestrated a showdown at his mound. The descendants of Dunden's most loyal followers claim that Nyakon Bär tried, but failed to fulfill Dunden's challenge to run to the top of his mound and the prophet then humiliated her by "setting her to grind grain like any other woman and giving her one of his *dayiemni* to sleep with".<sup>334</sup> Gaa-jak communities who still revere Nyakon Bär today dismiss this and state that Dunden ordered his *dayiemni* to beat her to beat her with a large pestle, but the club shattered like glass when it touched her body. Both versions present Dunden as resorting to ruthlessly sexist rhetoric about women's domestic activities in his efforts to subjugate his female

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<sup>334</sup> Douglas Johnson. *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 98-99.

rival. One of Dunden's songs also uses this same sexist discourse to abuse prominent Gaa-jak elders who accepted Nyakon Bär's authority.

Besides disagreeing about who won this stand-off, the most striking contrast between the tales told by the champions of the two protagonists is that the Gaa-jak describe Nyakon Bär as peacefully defending herself without humiliating anyone, while Dunden's supporters relish the opportunity to describe his domination. Whatever may or may not have transpired at Dunden's mound, many Gaa-jak continued to revere Nyakon Bär, while Dunden's standing waned toward the end of his life, quite possibly because his quest to centralize power offended so many communities on the eastern frontier.

A new breed of pillaging Arab warlords, remembered as the *Dhurelai* (that is: Abdallahi, after the Mahdist Khalifia) also assaulted Eastern Jikany lands around 1890 and posed another, if initially fleeting, challenge to Dunden's prophetic political project of creating a unified and pacific community. Before these horsemen came riding out of the north, the only *Turuk* in the region had been the Turco-Egyptian garrison at the Nasir post erected in 1874 at the site of the *anywaa* settlement of Nor Den. The soldiers of Nasir (mostly Arabs from Dongola) post had caused some trouble for the sedentary *anywaa*, especially since they built their zariba in the midst of Den Gucker's village, and their descendants report that the soldiers coerced and extorted them.<sup>335</sup> However, these intruders got along well enough with the *anywaa* for the Russian adventurer Wilhelm Junker to paddle over to Den Gucker's island without protection and meet

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<sup>335</sup> Kok Mut Oman & Yual Mut Oman, interview with author, Nordeng, South Sudan (January 24, 2013).

Den Gucker personally in August of 1876. According to Junker, “the Nuer” were not troubled enough to stop building seasonal camps on very banks of the river.<sup>336</sup>

Whatever predations this garrison may have committed ceased when Mahdist revolutionaries began forcibly expelling the Turco-Egyptians from all of the Sudan. In 1881, a certain Muhammad Ahmad declared himself to be “the Guided One”, or al-Mahdi (المهدي) a figure whom many Sufi Muslims believed would prepare the way for the second coming of Jesus (Isa) and “the Day of Judgement” (يوم الدين). The Mahdi’s proclamation of divine power channeled popular resentment toward Turco-Egyptian military power in the Sudan and sparked a revolution that culminated in the capture of Khartoum and the death of Charles Gordon (by then Sudan’s Anglo-Khedival Governor-General) in 1885.

Arab raiders did not trouble eastern *nei ti naath* when the Mahdi ruled northern Sudan or in the early reign of his “successor” (or Khalifia) Abdallahi, because his theocratic polity lacked the logistical capacity to operate so far from their capital at Omdurman (or Um Durmān) far to the north.<sup>337</sup> His presence was felt briefly in February of 1890 when Abdallah began ordering his ill-supplied troops to subsist by looting the countryside. One particularly adventurous Mahdist force responded to this license by venturing south of the White Nile through Mabaan territory, before turning west to traverse the Machar Marshes and reaching the banks of the Sobat. These starving soldiers had no interest in ordinary commerce with the Eastern Jikāny and indulged in naked plundering, simply killing or kidnapping whomever they met to create a kind of

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<sup>336</sup> Wilhelm Junker, *Travel in Africa during the years 1875- 1876* (London: Chapman, 1890) p. 216-224.

<sup>337</sup> “Khalifa” is the standard Sudanist transliteration of خليفة, a title better known to the wider English-speaking world as “Caliph”.

Generally rendered Omdurman in English, this city directly across the Nile from Khartoum is actually named “mother of Durmān” (ام درمان)



instantaneous disaster that contrasted with the gradualist, but ultimately more destructive, predations of earlier merchant-slavers, who allied with local partners like Nuäär Mēr.<sup>338</sup>

The Gaa-jak also remember this single party of *Turuk Dhurelai* as riding in from the north in the dry-season and wreaking extreme devastation on settlements in the Machar Marshes.<sup>339</sup> The Gaa-jak were caught unprepared, because they had never been victimized by gunmen before and had assumed that *Turuk* arrived only on steamers in the wet-season, as the Turco-Egyptians had always done. The Cieŋ Nyijaanni section who lived between Yom and Thooc at a settlement called Yat seem to have borne the brunt of the resulting bloodbath, and their descendants can still list the names of women swept off by this raiding party, as well as those of men from the *Boi-loc* and *Maker* sets who died in a futile defense of their communities.<sup>340</sup> The Gaa-jak suffered no other raids until 1897, and, since Madhist raiders had afflicted only communities that had largely neglected Dunden in the years before the raid, many eastern *nei ti naath* continued to believe the victor of Padiŋ could bury their problems in his mound.

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<sup>338</sup> Douglas Johnson & Richard Pankhurst, "The Great Drought and Famine of 1888-1892 in northeast Africa" in Douglas Johnson & Richard Pankhurst, *The Ecology of Survival: Case Studies from Northeast African History* (London: Lester Crook, 1988) p. 63.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 145.

Charles Michel, *Vers Fachoda* (Paris, 1900) p. 186, 285, 308.

<sup>339</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 175.

<sup>340</sup> Tap Luak Wēr Dundit, in discussion with author, April 7, 2013 in Mathian of Loŋecuk County, Eastern Upper Nile State, South Sudan.

Tap Luak specifically named ten daughters and two wives taken captive from of Dundit's household alone as well as two initiated males and a mother from the same household killed by these raiders who spent two nights at Yat before moving on. While the slain young men had been marked in the Boi-loc age-set their father Dundit was an unmarked Nɔɔk.

## Conclusion

*Nei ti naath*, and especially the Eastern Jikāny, Ləu, and Gaawäär confederations, marked the period between 1878 and 1896 by initiating marriageability-sets named after a prophet's rod (*daŋ*). This sacred and powerful object symbolized the rise of a new class of spiritual-political prophets who resolved the local feuds that had grown endemic and purged their communities of new threats from slavers. These prophets met these novel challenges, not by crafting entirely new beliefs and practices, but by combining the customs of *nei ti naath* lineages with those of the assimilated Padaŋ who had come to comprise most of these lineages' membership. The most famous of these prophets, Dundəŋ Bəŋ, achieved an unprecedented degree of centralized spiritual-political power by building a massive mound and traveling widely among the communities he attracted. However, this most visible symbol of his prestige, his message of peace and territorial stability, and his efforts to dominate his rivals also began to undermine his standing among frontier communities just as new parties of *Turuk* began to reappear on in the Abyssinian eastern edges of the *nei ti naath* moral universe.

## Chapter 5

### Marking Militarization from 1896 to the 1920s:

#### From the Prophet's Rod to Remington Rifles

Wa Kuey tɔŋɛ bā tole nɛn ɛ wi diaal. Bā luny jɔk ɛ Bā wec yaŋ tɔŋɛ.	The hearth of [our camp] Kuey is lit smoke is seen in every place. I returned back to it I light the hearth of the cow's camp.
Bā wec yaŋ tɔŋɛ. Cā tɔŋ, cā gel tɔŋä.	I light the hearth of the cow's camp. I lit the hearth, I protected my hearth.
Gëälä yow kɛ ɲu? Gëälä yow kɛ mac. Wa mac tuɔɔk ba wiädɛ thëëŋ ɛ rööl diaal.	How can I protect the world? I protect the world with a gun. I fire a gun and its gunshot resounds in every country. <sup>341</sup>

#### Gaa-jak song, Baro River communities

There is an increasing use of firearms at [Gaawäär] dances ... trading parties come from the Garjak [Gaa-jak] country generally in December and January. Ivory is the only commodity in the arms trade. [The prophet] Dwal Diu's camp has by far the greater number of arms ... Arms have been presented to a few responsible Chiefs [as gifts by my administration].<sup>342</sup>

Percy Coriat, District Commissioner, January 1926

The tribesmen want rifles chiefly because their possession is a subject of personal pride.<sup>343</sup>

Corfield, Governor of Upper Nile State, July 1931

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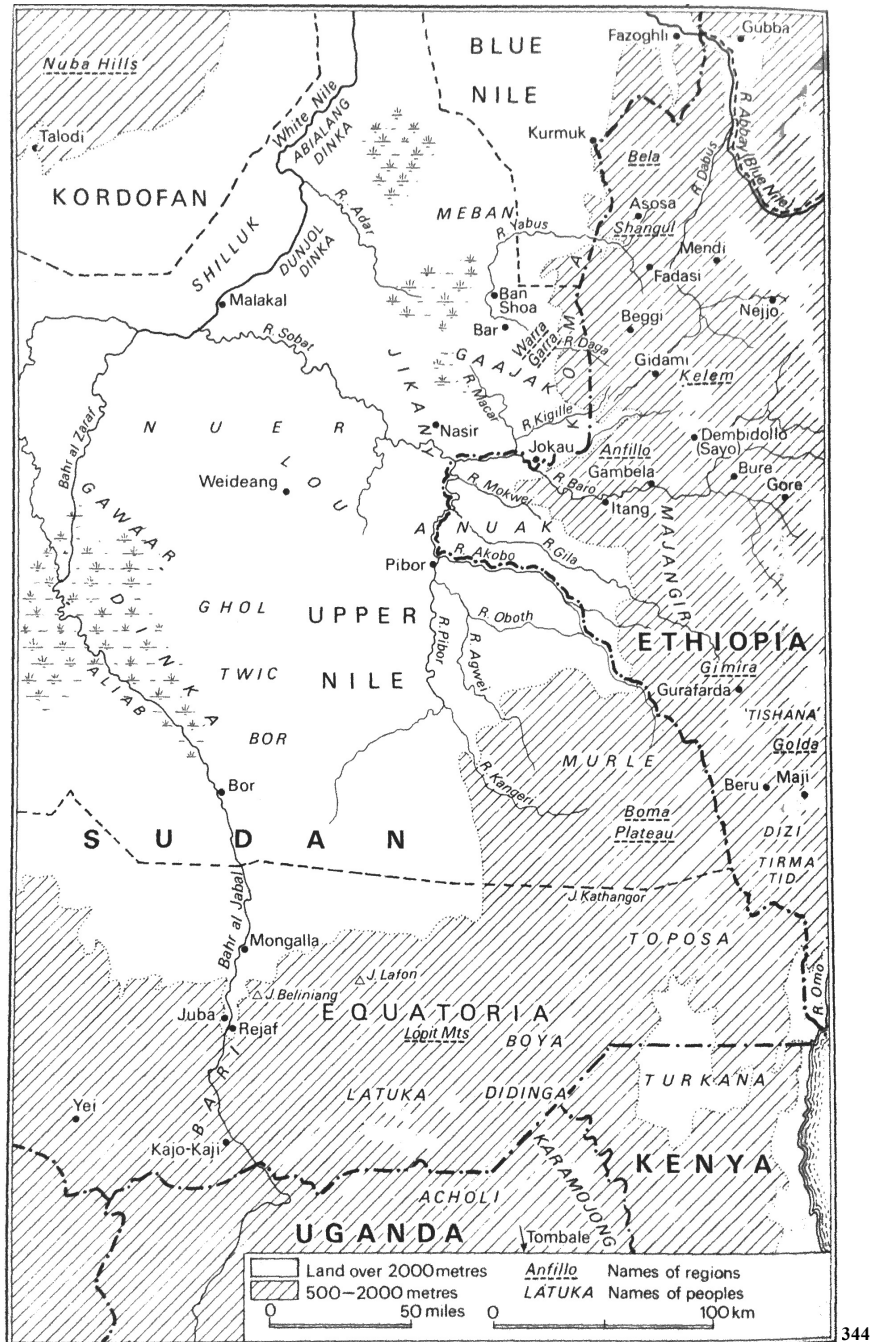
<sup>341</sup> Elders of Wec Gaatluak, interview with author, Maiwut County, South Sudan (April 12, 2013).

<sup>342</sup> Percy Coriat, "Transfer of Barr Gaweir to Zeraf Valley District (1926)" in Douglas Johnson (ed.) *Governing the Nuer: Documents by Percy Coriat on Nuer History and Ethnography 1922-1931* (Oxford: JASO occasional papers, 1993) p. 43.

<sup>343</sup> F.D. Corfield, "Handing Over Notes" in Douglas Johnson & Charles Willis (ed.s) *The Upper Nile Province Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

## Map 5.0

## Borderlands of the Anglo-Egyptian and Abyssinian Frontier



<sup>344</sup> A reproduction of map 12 in Peter Garrestson, “Vicious cycles: ivory, slaves, and arms on the new Maji frontier” in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 198.

## Chapter Overview

Existing histories of “the colonial era” for South Sudan as a whole, and for particular groupings like *nei ti naath*, generally revolve around British actions and the government archives in Durham, England. Historians’ periodizations have consistently described a profound rupture in either 1898, when the British claimed political authority on paper, or when their military forces gained meaningful control on the ground: for the Eastern Jikany, 1920. Historians of Southern Sudan like Robert Collins, Mohamad Omer Beshir, and Martin Daly even went so far as to name 1898 in the titles of their monographs, while Giet Jal’s “History of the Eastern Jikany before 1920” also treated British conquest as a clear line between “pre-colonial” and “colonial”.<sup>345</sup>

This chapter challenges the narrative that takes either of these dates as significant by suggesting that for *nei ti naath*, and other residents of the eastern half of what is now South Sudan, relationships with the British followed a pattern established by events along the Abyssinian frontier (modern-day Ethiopia) a decade before the British imposed their military will. For *nei ti naath*, British conquest was but one episode in a longer process of militarization in which firearms (*mac*) became valued symbols of local power and prestige. This process culminated in 1931 with the initiation of marriageability-set named “Black-and-White-Steer – Gun” (*Rial-Mac*) but began in 1910, when *nei ti naath* began purchasing large numbers of guns from merchants in Abyssinia. This traffic also inspired *nei ti naath* to create a new kind of

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<sup>345</sup> Robert Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: the Southern Sudan, 1889-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

Martin Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1898-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Mohamad Omer Beshir, *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict* (New York: Praeger, 1968).

Mohamad Omer Beshir, *Educational Development in the Sudan, 1889-1956* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

“chief” (*kuaar*) whose prestige came from receiving rifles as gifts from Abyssinian governors. Tribute in rifles paid to *nei ti naath* chiefs, as the opening quotes reveal, was also how British rule operated in the 1920s.

Prior to the initiation of the marriageability-set named *Daŋ-Goŋa* (“Prophet’s-Rod – Hedgehog-colored-Steer”) in 1896 or 1897, eastern *nei ti naath* had settled into two decades of relative peace, inter-communal harmony, and demilitarization. Syncretistic prophets like Dundəŋ Bəŋ helped create this peace because they combined spiritual powers recognized by *nei ti naath* newcomers and autochthonous Padaŋ communities to resolve blood feuds and create consensuses. Prophets also restored order by purging their communities of predatory slavers financed by foreign merchants. Dundəŋ Bəŋ’s victory at Padiŋ in 1878, and Nuäär Mər’s violent death in 1879, exterminated Arab merchant-slavers’ local allies.

The relative peace that followed the Battle of Padiŋ was also made possible by Mahdist Arab revolutionaries who destroyed the commercial networks connecting the Sudd with Egypt’s labor-hungry cotton fields and ultimately created a window of opportunity for Abyssinian activities in the eastern Sudd. Ironically, the Mahdist slavers who slew Charles Gordon, the darling of England’s Anti-Slavery Society, in 1885 did more to protect *nei ti naath* than Gordon had managed throughout the 1870s. Gordon had disrupted Egyptian merchant-slavers like Ali Nasir by transferring them from the Bahr el-Zeraf to the Sobat, but the Mahdists put them out of business entirely. Mahdist raids in the Sudd were brutal, but also rare, since the Mahdi’s regime lacked the logistical capacity to conduct profitable commerce in the Sudd.

*Nei ti naath* who were inadvertently shielded from European powers by the Mahdists had to contend once again with imperial armies and foreign merchants as the European “Scramble for Africa” reached a climax on the banks of the White Nile. However, the relatively famous

confrontation between the British and the French at Fashoda in 1898 took place after the Abyssinians had already marched through *nei ti naath* territories to the Nile in 1897. *Nei ti naath* weathered initial invasions by these three *Turuk*, who were interested in besting one another rather than in subjugating local communities, without significantly altering their time-tested strategies of assimilating marginalized members of outside groups. However, when Abyssinian governors and merchants gave guns to vengeful *anywaa* warlords after 1910, they compelled eastern *nei ti naath* to militarize.

Eastern Jikāny herders, and particularly the Gaa-jak, who had formerly exchanged ivory elephant tusks for cattle of the Oromo herders who lived along the Abyssinian frontier, began purchasing guns to defend their communities from the *anywaa*, who, unlike the *Turuk* of this era, were eager for cattle and captives. Established *nei ti naath* leaders, including “men of cattle” and “prophets” (a *wut yɔɔk* and a *gök* respectively) often helped organize the firearms trade so that the prophet’s rod (*dan*) and the gun (*mac*) overlapped as symbols of power. This new commercial source of guns in Abyssinia empowered previously marginal borderlands figures who built alliances with Abyssinian governors and soon turned to much the same style of raiding and pillaging as their *anywaa* predecessors. Even these well-armed *nei ti naath* communities finally lost their political independence in the 1920s when the British routed them with machine guns and bombers. However, British rule furthered, rather than abrogated, the growing link among *nei ti naath* between firearms and political authority. *Nei ti naath* whom the British tapped as partners demanded patronage, and British officials, who admitted they could not control the Ethiopian border, decided to outbid Abyssinian gun-runners by distributing superior Remington rifles to collaborative *nei ti naath*. Local herders, who valued these arms both as

practical weapons and as symbols of British support, increasingly viewed these rifles as key symbols of pastoralist power.

### **Colonial Crosshairs: The *Turuk* Converge in their Scramble for Africa**

Before the initiation of *Daŋ-Goŋa* in 1896, *nei ti naath* understood the *Turuk* as an undifferentiated mass of marginally relevant outsiders, and most of them had little to no experience with firearms. Both eastern and western *nei ti naath* had tangled with Mahdists and differentiated them enough to call them *Turuk Dhurelai* after the name of their Khalifa, Abdallahi, but they still viewed all raiders with guns, steamboats, and horses (that is *jiok Turuk* or “dogs of the *Turuk*”) as basically interchangeable. Eastern *nei ti naath*, and the Jikāny in particular, had to contend with a plethora of *Turuk* who came from every direction simultaneously in 1897 and 1898. Most ended up fighting these *Turuk* at some point and often emulated their *collø* neighbors’ strategy of pitting the several *Turuk* factions against one another. However, eastern *nei ti naath* also countered heavily armed invaders with their time-honored strategies for assimilating marginalized members of other groups.

The initiation of *Daŋ-Goŋa* represented a high water mark for Dunderŋ’s project of spiritual-political consolidation, but 1896 was also a definitive moment in the career of Menelik II, the militarily powerful “Lion of Judah and King of Kings”, emperor in neighboring Abyssinia.<sup>346</sup> Before 1896, Menelik II’s predecessors in Addis Ababa had struggled to simply hold on to dispersed territories in the Abyssinian highlands. Téwodros II had committed suicide after a British expedition successfully stormed his personal residence in 1868 and, in 1887 the Mahdists had sacked the former capital of Gondar. Yohannes IV had responded to this invasion

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<sup>346</sup> The actual Amharic title “king of kings” is ንጉሠ ነገሥት and generally transliterated as Nəgusä Nägäst.



with a campaign that expelled the Mahdists from the highlands but was mortally wounded in 1889 at the Battle of Gallabat. Following these struggles, Menelik's victory over an invading Italian army at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 remade the region's political landscape by placing the victorious Abyssinian regime in a position to expand.<sup>347</sup> On March 1<sup>st</sup> of 1896, Menelik's army obliterated an Italian expeditionary force of eighteen thousand infantry and cavalry supported by fifty-six pieces of modern artillery. The Abyssinians punished this Italian horde by inflicting the highest rate of casualties suffered in the entire nineteenth century by any European army, including the French defeat at Waterloo.<sup>348</sup> Menelik's dramatic victory over well-equipped European invaders renewed his confidence in his own dreams of African empire and gave the Abyssinians greater leverage in negotiations with the French based in Djibouti on the Red Sea coast and the British in lower Egypt, the East Africa Protectorate (modern-day Kenya), and the Protectorate of Uganda.

Menelik had begun talking to European powers as early as 1891 about Abyssinia's "ancestral lands" along the east bank of the White Nile from the old Turco-Egyptian city of Khartoum in the north to Lake Albert (now western Uganda) to the south.<sup>349</sup> Menelik's official statements exploited the fact that old seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European maps, quite innocent of actualities in the region, did label all the lands he claimed as part of the "Empire des Abissins" but, after Adwa, Menelik saw opportunities to make some of these imaginative claims

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<sup>347</sup> Some scholars have transliterated Adwa as Adowa or Adua. The actual Amharic term is ዓድዋ.

<sup>348</sup> The Italian force of 17,700 men at Adwa suffered an incredible 65% percent casualty rate. Most of these casualties (7,000) were killed in action, since outmatched Italian units refused to surrender to their foes they disastrously underestimated as "primitive".

<sup>349</sup> Robert Collins, *Civil Wars and Revolutions in the Sudan: Essays on the Sudan, the Southern Sudan, and Darfur* (Hollywood, CA: Tesehai, 2005) p. 368.

Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 44.

real.<sup>350</sup> Menelik knew he had little chance of challenging established British protectorates like Uganda but, thanks to Mahdists, areas like the Sudd were still part of “the scramble”. Playing for time, Menelik made clandestine efforts to help his old Mahdist foes resist the British long enough for his forces to move into as many spaces that Europeans had not claimed as possible.

Menelik owed much of his success at Adwa to his shrewd estimation of what his armies could and could not achieve, and he continued to play his hand with similarly calculated sagacity. Three weeks after Adwa Menelik began corresponding with the Khalifa Abdallahi in the Mahdist capital of Omdurman. In June and July of 1896 his letters specifically proposed alliances against Europeans in general and against “the red English” in particular.”<sup>351</sup> Despite his Orthodox Christian faith, Menelik built common cause with his zealous Muslim enemies by asserting that “all whites were the enemies of God”. He also simultaneously assured British envoys that it “was absolutely impossible that he should even contemplate affording his traditional Muslim enemies any assistance.”<sup>352</sup> Menelik entertained missions from Russia, Britain, and France as purported Christian allies and encouraged these powers, as well as his Italian and Ottoman enemies, to undermine one another and compete for his cooperation with gaudy gifts and promises of exclusive alliances.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> For example, the Frenchman Nicolas Sason’s map of Africa from 1679 showed the Abyssinian Empire extending to the east bank of the Nile even below Khartoum to the riverine city of Dangola in the north and stretching south to East Africa’s Great Lakes region. Menelik and his emissaries found a similar map crafted in 1826 very useful foundation for arguing their case.

<sup>351</sup> G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965) p. 297.

<sup>352</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 77-78.

G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965) p. 297.

<sup>353</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 77-78.

Between 1896 and 1898, France was the imperial power most interested in recognizing Menelik's territorial claims because they needed Abyssinian support for their own ambitions to establish a west-east band of French colonial territory along the entire southern edge of the Sahara Desert, from Senegal on the Atlantic coast to the west bank of the Upper White Nile. At that time the French were building a latitudinal railroad intended to link Dakar in the west to Djibouti on the Red Sea that directly rivaled British dreams of securing continental domination with a longitudinal pair of rails from Cape Town to Cairo. The French had managed to pursue this vision without directly threatening British ambitions because the two transcontinental projects involved seizing completely different real estate, but these perpendicular tracks would still cross in the area of the Upper Nile. The hydrologist Victor Prompt had added fuel to the fire by convincing the Institut Égyptien in Paris that whoever dammed the White Nile at the old Turco-Egyptian post (and *collò* capital) of Fashoda could control Egypt's vital supply of water.<sup>354</sup> Both "facts" led the French to conclude that the feverish race for territory in Africa would reach its climax in the eastern Sudd.

The French strategy for seizing the Bahr el-Ghazal region and the west bank of the Upper White Nile called for French Major Jean-Baptiste Marchand to lead an expedition from Gabon to Brazzaville and up the Congo and Ubangi Rivers to what is now the Central African Republic. This expedition would then trek overland to the Bahr el-Ghazal, steam down the White Nile, and claim Fashoda for France. The French initially hoped to find common cause there with the Mahdists but eventually realized that the zealous Khalifia and his pious troops had little taste for allying with infidels, no matter how exposed they were to Anglo-Egyptian forces moving in from

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<sup>354</sup> Robert Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) p. 10.

the north.<sup>355</sup> The French also knew they would not be able to resupply a permanent post on the Upper White Nile overland from their territories to the west. To hold this strategic real estate, they would need a supply route through Abyssinia. In Addis Ababa, a French diplomat named Léonce Lagarde seemed to have solved this problem by securing vague promises that Menelik would support a French force descending from the highlands to follow the Baro and Sobat Rivers downstream for a Nile rendezvous at Fashoda.

British agents discovered this French plot and realized that French maneuvering and Menelik's post-Adwa ascendancy posed a real threat to their plans to control the world's longest river and, if Parisian hydrologists were any judge, might jeopardize their hold on Egypt and the Suez Canal. British officers in Uganda struggled to organize a downstream expedition. However, less than one month after Adwa, the sirdar (general) of the Egyptian army, British general Horatio Herbert Kitchener, did divert massive sums of Egyptian wealth to commence an invasion of that Mahdist Sudan in 1897 that involved troops and convict laborers who constructed a railway south through the desert. British and Egyptian regiments under Kitchener's command faced few natural barriers but could not "reclaim" the old Turco-Egyptian posts like Fashoda and Nasir in the name of the Egyptian Khedive until they had battled through the entire Mahdist state. Thus the Abyssinians, as well as the Anglo-Egyptians and the French all set out to seize Fashoda and the adjoining Sobat Valley just as Dunder's power and influence in the eastern Sudd were cresting.

### **Initial Invasions: Confronting the *Turuk* with Time-Honored Tactics of Assimilation**

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<sup>355</sup> G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965) p. 290-291.

By the late 1890s assimilationist Gaa-jak communities had advanced to the banks of the Baro River, and even beyond, which put them near the path of expeditions approaching from the Abyssinian highlands. The sections of the Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tär who had moved to the Yiëër Jukow (or Khor Jukow in Sudanese Arabic) after killing Yuol Määr actually had wet-season and dry-season camps in territories that now belong to Ethiopia. Further west, the Cieŋ Cany around modern-day Malual Payam, and the Cieŋ Wau along the Yiëër (or Khor) Machar also used the banks of the Baro River as for dry-season grazing. Roughly half of all Gaa-jiok, and significant numbers of Lou, also lived in areas that the Abyssinians would traverse on their way to the White Nile, since both the community led by the elderly Yioi Bini and the Cieŋ Laaŋ lived on the west banks of the Pibor and Sobat Rivers.

All these herding communities had generally avoided Turco-Egyptian and Mahdist steamboats because any craft much larger than a canoe could operate on these streams only in the rainy season when herders were already retreating from the inundation. Few contemporary Eastern Jikäny elders can provide detailed accounts of *Turuk* riverine predations before the initiation of *Daŋ-Gona* in 1896, but they often recall the Abyssinian raids of this era and how their forefathers' retaliated. Mobile herding communities of *nei ti naath* had a much harder time avoiding horsemen, like the Mahdists who had devastated Yat, because hooved horses, like cattle, cannot survive inside the marshes.

Back in Addis Ababa, Menelik delayed the French officers heading west, and the first French expedition did not reach the Baro until the dry-season of 1897. As Menelik may have hoped, this poorly organized French mission failed spectacularly and limped back up to the highlands, after having only glimpsed the headwaters of the Sobat, with roughly half of the

hundred and fifty men and a fifth of the hundred and forty pack animals they had set out with.<sup>356</sup> Menelik took over after this French failure and organized three expeditionary forces (that French observers described as a quarter of a million men, women, and children in total) to assert his control over the territory. The largest force, commanded by Haile Selassie's father, *ras* Tafari Makonnen Woldemikael, marched down the Blue Nile to claim the gold-bearing region of Bani Shanqūl with the tacit approval of Khalifa 'Abdallāhi, who had grown tired of that regions' independently minded governor.<sup>357</sup> A second force marched west toward the Sobat Valley, and a third army set out to the south toward Lake Rudolf.

An Amhara *dejazmach* named Tesemma led this Sobat mission, comprised of four thousand riflemen (many of them on horseback), several thousand foot soldiers with spears and shields, one piece of the artillery, and several Russian and French observers.<sup>358</sup> Tesemma's army also included a huge train of women and children to provide logistical support for an army that lacked entirely the railroads and steamboats on which the British and French generally relied. The Russian and French officers who accompanied Tesemma reported that

Each fighting man was attended by up to ten women, according to his military rank, as well as one or two boys to carry his weapons, hold his horse, and act as a cushion when his master wanted to lie down and sleep. Each person carried enough food for a month after which they were expected to live off the country.<sup>359</sup>

This massive force clearly represented a very different kind of *Turuk* from the small units of predominantly male merchant-slavers who had operated in previous periods out of steamboats.

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<sup>356</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 79-80.

<sup>357</sup> G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965) p. 298.

<sup>358</sup> *Dejazmach* was an Abyssinian title meaning "Commander of the Gate. Harold Marcus has equated with European feudal title of count.

<sup>359</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 105.

An army trained to “live off the country” clearly posed a threat to everyone in the communities along their path. However, the numerous slaves (and human pillows) in this company also presented opportunities for communities with a long tradition of coaxing marginalized outsiders to join their ranks, and, for militarily weaker parties, this vulnerable force also offered the possibility of a new balance of local powers.

Tesemma descended down the Baro valley from his base at Goré on March 11<sup>th</sup> of 1898, half-way through the dry-season, when the Abyssinians knew they would encounter the fewest impassable marshes and disease-carrying mosquitoes. The *dejazmach* also decided to enlist the aid of local *anywaa* guides, who viewed the expedition as an opportunity to turn the tables on their Gaa-jak neighbors.

razzias des Nouers sur les Yambos sont annuelles ...  
Ils surprennent un village, vident les greniers,  
volent les chèvres, emmènent les femmes ...

déguisés en guerriers farouches,  
marchant derrière nos talons.  
«Je vais chercher mes femmes!»  
crient-ils à qui mieux aux amis et connaissance  
que nous rencontrons. Et ceux-ci se mettent à notre  
suite, pour chercher leurs femmes, sans doute aussi. Ils  
sont l'air niais et serin, tout comme chez nous les  
maris affligés d'épouses volages.

Nuer raids on the “Yambo” [*anywaa*] are annual  
They surprise a village, empty the granaries,  
steal the goats, take the women ...

pretending to be fierce warriors,  
[our *anywaa* guides] walk behind our heels.  
“I am going to find my women!”  
they cry to outdo friends and acquaintances  
whom we meet. And they start to join our party,  
to find their women, without doubt also. They  
seem silly and foolish, as at home husbands  
beat their wives on a whim.<sup>360</sup>

There is no conclusive evidence that Tesemma engaged in any “liberating” on this mission, but members of the expedition did record that Gaa-jak who encountered his expedition were distraught that these grudge-bearing *anywaa* had become “friends of the *Turuk*” (les amis des

<sup>360</sup> Charles Michel, *Vers Fachoda* (Paris: 1900) p. 297-299.

Tourouques) and that communities who failed to avoid the expedition were compelled to empty their reserves of sorghum to feed its massive numbers.<sup>361</sup>

Tesemma had not ventured very far down the Baro before he decided to avoid the river's lower reaches and ordered a subordinate *fitawrarī* named Haile to take eight hundred mounted riflemen to head south, cross the Gilo (or Gila) River, and proceed to confluence of the Khor Ajuba and the Akobo River.<sup>362</sup> From there Haile's force would cross to the drier soils on the southwest bank of the Akobo-Baro-Sobat river system, turn north, and lead his troops downstream, first to where the Akobo joined the Pibor, then to the confluence with the Sobat, and finally to the White Nile itself.<sup>363</sup> Tesemma and the bulk of his army remained near the modern-day city of Gambella, where they seem to have engaged freely in additional "living off the land".

Gaa-jak elders along the Baro now report that Abyssinian soldiers began rustling cattle and kidnapping their women and children shortly after the opening of the *Dan-Goṇa* set in 1896.<sup>364</sup> Their testimony is consistent with records of Abyssinian slaving elsewhere and reflects the *modus operandi* of an army where rank was commensurate with the size of the entourage an officer could muster.<sup>365</sup> Gaa-jak warriors did not have guns at this time and apparently never tried to overpower Tesemma's army directly but instead recouped their losses of personnel by capturing Abyssinians in counter-raids of their own. The Gaa-jak then drew on their remarkable

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<sup>361</sup> Charles Michel, *Vers Fachoda* (Paris: 1900) p. 317.

<sup>362</sup> *Fitawrarī* was an Abyssinian military title for the commander of a vanguard. Marcus has equated *fitawrarī* with the European title of baron.

<sup>363</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 106.

<sup>364</sup> Gaa-jak testimonies of this early conflict may reflect clashes with the French-led force from the previous December which did march directly along the Baro. However this smaller party returned to Goré a mere month after departing and would not have been nearly as bold or as hungry as the expedition Tessema led a few months later.

<sup>365</sup> Henry Darley, *Slaves and Ivory in Abyssinia: a record of adventure and exploration among the Ethiopian slave-raiders* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969).



skills of inclusion and assimilation to convince their captives, and deserters who had tired of serving as pack animals and human mats, to accept the more egalitarian lifestyle offered by the *nei ti naath*.

A number of Abyssinian “boys” elected to receive *gaar* and were able to join the *Dan-Gona* set because the preceding man of cattle, *Gaac Jaan* Win, had not yet closed the set. The Gaa-jak continued to use this assimilationist strategy to assimilate marginalized members of the *Turuk Mikat* (their original term for Abyssinians) in further conflicts, and roughly one hundred younger Abyssinians joined the later sets of *Car-Boic* and *Lith-Gaac*.<sup>366</sup> Most assimilated Abyssinians became the adopted children of whoever captured them, and Gaa-jak men who married assimilated Abyssinian women taken from these expeditions paid bride-wealth to their captors, as “fathers”, just as if the brides had been born within their community.<sup>367</sup> A minority of assimilated Abyssinians elected to keep at least part of their original names, and contemporary Gaa-jak elders cited men like *Tun Dhulai* of the *Cien Wau* as examples.<sup>368</sup> These Abyssinian names are almost always Islamic, suggesting that the Gaa-jak took in mostly subjugated people rather than recruiting Orthodox Christians from the ruling Amhara and Tigrey ethnic groups. The Gaa-jak cannot name any battles they won against the Abyssinians at this time, but they do not

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<sup>366</sup> Nhial Kuek Yio, Gaatluak Tung Tut, Gaatluak Laul Ruac, & Wiyual Dhoang Rik, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 18, 2013)

The hundred names of persons supposed to have been Abyssinians by their Gaa-jak descendants represented a small percentage of the total population of these communities.

<sup>367</sup> French observers were quite impressed with women who, after walking and carrying for ten hours a day would – apparently – cheerfully collect the firewood, cook the food, make the beer, and wash the feet of their menfolk. Given this work load, women clearly had reasons to the Gaa-jak.

Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 105.

<sup>368</sup> *Tun* is a common *nei ti naath* name meaning “spear”, but *Cien Wau* elders who were fluent in Amharic insisted that *Dhulai* was Ethiopian (*Buny*). *Dhulai* sounds very similar to the common Arabic Muslim name “Abdulhai” (عبد الحى) and unlike any Oromo or Amharic name I am familiar with. It is possible however that Ras Tessema’s army included Muslim boys who had become “attached” to Abyssinian soldiers during or after their conquest of the Emirate of Harar in 1887.

consider their intrusion a defeat either, since they successfully counterbalanced Abyssinian force of arms with their own assimilationist acumen.

The Gaa-jiok did not engage in the same protracted cycle of raid and counter-raid with Haile's force because the *fitawrarī*'s more mobile column broke camp every two or three days along their circuitous southerly route to the upper reaches of the White Nile. The Gaa-jiok also seem to have started out on better terms with Haile's force because the first party of *anywaa* guides who had joined the Abyssinians to pillage the Jikāny turned back as the expedition prepared to cross the Gilo River and enter lands they apparently described as the territory of "bad Yambos [*anywaa*] who are allies of the Nuers".<sup>369</sup>

The first Gaa-jiok to meet the Abyssinians were the Cieṇ Kuek and Cieṇ Thiēp sections of the Cieṇ Waṅkec who had followed Yioi Bini to the banks of the Pibor River. This community made their dry-season camps on the Pibor's west bank, directly along the route that Haile's expedition took after crossing the Akobo River. Both Cieṇ Waṅkec elders and the log of a Russian accompanying Haile attest that Yioi Bini welcomed Haile and accepted two Abyssinian flags as tokens of an informal agreement. Yioi Bini and Haile seem to have felt genuinely committed to this agreement, but the Abyssinian forces were not highly disciplined, and some (presumably hungry) Abyssinian soldiers also shot some Cieṇ Waṅkec, slaughtered an entire herd of cattle, and took three women captive.<sup>370</sup>

Following this offensive incident, Haile's forces proceeded downstream to Nasir, crossed into the territory of the Lōu confederation, where they built a temporary bridge across the Khor

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<sup>369</sup> Charles Michel, *Vers Fashoda* (Paris, 1900) p. 314.

<sup>370</sup> Aratmonov says these women were taken for questioning, local elders claim they were killed.

Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 184-185.

Leonid Aratamonov, *Through Ethiopia to the White Nile, the 1897-1899 Expedition* (Moscow, 1979) p. 97-98.

Nyanding, and eventually reached the banks of the White Nile near the mouth of the Khor Fulluth. The expedition finally planted the Abyssinian flag on the east bank and allowed a Russian Cossack in the party to swim across the Nile and raise the French tricolor on the west bank as well. The Abyssinians found no trace or rumor of the French, and they apparently were much more interested in asserting their own rights to east bank of the Nile than helping the French claim Fashoda. Haile refused French observers' requests that the mission either cross the Sobat or the White Nile to reach Fashoda, or wait for Marchand (who was supposed to have arrived from the south a year earlier) by stating "We have not enough food. My men are sick. The river is rising. We will die in the swamps. Let us go."<sup>371</sup>

The Gaa-jiok had not mobilized to challenge the Abyssinians in open battle, but individuals who resented their predations devised a means of combating the invaders. Residents of the Sobat had learned from their dealings with Arab *Turuk* that "white" officers (whom they described as red or pink) were generally the commanders. Some Gaa-jiok apparently concluded from this stereotype that Maurice Potter, a Swiss artist accompanying Haile's forces to find Marchand, held similar status and took up positions in the dense elephant grass, avoided Abyssinian gunfire, and slew the unfortunate European.<sup>372</sup>

The death of a Swiss national would not have troubled Haile, but Europeans' logs and Jikāny elders both agree that many Abyssinian men and horses died of disease during the perilous trip back to the Abyssinian highlands. Many soldiers and slaves also deserted Haile's

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<sup>371</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 107.

<sup>372</sup> Fievre, the other Frenchman on the expedition, seems to have had no idea who speared Potter or why. Some Cierj Laanj elders claim their forefathers waylaid *Turuk* who marched up the Sobat around this time, but it is not clear which party this one may have been.

Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 107.

army, and, according to *nei ti naath* elders, at least some Abyssinians who struggled to survive in the Sudd turned for aid to *nei ti naath* communities.

Eastern *nei ti naath* have maintained an extremely popular oral tradition that part of the Abyssinian expedition on this return trek visited Dunden̄'s mound and established a kind of covenant with the local peoples. Giet Jal's version of this tradition, recorded in 1982, actually names its leader as the *fitawrarī* Haile himself. However, it seems probable that the elders Giet Jal consulted invoked Haile as a symbolic reverence to the party in general (or that Giet Jal may have suggested this unusually specific detail to his sources in the course of his conversations). Douglas Johnson also recorded a lengthy account of this visit, as told in the late 1970s by one of Dunden̄'s grandsons, and mentioned other variations virtually indistinguishable from the narratives given in 2013 by Eastern Jikāny elders.<sup>373</sup> These elders report that Abyssinians (known today as *Buny*) came to beg food, which certainly agrees with the desperate plight described by the Europeans accompanying the expedition, and Dunden̄ may indeed have given steers to the starving Abyssinians.<sup>374</sup> Eastern *nei ti naath* claims today that Dunden̄ predicted that his people would one day follow those steers are crediting the prophet with predicting how the Lou, and especially the Eastern Jikāny, in future wars would take shelter from British colonial rule on the Ethiopian side of the border.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936)" in Donald Donham and Wendy Jamed (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 242-243.

<sup>374</sup> Charles Michel, *Vers Fashoda* (Paris, 1900) p. 314.

Leonid Aratamonov, *Through Ethiopia to the White Nile, the 1897-1899 Expedition* (Moscow, 1979) p. 97-98.

<sup>375</sup> As Johnson also notes, most contemporary accounts say that Haile Salassie himself was the one who visited Dunden̄ though many persons also have enough formal schooling to note this as a historical impossibility as the future emperor was only a toddler at the time of Tessema's mission. Regardless of historicity, this popular claim goes to the heart of this tale's central message of reciprocity in Nuer-Ethiopian relations.

Marchand came close to meeting the Abyssinians, as his first boats reached the confluence of the Sobat and the White Nile later that same year on the sixth of July. The French received accurate reports from local *cøllø* about the Abyssinians and sent boats racing up the Sobat, where they found plenty of Abyssinian flags but no Abyssinians. Marchand's men, most of whom were Senegalese, then concentrated on securing their exposed position. They met with *cøllø* delegates and compelled the reigning *rädh* (Kur Nyidhög) to sign an agreement written in both French and Arabic (neither of which he spoke) as they began repairing the ruined Turco-Egyptian fort at Fashoda.<sup>376</sup>

The Mahdists learned almost immediately of the French landing at Fashoda from some of Kur Nyidhög's messengers. The Mahdists had supported Kur Nyidhög personally by helping him overcome rival claimants to his title back in 1892, and the *cøllø* preferred an essentially absentee *Turuk* like the Mahdists over these new *Turuk*, who clearly planned to set up shop where the *cøllø* could not avoid them. The Mahdists had not maintained a presence in Fashoda or any other part of the Sudd for several years and, since Kitchener was already closing in on Omdurman, they could have chosen to ignore the French occupation of these unmanned ruins.<sup>377</sup>

The Mahdists might have exploited Marchand's arrival to enlist the French against the British if Khalifia Abdallāhi had rivaled Menelik in statecraft, or if Mahdist religious zeal had left more room for pragmatic alliances. In fact, the Khalifia had even received the French tricolor from an Abyssinian emissary, along with Menelik's explicit advice that flying this flag would

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<sup>376</sup> Darrell Bates, *The Fashoda Incident* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>377</sup> Martin Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1898-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 3.

forestall any British attacks.<sup>378</sup> The proud Mahdists not only rejected Menelik's council but also commenced an assault on Fashoda a month after Marchand arrived there.

The sedentary *cøllø* around Fashoda did not have the same history of voluntarily assimilating foreign men through *gaar* as their *nei ti naath* neighbors. However, they had ample experience with rival claimants to their kingship and knew how to play one group of *Turuk* against another, while reminding both parties of the value of their support. When the Mahdists brought in old civilian steamboats, retooled for battle, and fired on the French, Kur Nyidhög marshalled his warriors outside the French fort in a show of strength. Kur Nyidhög wisely waited to see how the contest developed and declined to join the fray when he saw the Mahdists were not up to the task of evicting the French. The *cøllø* did not provide the French with any intelligence in their initial engagements with the Mahdists. However, they reappraised this policy of restraint when they detected an even greater threat from the Anglo-Egyptians and were the first to tell Marchand that a massive flotilla of *Turuk* was moving up the Upper White Nile in September of 1898. Later than their Abyssinian and French rivals, Kitchener and the British had finally arrived.

Unfortunately for the *cøllø*, and eastern *nei ti naath* living upstream, the French and British did not slaughter each other. Marchand and General Kitchener simply sat down together and agreed to refer the matter to Paris and London. Eventually, when the superiors in France surrendered claims on the Sudd to avoid a war with global implications, Marchand left without firing a shot. Marchand and his men then steamed up the Sobat and evacuated through Abyssinia to Djibouti while British vessels followed them up both the White Nile and the Sobat to remove any remaining French and Abyssinian flags and to assure the locals that they came in peace.

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<sup>378</sup> G. N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965).

The Cienj Laan now claim that these *Turuk* compelled them to tow the boats they used when they became lodged in vegetation and that a number of them were killed by snakes while performing services for “pink” gunmen whom they dared not refuse.<sup>379</sup> British documents do not admit to making these impositions but do relate that the Jikāny, and *nei ti naath* in general, opposed their presence and attempted to use their associations with the French and Abyssinians to shield them from the British. H. W. Jackson was the first Anglo-Egyptian officer to encounter “the Nuer” (probably *Lak* or *Thianj*), somewhere along the White Nile, and reported that the community broke into war songs when they detected his forces and warned his *Padanj* guide that they were not welcome. Marchand had told the British of Yioi Bini’s treaty with the Abyssinians, and an Anglo-Egyptian flotilla under the command of one “Abu Klea” forcefully occupied Yioi Bini’s home and held one of his sons as a hostage until the community surrendered their Abyssinian flags and French clothing.<sup>380</sup> This show of force did not immediately end the matter, and Abu Klea spent the rest of the year burning down the villages of Gaa-jiok men he found displaying French flags and carrying old Abyssinian correspondence. Finally, the Anglo-Egyptian regime ensured that Marchand steamed up the Sobat, and after a brief stay with Yioi Bini (who did not know Marchand had betrayed him), left “their realm”.<sup>381</sup>

The Anglo-Egyptians spent much of the next three years getting Menelik to agree to treat the Akobo and Baro Rivers as the boundaries between the territories that British and Abyssinians claimed. Anglo-Egyptian officers based around Fashoda also began to establish ties with local

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<sup>379</sup> Pal Juac, Tut Thon, Tongyik Ruot Kor, Jok Luak Duop, Simon Kueth Reeth, & John Gaac Cuol, interview with author, Ulang, South Sudan (January 29, 2013).

<sup>380</sup> This is the name Giet Jal has produced from British archival sources, but it may represent a distortion. “Abu Klea” was the name British officers gave to the Battle of ‘Abu Tuleih (أبو ظليخ) in January of 1885 because they could not pronounce the actual Arabic name of the wadi where they engaged the Mahdists.

<sup>381</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 191-207.

Padaŋ, principally with men from the Luac confederation who had learned Arabic while collaborating with merchant-slavers in the 1860s and 1870s or while enslaved to the Mahdists in the 1880s and 1890s. British officers who drew their knowledge from old allies of Cier Deŋ and Nuäär Mər developed a predictably negative opinion of Dundəŋ, or DeŋKur (his “steer-name” or *ner*), as a fanatic *nei ti naath* version of the Mahdi.<sup>382</sup>

Eventually the British officer in charge of Fashoda, named Major Blewitt, decided to organize a “Dengkur patrol” to deal with this supposed warmonger, but the campaign did not go exactly as planned. Anglo-Egyptian troops found no crazed zealots who fought to the death but instead marched unopposed to the mound because Dundəŋ told the Lou that divinity did not want them to fight these *Turuk*. Major Blewitt’s greedy guides then desecrated the mound and looted its ivory tusks, which found ready markets in Egypt and in Abyssinia, before the whole party returned home. British officers began to realize they had been manipulated after this incident and briefly imprisoned some of the conspirators, but they had already ruined any chance of integrating the prophet into their administration, tarnishing both Dundəŋ’s reputation as a powerful prophet and their own claims that they had come in peace.<sup>383</sup> Blewitt’s wiser successors tried to legitimize their administration by arbitrating disputes among *nei ti naath*, as Dundəŋ had done. However the British did not win many hearts and minds since their authority rested on the same coercive force as earlier Turco-Egyptian and Abyssinian *Turuk*, and their offers of friendship seemed as insincere as those of any other *Turuk*.

### **Ivory, Breechloaders, and the War of Diu Majak (1902 – 1913)**

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<sup>382</sup> Doulgas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 116-118.

<sup>383</sup> Doulgas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 116-118.



Many *nei ti naath* were troubled by the sudden flood of *Turuk* incursions by land and by water in 1897 and 1898, and Dunden's followers were also dismayed by the senseless raid on the mound in 1902. However, eastern *nei ti naath* suffered no further regular raiding after 1898, and most communities could generally ignore the thin Anglo-Egyptian presence in the region and saw no need to move to militarize for self-defense. What did interest *nei ti naath*, and particularly Eastern Jikāny men, was the opportunity to acquire cattle for bride-wealth by conducting commerce on the Abyssinian frontier.

Contemporary Gaa-jak elders associate the beginnings of their grandfathers' ivory-for-cattle commerce with relationships forged with Oromo whom they assimilated from the mixed crowds of Tesemma's army.<sup>384</sup> Some elders also say that Abyssinians who told their countrymen about the ring of elephant tusks encircling Dunden's mound inspired ivory merchants to descend from the highlands. Douglas Johnson has also hypothesized that this traffic may have begun much earlier and that Abyssinians who had traded with the Padaṇ simply continued to do business with the Gaa-jak when they absorbed local Padaṇ.<sup>385</sup> In any case, British records show that Oromo merchants from the highlands and a few enterprising Greeks were already selling highlander cattle for Gaa-jak elephant tusks by 1901, when Anglo-Egyptian officers began monitoring trading activity on the banks of the Baro.<sup>386</sup> These same British records also show

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<sup>384</sup> Tap Luak Wer & Nyak Tuong Wan, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 7, 2013).

<sup>385</sup> Douglas Johnson has suggested that this ivory traffic may actually have begun back before most of the Padaṇ east of the Sobat had accepted *gaar* and become *nei ti naath*. The European traveler Juan Maria Schuver reported finding 2,000 Dinka troops (presumably Padaṇ) serving with Oromo Lord Jote Tullu in 1881, and Johnson has hypothesized that some of them later joined the Jikāny.

Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936)" in Donald Donham and Wendy Jamed (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 231-232.

<sup>386</sup> Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936)" in Donald Donham and Wendy Jamed (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 234-235.

that eastern *nei ti naath* began buying guns instead of cattle only in 1910, after their *anywaa* neighbors had acquired thousands of breech-loading rifles and begun making plans to use them to annihilate both the Jikāny and Lōu.

Eastern *nei ti naath* who faced *anywaa* gunmen could not simply wait for their neighbors to disappear over the horizon or return to fortified trading posts, as they had done with the initial waves of *Turuk*, because these new invaders were interested in fleeting plunder rather than fixing international borders for all time. Moreover, everyone knew that *anywaa* had once occupied all the banks of the Sobat River as well as the headwaters along the Akobo, Pibor, and Baro Rivers and could use that history of prior occupation as a pretext for raiding the Lōu and Jikāny who had moved into the region only recently. Between 1910 and 1912, Eastern *nei ti naath* felt compelled to combat the predations of gun-toting *anywaa* by taking unprecedented military actions. The Lōu and certain sections of the Gaa-jjok living west of the Pibor River called in the Anglo-Egyptians as allies but discovered that the British were scandalously impotent in this kind of warfare by mobile bands. Alternatively, the Gaa-jak and other Eastern Jikāny who lived too far to the east to consider British support had far greater success in wars with both Oromo raiders from Abyssinia and *anywaa* warlords when they took matters into their own hands.

The sedentary *anywaa* had suffered more than their Gaa-jak neighbors from Tesemma's initial invasion because they could not easily relocate their villages and because they lay more directly in the path of the Abyssinian expedition. Unlike *nei ti naath*, who enjoyed relative peace after 1898, the *anywaa* suffered the continual predations of Tesemma (promoted from *dejasmach* to *ras*), who had always seen the mission to the White Nile primarily as a means of taking personal control of the lower Baro River Valley. The *anywaa* quickly learned that Tesemma had an insatiable appetite for ivory, because in the 1880s Menelik had begun demanding that all his

vassals pay annual tribute in either ivory or gold.<sup>387</sup> Enterprising *anywaa* quickly depleted local ivory stocks when they found that they could not spear elephants fast enough to satisfy Abyssinian warlord-entrepreneurs or the Oromo and Greek traders, who were all involved in trafficking tusks to Djibouti and the Indian Ocean market.<sup>388</sup> Elephant-hunting *anywaa* responded by investing in Abyssinian rifles, initially only muzzle-loaders, to kill more elephants, and this shift from selling ivory to acquire cattle and other economic forms of wealth to buying powerful means of destruction gradually facilitated a new kind of warfare.

Initially, *anywaa* armed with muzzle-loading rifles managed to defeat only other *anywaa* who lacked firearms, but these weapons did not offer a clear advantage over *nei ti naath* who could marshal more personnel, even though they fought only with spears and shields. The first *anywaa* who tried to use guns to vanquish eastern *nei ti naath* was a royal named Odiel wä Koat, who managed to stockpile guns by paying tribute to Tesemma. Odiel felt strong enough to lead an attack on Yioi Bini's home community along the Pibor sometime after the initiation of *Dan-Gona* (1896), but Odiel lost forty men and seven rifles when Yioi Bini's warriors forced him to retreat.<sup>389</sup>

Odiel's miscalculation earned him the ire of not only *nei ti naath* but the Abyssinians and the Briths as well.<sup>390</sup> In 1903 Odiel felt compelled to attend a peace meeting, where British officers warned him that the Gaa-jiok were then under their protection. Odiel suffered

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<sup>387</sup> Slave-raiding among the *anywaa* grew so intense that Lord Cromer in Cairo and General Wingate in Khartoum began exchanging letters on the subject in 1906 .

Evelyn Cromer's reply to McMurdo's account of Abyssinian slave raiding on the Anuak ,1906, report 278/1/1-125, Sudan Material, Durham University Sepcial Collections Library, Durham, U.K.

<sup>388</sup> Yohannes to Russian Envoy, 1909, Reference Number 7622, Ethiopian National Archives and Library, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>389</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (New York: Percy Lund & Humpreis Co., 1940) p. 11.

<sup>390</sup> Deng Nhial & Kuek Kiir, interview with author, Korenge Payam, South Sudan (January 21, 2013).

Tesemma's censure also, since the *ras* did not wish for any confrontation with the British.

Tesemma imprisoned Odiel in the highland city of Bure for a time and, around 1906, transferred his support to another *anywaa* royal named Olimi wä Agaanya.<sup>391</sup> Olimi respected Tesemma's wishes by leading some of the Openo confederation of *anywaa* against the Gaa-jak, who had no protection by the British, but this mission also failed when the Gaa-jak speared Olimi.<sup>392</sup>

Elephant-hunting *anywaa* gained an upper hand over *nei ti naath* only when they acquired much more lethal breech-loading rifles in the years between 1906 and 1910. These weapons reached the Abyssinian frontier after the Austrian army rid themselves of their antiquated Werder rifles, manufactured in the 1870s, by selling them to a syndicate of American and European gun merchants, who shipped them to Djibouti.<sup>393</sup> The *anywaa* thus gained access to rapid-firing weapons, and particular *anywaa* royals who received large supplies of these guns from Tesemma began consolidating power by turning them on rivals and using them to enforce fealty among their followers. *Anywaa* royals who allied with Tesemma used his arms to crush other *anywaa* who had remained independent and compelled vanquished groups like the Ciro confederation to flee toward *nei ti naath* territories, where some assimilated into Lou or Jikāny communities. This brutal process of armed *anywaa* consolidation reached its apex in 1910 when a patron of Tesemma named Okwei wä Cam gained control of the *anywaa* royal emblems and effective control of the Adono and Nyikaani confederations of *anywaa* living between the Gilo and Pibor rivers. Okwei furthered this consolidation of power by marrying his sister to the son of

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<sup>391</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 254.

<sup>392</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (New York: Percy Lund & Humphreys Co., 1940) p. 11.

<sup>393</sup> Robert Collins, "Anuak" in Carl Skutsch (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities* (New York: Routledge, 2005) p. 112-113.

another royal, named Diu Majak, who held sway over most of the Openo *anywaa*.<sup>394</sup> According to Gaa-jiok elders, Okwei was the son of the very same Jiokthianj Lual whom Yioi Bini had speared at a dinner party as vengeance for the death of his son. Aside from this personal vendetta, Okwei and his *anywaa* followers had a chance to reverse the process of ethnic transformation between 1855 and 1897 that had compelled *anywaa* to either become *nei ti naath* or give up cattle completely.<sup>395</sup>

Both the Lou and the Gaa-jiok were poorly prepared to face Okwei's onslaught, because they had turned to feuding among themselves in the years since they had defeated Odiel, and especially after Dunden's death in 1906. The two halves of the Lou confederation, the Mor-Lou and Gun-Lou, turned against each other in a conflict remembered today as the "War of the Returning Hyena" (*Kör Luny Yaak*). Veterans of this brutal conflict later told Evans-Pritchard it was "one of the worst wars in Nuer history", where "so many people were killed that the dead were left for the hyenas" whose feasting on the human carrion gave this conflict its name.<sup>396</sup>

The Gaa-jiok had not been reduced to animal food, but they had also devolved into localized blood feuds. The Cieŋ Minyal section of the Cieŋ Wankec fought with one section of the Cieŋ Laan (called the Cieŋ Lony) and killed an "aristocrat" (*diel*) named Lul Yöthnyan. While that fight continued, two different sections of the Cieŋ Laan went to war with each other when the Cieŋ Guandŋ section killed an "aristocrat" (*diel*) of the Cieŋ Kowai named Banuan Luot Kowai.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Note the *anywaa*, unlike the *cøllø* had multiple royal lines, as anyone who had every held the royal beads could claim the title.

<sup>395</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 256.

<sup>396</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) p. 144.

<sup>397</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 250.

Most importantly for weakening their collective defense against an *anywaa* invasion, Yioi Bini's community that bordered the *anywaa* along the Pibor also split in two. Outsiders generally thought of Yioi Bini as the leader of all Cienj Wankec colony on the Pibor, but the reality was more complex. Yioi spoke only for the Cienj Kuek section of his community but generally enjoyed the support of the Cienj Thiap and of their ranking elder, Kör Lieplia, who, like Yioi, belonged to the marriageability-set *Thut* (initiated in the 1850s). Both these allied groups had assimilated outsiders to grow in size during the 1880s and 1890s, but the natural resources of the Pibor River Valley had not increased to meet the resulting higher demands on them. The two elders managed to smooth over an initial quarrel over the rights to fish in a pool called Kunmil, but they could not eliminate the underlying problems of overcrowding. Eventually the two groups came to blows after one Cienj Kuek man maliciously kicked a pile of grain into the dirt and jeered at a Cienj Thiap daughter who had been gathering it. Four Cienj Thiap men retaliated by killing the offender's brother, igniting a series of tit-for-tat slayings that Yioi Bini and Kör Lieplia resolved only by agreeing that the Cienj Thiap should move off to the west to relatively open territory too distant for either group to render timely aid to the other in the case of a military assault.<sup>398</sup>

Gaa-jiok communities who knew that Okwei was the son of Jiokthianj Lual seem to have recognized the security threat at the last moment, since they agreed to pay a cattle tribute to the British in 1910, for the very first time, on the eve of this conflict, presumably because they wanted to ensure that the British would provide the protection they had promised back in 1903.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Yöth Guadonj, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (January 19, 2013).

The four Cienj Thiap men who shed first blood were Cany from the set *Lajak* and Cat, Mat, and Juoc of the set *Boi-Loc*. The daughter they avenged was the paternal aunt of Yöth Guadonj. Members of the Cienj Kuek also killed Ræeth Danbil and Yoa Jak as part of their retaliation.

<sup>399</sup> Omuot Bukjiok, interview with author, Jikmir, South Sudan (February 13, 2013).

Unfortunately for the Gaa-jiok, and eastern *nei ti naath* in general, the British proved to be fairly impotent allies who failed to preempt raiding or to enact effective retribution.

Okwei wä Cam and Diu Majak commenced a coordinated assault on all eastern *nei ti naath* when *ras* Tesemma, who had discouraged crossing the Pibor, died in 1911.<sup>400</sup> Okwei wä Cam's well-armed forces cut through the Cienj Kuek and the Cienj Thiëp, kept on marching across the territories of both the Mor-Lou and the Gun-Lou, and wreaked greater devastation among the eastern *nei ti naath* than any force that had yet assailed them. Okwei stopped only when he reached the banks of the Bahr el-Zeraf and returned home with hundreds of captives and thousands of cattle.<sup>401</sup> Diu Majak's warriors also tore through a number of Gaa-jak communities, beginning with the Cienj Thianj Tär, who lived between the Baro River and the southern bank of the Khor Jukow, and the Cienj Cany to their west. Eventually Diu Majak's war party stopped to slaughter cattle and enjoy the fruits of their plundering at an unusual patch of forest called Biöt, just east of the Khor Machar, that still exists today.<sup>402</sup>

Eastern *nei ti naath* responded to this unprecedented scale of violence with equally unprecedented unity as they mounted coordinated counterattacks against both Diu Majak along the Baro River and on Okwei wä Cam's base between the Pibor and Gilo Rivers in 1911. Eastern *nei ti naath* turned their attention first to Diu Majak, because he had made himself an easier

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Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936)" in Donald Donham and Wendy Jamed (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 222-224.

Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 249-250.

<sup>400</sup> Peter Garrestson, "Vicious cycles: ivory, slaves, and arms on the new Maji frontier" in Donald Donham and Wendy Jamed (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 203.

<sup>401</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak* (New York: & Humpries Co., 1940) p. 11.

<sup>402</sup> Nhial Kuek Yio, Gaatluak Tunj Tut, and Gaatluak Lual Ruey, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 18, 2013).

target by arrogantly erecting a permanent base within their territory. Gaa-jak refugees regrouped in Cieŋ Wau territory along the Khor Machar, and warriors poured in from all the untouched Gaa-jak communities to the north, as well as from the Gaa-guoŋ and a number of Gaa-jiok communities including the Cieŋ Yual, and even some of the Cieŋ Laaŋ. The *nei ti naath* took up positions surrounding Diu Majak's camp at Biöt during the night and agreed to mimic the cry of an *anywaa* rooster at first light as a signal to launch a coordinated attack.<sup>403</sup>

Eastern Jikäny warriors exploited the dim light and the element of surprise to limit the lethality of *anywaa* fast-firing breechloaders, and the marksmen ended up shooting a number of Eastern Jikäny only in the foot and other extremities.<sup>404</sup> The *nei ti naath* closed with the *anywaa* gunmen with tolerable losses, overwhelmed them with their sheer numbers, and pressed their pursuit even after a Cieŋ Wau man named Lual Diŋ speared Diu Majak on the banks of the Khor Jukow.<sup>405</sup> The next day the Eastern Jikäny reached the original border between the *anywaa* and Cieŋ Thiaŋ Täŋ on the Abyssinian side of the border but continued probing deeper into *anywaa* territory for a full week. The Gaa-jak, Gaa-guoŋ, and the Cieŋ Yual considered this 1911 battle, which was the first major engagement with firearms, as the definitive moment for an entire generation of men and memorialized it in the “Song of Diu Majak's War” (*Diit Kör Diu Majak*).

The anthropologist Dereje Feyissa has written about this particular song within the context of contemporary ethnic conflicts in the Gambella Region in Ethiopia, especially since the

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<sup>403</sup> Traditionally *nei ti naath* did not keep any fowl for two reasons. First they abhorred the idea of eating either eggs or birds, and, second, keeping these birds was incompatible with their highly mobile lifestyle.

<sup>404</sup> One of these men shot in the foot was Yua Thuony of the Cieŋ Wau. Others like Deŋ Cuol Roa and Ruey Dök Cuol were gunned down before they reached the *anywaa* lines.

<sup>405</sup> Many of Lual Diŋ's descendants now living in Nebraska express no knowledge of their ancestor's heroism but he receives unanimous credit among various sections of Gaa-jak within South Sudan and Ethiopia.



ballad speaks of annihilating “boys” who lacked *gaar* (i.e. *anywaa*).<sup>406</sup> In the context of 1911, its hyperbolic boasting served as a useful way of militarizing marriageability marks to galvanize this extraordinary military alliance. For eighty years Eastern Jikāny had not fought as a unified confederation, and back then they had been a much smaller and easily united group. In 1911, Eastern Jikāny achieved an unprecedented unity, not by emphasizing descent (since more had Padaŋ roots than ever) but by focusing on *gaar* and the man of cattle who performed it (Gaac Jaan Win). They also invoked the divinity WIU (sacred to both Jikāny and the Döök-Padaŋ), and glossed Latjoor’s famous crossing at Blue Heron’s Ford (Wath Döök) as a “conquest” so they could link this heritage to the militarization of 1911, as their descendants memorized in song.

Cä köör loc kä Biöt Kuṭh Lual tuol /cie de be dhöl ... yṭok Jaan tee Win Gaac keko ... Yaŋ Gaŋ Käny ku bee dhool, cä ku lök cä we kör. Cä kēec dā ṇaac ε rööl diaal. Cä ṇaac mā Majak. Cä ṇaac mā Bär Jiör... Coalä Laan kenε Ken...	I turned the war at Biöt Kuṭh a red cow cannot be taken by [uninitiated] boys... Gaac had regained Jaan Win’s cattle... A cow of father [ji]Käny was taken by boys, <sup>407</sup> I rejected this, I went to war. My anger was known in every country. I knew even Majak [the birthplace of Diu Majak] I knew even the <i>anywaa</i> of Jiör [Gilo River]... I called [Cien] Laan and Ken [Cien Yual]...
Jikāny wane raare Wath Döök. wa kiire Gaa-jak cike dual... /Cie kac maa diit Wiu, /kan pek dhiaac /kan ε goaŋ ... bane räth Tierεgak	The Jikāny went out of Heron’s Ford. I went to the river [but] the Gaa-jak were afraid... It is not a lie that WIU is great, [WIU] was not useless nor bent... We will trek to Tierεgak [an <i>anywaa</i> settlement]. <sup>408</sup>

Contemporary elders report that Eastern Jikāny warriors pressed deep into *anywaa* territory, even to the village of Tierεgak that lies to the east of the modern Ethiopian town of Gambella,

<sup>406</sup> Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

<sup>407</sup> In *thok naath*, the word or prefix *ji* means “you” but can also mean “you people of”. *Ji-kāny* literally means “People of the Sunrise”, which explains how this particle can be omitted in a song without causing confusion.

<sup>408</sup> Nhial Kuek Yio, Gaatluak Tun Tut, and Gaatluak Lual Ruey, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 18, 2013).

but they did not attempt to occupy any of this territory. A certain Kuṁny Yac who led the war party ordered a halt at Tiēregak, and the warriors then dispersed to their homes.<sup>409</sup>

The Gaa-jak also repelled another assault from the Abyssinian army of *ato* Zerefu in 1912.<sup>410</sup> Zerefu was an Amhara lord who ruled the Oromo region around Gidami and whose forces managed to fight their way down the Baro to Jukow before the Gaa-jak killed a fourth of this Abyssinian army and compelled Zerefu to retreat.<sup>411</sup> After this second victory over the *anywaa* and their provisional Abyssinian allies, the Gaa-jak, made peace with their foes from the highlands. The Gaa-jak chose Thowat Gaac and Koryom Tut, who both hailed from the border community of the Cieṅ Thianṅ Tär, to represent their side opposite Ker Markom of the Openo *anywaa* and Nyanṅ Wupuṁ from Nyiice on the Gilo River, as well as an unknown Abyssinian official.<sup>412</sup> All sides then agreed to return to the lands they had held in 1909. The Gaa-jak also ransomed back a number of their captured companions from the Abyssinians with ivory but did not return any of the rifles or captives they had taken.

The peace that concluded this first-ever war fought by *nei ti naath* with guns illustrated how the commerce in modern weapons that undergirded militarization was already altering political power among the Gaa-jak generations. Thowat Gaac belonged to the “White-Hearts” (*Boi-loc*, initiated in the 1860s) marriageability-set and typified the septuagenarians who generally represented their communities at these kinds of meetings, but Koryom Tut was from the “Prophet’s-Rod-Hedgehog-Colored-Steer” set (*Dan-Gonja* initiated circa 1896) and roughly

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<sup>409</sup> Tap Luak Wer Dundit and Nyak Tuṁṅ Wan, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 8, 2013).

<sup>410</sup> *Ato* iwas originally a military title but is used by many Ethiopians today in the same way that Americans use Mr.

<sup>411</sup> Douglas Johnson, “On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936) in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 229.

<sup>412</sup> Tap Luak Wer Dundit and Nyak Tuṁṅ Wan, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 8, 2013).

forty years younger than Thowat Gaac. The Gaa-jak on the border chose Koryom Tut as one of their spokesmen because he had been one of the first to start selling elephant tusks for guns instead of for cattle, contributing significantly to their wartime success. Shortly after this peace meeting, Tesemma's successor officially incorporated Koryom Tut into his administration in Abyssinia by awarding him the rank of *fitawari*.<sup>413</sup>

Further west along the banks of the Pibor River, the Lou and the resident Gaa-jiok, who had fewer guns than the Gaa-jak, persuaded the Anglo-Egyptian regime to support them against their *anywaa* aggressors. Emissaries including Yioi Bini's son, Camcar Yioi, and Kör Lieplia's grandson, Taiyau Nhial Kör, convinced the British to send one hundred and forty troops in two gun boats to the juncture of the Akobo, Pibor, and Sobat Rivers. The *nei ti naath* and the Anglo-Egyptians also agreed that, once this task force arrived, they would launch a joint counter-attack against the *anywaa*, designed to break Okwei's power in the region.

A detachment from the thirteenth Sudanese battalion (Sudanese troops with British and Egyptian officers) reached the Pibor on November first of 1911, but local Gaa-jiok informed the company that the wily Okwei had already crossed the Pibor into the jungle of Nyikani near the Gilo River. Missing their intended quarry, the gunboats split up and conducted simultaneous attacks on the two largest *anywaa* settlements on the immediate banks of the Pibor, allowing *nei ti naath* to "recapture" a number of the cattle, women, and children they had lost in the preceding raiding. The following month British officers noted with pleasure that, for the first time ever,

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<sup>413</sup> Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936) in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 239.

Gaa-jiok communities had delivered their annual tribute of cattle before local police approached them in an apparent effort to ensure British protection.<sup>414</sup>

British officials first in Khartoum, and then Cairo and London as well, approved a second, more aggressive retaliatory raid against Okwei's home base on the Abyssinian side of the border for 1912 and spent several months moving in supplies on steamers and on the heads of their *nei ti naath* bearers. Battalion commander Major Levenson then led four hundred Sudanese troops and thirty-nine officers (twenty-one Egyptians and seventeen British) across the Pibor into the Nyikani territory, where, on the Ides of March, they walked into an ambush. Fifty-four Sudanese soldiers and five officers (two British and three Egyptians) died before British heavy artillery rescued the hapless Anglo-Egyptian force by shattering the surrounding forest with a barrage of shrapnel that compelled the *anywaa* to retreat. The British did not consider the casualties of their *nei ti naath* allies important enough to record them, but the Gaa-jiok remember burying both Camcar and Taiyu Nhail at that battlefield.<sup>415</sup>

The Anglo-Egyptians found and burned Okwei's abandoned village the following day. They then returned to the Pibor, where they learned that in their absence the *anywaa* had conducted more raids against the *nei ti naath*. Levenson immediately ordered a second mission across the Pibor but never found any *anywaa*, who easily evaded him in their own swamps. Accepting their failure, the Anglo-Egyptians set about erecting posts along the Akobo and Pibor Rivers as a means of containing raiders they had not defeated. In 1913, the British noted that many Lou and Gaa-jiok stopped paying tribute to a government that had offered so little in return

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<sup>414</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 261-262.

<sup>415</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 268-273.

for their cattle, even as the Gaa-jak had defeated Diu Majak, and the Abyssinians, without *Turuk* aid.

Many *nei ti naath* who observed both the War of Diu Majak and the failed campaign against Okwei concluded that they were better off arming themselves by selling ivory to the Abyssinians for guns than outsourcing their defense to the uncomprehending and undependable British and redoubled their investments in breechloaders and ammunition. The venerable Gaac Jaan Win facilitated this trend by turning his homestead at Wunakoi, a site revered by *nei ti naath*, into an epicenter of this arms trade. Many Eastern Jikāny and Lōu traveled to Wunakoi to sell cattle and ivory for guns to Oromo, Greek, and Somali merchants, or to the agents of rival Abyssinian lords like sheikh Khojali al-Hassan (who controlled the Abyssinian city of Asosa) and *dejazmach* Jote Tulla, who had regained control of his Oromo territory from *ato* Zerefu after the latter's 1912 defeat by Gaa-jak.

Gaac Jaan Win did not owe his position to *Turuk* patronage and never tried to eliminate *nei ti naath* rivals and grow rich from plunder, and he had understandable reasons for helping arm his people. However, he initiated a significant militarization of Jikāny culture by transforming a sacred space devoted to cattle-healing rituals into a commercial center. Gaa-jak gun runners used Wunakoi to forge business relationships with Abyssinian suppliers (mostly Oromo) and with other *jiēēŋ* and *nei ti naath* to the west, who also sought firearms.

Closer to the Abyssinian highlands, enterprising Gaa-jak with far weaker hereditary claims to leadership increased their stature by creating and leveraging gun-running relationships with particular Abyssinian lords. Koryom Tut of the Cien Thian Tär used his title as an Abyssinian *fitawarī* to enjoy the legal right to conduct commerce with Abyssinian agents at Goré and Bure. The Cien Thian Kaan, who lived farther north, made similar arrangements through a

relatively obscure “man of cattle” (*wut yɔɔk*) named Mut Duŋ, encamped at Baar (near what became Daga Post), who forged a partnership with Jote Tullu, the Oromo ruler of the highland city of Gidami. Other enterprising individuals, who had neither hereditary status among the *nei ti naath* nor connections to Abyssinian lords, subverted the authority of both by sneaking into the highlands just long enough to find any Oromo merchant willing to swap ivory for guns, and then disappearing. The Gaa-jak quickly depleted local elephant populations. Nevertheless these mobile herders maintained higher trade volumes than their sedentary *anywaa* neighbors by trekking deep into the Sudd in search of retreating elephant herds. The Gaa-jak also became renowned for selling their rifles for ivory across the region and trafficking guns to other *nei ti naath* and *jiëëŋ* from the Lɔu, the Gaawäär, Lək, Thiaŋ, Nyaruweŋ, and Bor confederations. In 1913, the British even discovered some Gaa-jak selling rifles in the Nuba Mountains.<sup>416</sup>

This unimpeded commerce enabled local communities to adopt firearms on their own terms, and through the conduits of their own leaders, even as it also promoted the rise of a new class of warlord whose standing flowed from the special relationships with Abyssinian *Turuk* symbolized by firearms. *Nei ti naath* experienced this intensifying process of militarization more as a continuation of tradition than as a rupture, because new trading leaders like Mut Duŋ and Koryom Tut overlapped with more traditional figures like Gaac Jaan Win.

Another figure who exemplified this fairly seamless transition from prophetic rods to modern weaponry was a Gaawäär prophet named Dual Diu, the son of the prophet Deŋ Laka who had slain Nuäär Mər and initiated the set named “Prophet’s-Rod” (*Dan*) in 1879. According to the Gaawäär, DIU, the divinity of Dual’s deceased father, first seized Dual after an elephant

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<sup>416</sup> Douglas Johnson, “On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936) in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 228, 234-235.

hunt during the very same 1912-1913 dry-season when the Gaawäär began traveling to Gaa-jak territory to sell tusks for guns. Dual then wandered into the bush and lived in seclusion for a time before returning and predicting the arrival of a herd of elephants to convince the Gaawäär that he truly did have a divinity.<sup>417</sup> This new prophet of DIU became particularly famous for buying up guns and, unlike his father, built at least part of his reputation on his ability to procure ivory tusks though the Gaawäär, not any *Turuk*, chose Dual to take up his father's mantel. The Gaawäär of the Zeraf Island lived too far from Abyssinia for Dual to become a *fitawarī*. Nevertheless, Abyssinian commerce directly contributed to the ways that all *nei ti naath* were reimagining power and prestige as flowing from the barrels of guns rather than from their prophets' rods in the decade before British conquest.

### **From Defense to Offense: New Gaa-jak “Chiefs” and the Raiding Economy (1914-1919)**

Douglas Johnson and Giet Jal have noted how *nei ti naath* during the early colonial era adopted a new word for “chief” (*kuäär*), replacing an older discourse about an owner/father (*guan*) as communities rebranded many officiants as “chiefs” (the “earth-master”, *guan muon*, became a *kuäär muon*, etc.). The problem with linking this transition with growing British control in the area is that the word clearly originates with the *anywaa* word *kwärò*, or village headman, and that “chiefs” like Koryom Tut and Mut Duṅ became the clients of Abyssinian governors after *anywaa* “chiefs” with this title had already made similar arrangements. This class of *nei ti naath* chiefs patterned on this *anywaa* model also experienced the same fundamental problem of raiding to sustain their standing. Lacking the legitimacy of figures like Gaac Jaan

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<sup>417</sup> Douglas Johnson, “On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936) in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 206.

Win, these chiefs needed to continually bring in wealth from outside their own communities to maintain their status. As elephant populations declined, raiding other villages became an increasingly attractive option. The Jikāny had turned to buying firearms originally as a means of defending themselves from a growing *anywaa* threat, but after that threat had passed, communities turned on neighbors with whom they had been at peace to make the most of their investments in military hardware.

The Gaa-jiok and the Lōu acquired a considerable number of rifles from the Gaa-jak between 1910 and 1913 and launched a series of raids in 1914 that devastated the *anywaa* along the Pibor and Akobo Rivers. These raids began as fairly understandable efforts to recoup and avenge their losses in Okwei's earlier rampage but, unlike earlier counter-raids, they did not enjoy British support. In fact some Gaa-jiok warriors who pursued *anywaa* refugees to very walls of one British outpost in 1914 were actually gunned down.<sup>418</sup> The Gaa-jiok and the Lōu profited considerably from the raids of 1914 and, coupled with voluntary assimilations, the Gaa-jiok brought in enough *anywaa* to ensure that the *Lith-Gaac* marriageability-set (opened in 1913) included a higher percentage of persons with *anywaa* names than any of the previous sets.<sup>419</sup> In sum *nei ti naath* saw that they fared better when armed than they had when the British had supported them.

Neither the Gaa-jiok, nor the Lōu, nor anyone else, ever caught Okwei, but *nei it naath* did stop raiding toward the end of 1914 and apparently felt confident that they had inflicted enough damage to deter future incursions. The Gaa-jiok and the Lōu sent word to the Nyikaani and Ciro *anywaa*, as well as to the British, that they were ready for peace. Eastern *nei ti naath*

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<sup>418</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 274-276.

<sup>419</sup> Some of these names are specific references to abducted children such as a "Night Child" (*Gaat-Wäär*). Other times persons simply kept their original names like Oker, which often indicates that the person chose to assimilate.



viewed the resulting accord as an extension of the earlier agreement between the Gaa-jak and the Open *anywaa* that had returned all parties to their 1909 positions and allowed for prisoner redemption (the British flattered themselves at this treaty somehow recognized their authority). This peace, like the Gaa-jak accord along the Baro, held because of the respected statures of the *nei ti naath* and *anywaa* leaders involved, and because both sides were by then fairly evenly matched, but peace created its own set of problems for the armed chiefs who had developed a taste for, if not a dependence on, plunder.

Mut Duṅ had a remote hereditary claim to the status of a man of cattle, but he was not a descendant of Jaan Win, and the Eastern Jikāny never recognized his right to open or close marriageability-sets, even after Gaac Jaan Win, the recognized officiant, died in 1913. Mut Duṅ was, however, a shrewd and indomitable leader, who realized that peace with the *anywaa* in the south left restless Gaa-jak and Gaa-jiok youths amenable to raiding but with few outlets for their aggressive inclinations. Mut Duṅ knew he could not monopolize the ivory trade, but, by organizing raids against the Koma and Mabaan to the north, he put himself in a favorable position to win favor with many by directing the distribution of booty that youthful raiders seized. Mut Duṅ was also extremely skilled at exploiting rivalries among the Abyssinians in the highlands. He exploited the proximity of his Cienj Kaan community to both the semi-autonomous province of Bani-Shangul and the region of Kelem around the city of Gidima and compelled the rulers of each highland region to compete with each other for Gaa-jak ivory. Mut Duṅ originally allied with *dajazmach* Jote Tulla of Gidima but consistently supported whoever offered him the best deal. In 1915, he encouraged men from the Cienj Kaan and Cienj Luony sections of the Cienj Thianj living around the dry-season settlements of Baar and Loṅɛcuk to travel to Addis Ababa and support sheikh Kholjali al-Hassan of Bani-Shangul in a dispute with Jote Tulla. Those who

made this journey returned with cattle, rifles, and donkeys, and Mut Duŋ continued to position himself as the primary beneficiary of the rivalry between Kholjali al-Hassan and Jote Tulla.<sup>420</sup>

Mut Duŋ also operated a bit like feudal Abyssinian lords who protected “their subjects” even as they raided neighboring communities from the same ethnic group. He consistently protected the Koma who lived on the Daga River (and who intermarried with the Cieŋ Kaan) from *Turuk* privations. During one Abyssinian raid in 1917, rode out in person on a donkey and convinced the raiders to retire. In 1918, the notorious slaver, *fitawrarī* Nagaw Ashana, also demanded Mut Duŋ hand over the Koma captives of the Daga River as tribute, but Mut Duŋ refused to surrender “his Koma” even when the Abyssinians attacked Baar. Mut Duŋ did claim a traditional man of cattle’s powers to cure sick animals. However, most of his personal success came from dealing with Abyssinians for guns or plundering other communities, primarily the Koma and the Mabaan who lived farther to the north on the banks of the Yabus River and in part of what is now Blue Nile State as far as the modern-day city of Kurmuk, Sudan.<sup>421</sup>

Contemporary Gaa-jak elders say that their war along the Yabus began after one of the Koma and Mabaan stole some of Gaa-jak cattle under the cover of darkness during the initiation period of set *Lith-Gaac* (Grey-Steer-Gaac, named in honor of the late Gaac Jaan Win and opened in 1915), and that the conflict, which depopulated settlement after settlement, lasted four years.<sup>422</sup> British officers never suggested that the Gaa-jak might have been provoked, but their records agree on the time line, since they reported that Gaa-jak raids against “the Burun” (Koma and

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<sup>420</sup> Douglas Johnson, “On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan (1898-1936) in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 229.

<sup>421</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 306.

<sup>422</sup> Yuat Puoc Lim, Gaatluak Liew Nyuon, and Kueth Yoga Baquan, interview with author, Gambella, Ethiopia (April 18, 2013).

Mabaan) started in November of 1915 and concluded at the end of 1919.<sup>423</sup> Whether or not any Koma had ever stolen Gaa-jak cattle, the raids were a disproportionate response that reflected the appetites of Mut Duŋ and his followers for plunder more than the drive for security that had originally driven the Eastern Jikāny to arm themselves in 1910. Firearms had become the *modus operandi* of *nei ti naath* political power and community prosperity, or even survival, and this transformation had little to do with a British policy of promoting “chiefs”. On the contrary, men like Mut Duŋ gained power and prestige during World War I, a time when the British suspended their campaigns in the Upper Nile region as authorities in London turned their attentions to grander theaters of wars in Europe, the Middle East, and German East Africa.

### **The British Army, the Abyssinian Frontier, and the War of Khor Manyan (1917 – 1920)**

British officials, who heard of these raids from Koma and Mabaan survivors, ignored the matter entirely until 1917. Even then, they had only capacity enough to send a detachment of soldiers and one heavy machine gun to camp for a few days on the Yabus in the hope of deterring the raiders with the prospect, but not the delivery, of the force of modern weapons. This mission never engaged the enemy, and Mut Duŋ continued to target the area with impunity so that neither he, nor any other *nei ti naath*, had any reason to anticipate the power of the military technology the British could bring to bear in the post-war period. The low point for the British that forced them to take some action in Sudd came the year before, when Lōu spearmen killed sixteen colonial police sent to stop a Lōu raid against the southern *jīēēŋ* in Mongolla Province. Local British military commanders punished the Lōu with a devastating “patrol” (which the Lōu had every right to view as a raid) in 1917. However, the British waited to

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<sup>423</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987).

challenge better-armed opponents with ties to the Abyssinians because their superiors rationed military resources during the height of the First World War and refused to sanction patrols.

Hawkish colonial officers finally received permission to assert themselves after the long military stalemate in the Middle East turned in favor of the British and their Entente allies. By November of 1917, famine in Syria and a general Arab revolt within the Ottoman Empire had removed Egypt from any danger and left the British confident of the final outcome in the theatre.<sup>424</sup> British commanders in Sudan reasserted themselves by first targeting a Desta Birru, the semi-autonomous *dejazmach* of the Abyssinian region of Meji. The British found Desta Birru especially irksome because he loosely governed a contingent of Ganda and Acholi soldier-settlers whom the British had once employed. The soldier-settlers who gathered around Desta Birru had taken advantage of British preoccupations elsewhere to escape British rule in Uganda, take control of all of what is now South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State, and gained influence among the Bari along the banks of the Nile and the modern-day city of Juba. A combined force of Sudanese troops and King's African Rifles from Kenya confronted and defeated these "Abyssinians" in May of 1918 at the Battle of Kangalla and ended their presence along the Nile.

<sup>425</sup> The British were content at that time to leave Desta's soldier-settlers in control of the Murle territory around the Boma Plateau and turned their attention to the Gaa-jak gun-runners.

The British viewed the ongoing Gaa-jak raids against the Koma and Mabaan as an ideal justification for imposing themselves along this stretch of the Abyssinian frontier and began erecting two stations on the west bank of the Yabus in 1918. The British may have intended

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<sup>424</sup> Arabs fighting under the banner of the Grand Sharif of Mecca captured the Ottoman Red Sea port of Aqaba in June and, after many failed attempts, British General Allenby defeated Ottoman forces in Gaza on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>425</sup> Peter Garrestson, "Vicious cycles: ivory, slaves, and arms on the new Maji frontier" in Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.s) *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 204.

these forts primarily as a message for the Abyssinians, or they may actually have believed they would give the Gaa-jak pause. In any case, the forts had no impact on Mut Duŋ's raiders, who had already stolen much of the mobile wealth on the west bank of the Yabus (both animal and human) and switched to targeting communities on the eastern bank.<sup>426</sup> Anglo-Egyptian military forces finally managed to repel some of Mut Duŋ's raiders in April of 1919. They also scattered a much larger raiding party and the following month even killed one of Mut Duŋ's sons. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Egyptians failed to intercept other raiding parties later in 1919.<sup>427</sup>

Colonial authorities used the ongoing violence as a justification for much more aggressive measures and, with the Great War now won in both Europe and the Middle East, were in a position to take action. British steamboats began transporting two separate military columns up the Sobat River to both Nasir and the edges of Mabaan territory in October of 1919, in preparation for a patrol there supported by heavy machine guns, a flotilla of gunboats, and a squadron of R.A.F. bombers. Several gunboats also went up the Baro in November, where they sank seventy-six Gaa-jak canoes (mostly purchased or stolen from *anywaa*) in an effort to prevent anyone from crossing into Abyssinia during the coming campaign. The British inspector stationed across the Ethiopian border at Gambella also began encouraging various *anywaa* to attack the Gaa-jak, and a detachment of mounted police rode down to the Pibor to prevent the Gaa-jak from sending any of their cattle to the Cieŋ Kuek or the Lou territory during the definitive campaign they planned. British commanders were aware that their elaborate military preparations could be interpreted as a kind of cattle raid and were eager to show that they were indeed *Turuk* of a new and pacifying kind. Consequently they ordered their commanders to make

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<sup>426</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987).

<sup>427</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, "The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920" Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 312-314.

a point of avoiding the appearance of plundering of cattle (as they had done when raiding Dundəŋ's mound) and to focus instead on degrading Gaa-jak military strength by killing as many men as possible.<sup>428</sup>

The Gaa-jiok and the Gaa-guon sections of the Eastern Jikāny were approached in 1920 by Anglo-Egyptian officers who tried to appease these prospective allies by explaining they were mobilizing to attack only the Gaa-jak, but this message did not mollify the communities. The Gaa-guon in particular had no illusions about Anglo-Egyptian “justice”, since an Egyptian officer dispatched to their territory in 1919 to punish the robbers of some Arab merchants (*jallab*) had killed a number of Gaa-guon men only loosely associated with the theft. Both the Gaa-jiok and the Gaa-guon decided to support the Gaa-jak in a decisive contest that their descendants remember as the War of Khor Manyan, after the site of the largest battle, but which the British misleadingly termed “the Garjak [Gaa-jak] Patrol”.<sup>429</sup>

Contemporary Gaa-jiok remember this war as a context where their ancestors knew from the very beginning that they were heavy outgunned by the British and sing songs that celebrate their ancestors' determination, to oppose the invaders in spite of their technological disadvantages.

Nyieny naath kɛ jɛ kǎ Manyan.  
Ci loac ŋɛɛny cie tonɛe?  
Göör yaŋ Dɛŋ a loacdän  
kany raar cie rual.  
Jiath kör ɛ joako  
ci duoth pimlöö.

The people fought at Manyan.  
Are your hearts as brave as a tree?  
Wanting Dɛŋ's cow, our hearts  
rise up like burning coals.  
We used to war with weapons  
[now only] fist-fighting remains.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 318.

<sup>429</sup> Gabriel Giet Jal, “The History of the Jikany Nuer before 1920” Ph.D. diss (University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987) p. 320.

<sup>430</sup> Gaay Kor Reet, interview with author, Nasir, South Sudan (January 18, 2013).

Eastern *nei ti naath* who fought in this war were certainly familiar with the lethal capabilities of gunboats, mounted troops, and the artillery the British had used against Okwei's forces in 1912. However, they could not counter the machine guns and biplane bombers the British had developed during the First World War and then deployed to the southern Sudan, had escalated the nature of warfare along the Upper Nile to what proved a definitive level.

In January of 1920, Major Bacon (whom the Eastern Jikäny called Kueybil) received permission to march a column of Sudanese troops southeast from Nasir into Gaa-guon territory. This force ran into an ambush along the Khor Manyan almost as soon as he had gone too deep into the interior to call on the gunboats on the river. Major Bacon's column tangled with the combined forces of the Gaa-guon and all of the Gaa-jiok living on that side of the Sobat and suffered a number of casualties in the ensuing two-day battle. Eventually Bacon's heavily armed and better trained force inflicted enough casualties on the *nei ti naath* to compel the Gaa-jiok and Gaa-guon to retreat into the marshes. Bacon then continued his march and burned the Gaa-guon settlement of Riel to the ground.<sup>431</sup> Major Bacon then followed up on this victory by marching to the juncture of the Baro River and Khor Machar and began a more protracted conflict that the Gaa-jak remember as "the English War" (*Kör Linlieth*).

The Gaa-jak living along the Baro had a long history of simply ignoring British officers (even refusing to turn their heads to the side in acknowledgement of their presence) and initially attempted to deal with Major Bacon's column by avoiding them. They did not attack the column when it encamped near the juncture of the Baro and the Khor Machar at a place called Gueñ, and survivors' descendants claim they were genuinely surprised when the British began attacking the Cieñ Wau living in a cattle camp called Duyär. The Cieñ Wau, who lived more than hundred

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<sup>431</sup> Bol Cuol, Dec Cuotkuac Buth, Riek Mac Buth, Nuot Duop Jany, Thok Pal Bol, Thiol Cuol Lam, and Banuot Mak Duoth, interview with author, Matar, Ethiopia (February 18, 2013).

kilometers to the south, had not been particularly active in Mut Duŋ's raids against the Koma or the Mabaan, and no one in Duyär at the time of the attack owned a serviceable rifle. At least ten spearmen fell trying to defend the community, without managing to injure even one of their heavily armed assailants, and a number of children drowned in the Baro as they fled in a panic.<sup>432</sup>

The Cieŋ Wau responded to this seemingly gratuitous attack by mustering rifle-bearing kinsmen and by calling in other Gaa-jak from the Cieŋ Reŋ and Cieŋ Nyijaanni to their west and the Cieŋ Cany and Cieŋ Tär to the east, but against British machine guns their breechloaders proved ineffective. The concentration of *nei ti naath* troops also created an easy target for otherwise inaccurate R.A.F. bombers, and the Gaa-jak of the Baro Valley who did not escape into Abyssinia either fled north or were forced to hide in the countryside, where many died of thirst during the most arid months of the dry season.

Far to the north, the Cieŋ Luony and Cieŋ Kaan sections of the Gaa-jak, who had done most of raiding against the Koma and Mabaan of the Yabus, fared much better against a column led by Major Coden. The northern Gaa-jak also failed when they confronted Coden directly, but they possessed marshes that the horses of the British struggled to navigate even at the height of the dry-season and availed themselves of the sanctuary beyond the Abyssinian border without having to leave their cattle behind or procure canoes. Mut Duŋ had little trouble evading Coden or resupplying himself with Abyssinian munitions. He also achieved a reputation for political genius of Machiavellian proportions when Khojali al-Hassan, the Abyssinian warlord, refused to sell him ammunition until the *nei ti naath* warleader threatened to divert all his commerce to the

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<sup>432</sup> Men killed in this attack on Duyär included Deŋ Dol, Gay Padol, Cuil Joŋ, Mac Kal, Cuol Joŋ Mer, Buoy Nhial, and Tɔnyik Gir Jany. Other men like Gaŋ Kuajien and Cuol Ruey were permanently crippled by their injuries. Nyayul Cii and Mer That were among the boys and girls who drowned in the Baro.



Anglo-Egyptians if Khojali refused him.<sup>433</sup> Contemporary Gaa-jak also credit Mut Duŋ with destroying his enemy's aircraft, though they do not agree on how he did so. Many insist that he threw a club into the propeller of a biplane as it swooped low to strafe some cattle, but a less popular tradition holds that he enlisted divine support through a particular ceremony. This divine explanation is more compatible with British records of a fire at the colonial airfield in Nasir that grounded the squadron.<sup>434</sup>

Many Gaa-jak warriors died in February and March of 1920, just as the British had intended, but the Eastern Jikāny who participated in this war did not come away with the chastening lessons the British had hoped to convey, since their rough brand of justice was indiscriminate at best. Representatives of most Gaa-jak communities made peace with the British once a few *nei ti naath* who spoke Arabic explained that the British demanded only a few cattle as tribute. However, Mut Duŋ never surrendered, and, like the *anywaa* leader Okwei, eluded the British until his death.<sup>435</sup> Consequently the Eastern Jikāny saw that those who could use the international border to play the British against the Abyssinians weathered cataclysms like the War of Khor Manyān far better than Jikāny communities that had not actually participated in the raids that the British had used to justify their rampaging patrol. Clearly, *nei ti naath* needed to keep acquiring more guns, both as practical weapons and as symbols of *Turuk* sponsorship, in order to defend their communities from the escalating military violence associated with imposing “Pax Britannica” in the southern Sudan.

## Conclusion:

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<sup>433</sup> Dec Manytap Macar, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, U.S.A. (March 7, 2011).

<sup>434</sup> Tap Luak Wer Duŋdit, interview with author, Mathiang, South Sudan (April 7, 2013).

<sup>435</sup> Both these men happened to die in 1920, but the British had nothing to do with their demise.

Eastern *nei ti naath*, and particularly the Eastern Jikäny, experienced the beginnings of colonial rule as a violent process of militarization, but British actions did not create a profound rupture with the past as they saw it. The Eastern Jikäny and the Lou had both encountered *Turuk* from the Ethiopian highlands, and engaged in commerce along that border before the British arrived. The process of militarizing eastern *nei ti naath* communities also began along the Abyssinian frontier in 1910 as the Eastern Jikäny and the Lou began buying guns from the Abyssinian highlands to defend themselves from *anywaa* warlords (who were themselves the clients of an Abyssinian *ras*). *Nei ti naath* did not experience the new phase of militarization as a profound rupture, because the most venerable and established members of their communities led the earliest efforts to acquire firearms in exchange for ivory tusks. Eventually a new breed of gun-running *nei ti naath* warlord-chiefs, who were the clients of Abyssinian lords, gained prominence along the Abyssinian frontier and transitioned from hunting elephants to a lifestyle built around raiding. Escalated British military “patrols” in 1920 ultimately sidelined these borderland war chiefs and their Abyssinian patrons. Nevertheless, the basic idea of gaining local power by acquiring and distributing rifles continued, as British officers distributed guns as patronage throughout the 1920s to accommodate local *nei ti naath* leaders they could not yet control.

## Conclusion

### History as Additive:

#### Achieving and Archiving Change through Combination and Accumulation

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

William Faulkner<sup>436</sup>

“The past tense is used to indicate that this [indigenous] system no longer operates. Although in reality, the past has merged with the present.”

Francis Mading Deng<sup>437</sup>

The first chapter of this thesis opened with the idea that, for *nei ti naath*, history “begins” (*tuk*) with exogamous kinship. Scholars can understand this commitment to exogamy in terms of mobile herders’ strategic successes in using it to build extensive kinship networks that enabled them to negotiate flexible grazing rights with distant communities in the mercurial floodplains of the Sudd in modern South Sudan. *Nei ti naath* who organized their communities around exogamous kinship pursued this and other historical innovations, and made sense of the past they enabled, in ways that reflected a worldview built from an additive logic rather than the rhetoric of rupture invoked in Westerners’ concept of “progress” from pasts left behind, eventuating in modernity.

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<sup>436</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>437</sup> Francis Madin Deng, Daniel J. Deng, David K. Deng, & Venessa Jiménez, *Identity, Diversity, and Constitutionalism in Africa* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2008) p. 80.

For *nei ti naath*, extreme prohibitions against “incest” (*ruaal*) have ensured that every marriage adds a formerly alien family, or draws a formerly distant one closer, into the lineage connections that grooms and brides have inherited from their respective ancestors. *Nei ti naath* children, who have memorized the names of their patrilineal ancestors as a sequence, refer to their lineages as “branches” (*kaar*) because they recognize that each forefather has both carried on his father’s line and incorporated new affines from his mothers’ side. This understanding of kinship and descent allows each generation to view themselves as unique, not because they have broken with the past to achieve “progress”, but because they embody and add to a present-day, and ongoing, accumulation of many ancestors from the past. This thesis has sought to highlight the *nei ti naath* additive perspective on history in both the historical processes described in the chapters and the cumulative logic that unites them as a whole. There is an insight into history as practiced in the West that western premises themselves often do not highlight.

The opening chapter presented early centuries of historical change in the Upper Nile region as a cumulative process by arguing that Nilotes transformed life in the Sudd by incrementally adding in new breeds of cattle and crops, but not through the ruptures theoretically associated with diverging languages. Teeth-extracting communities consolidated their extremely mobile strategies of agro-pastoralism by combining humpbacked cattle with cultigens of caudate sorghum developed from wild species in the area to consolidate a life-style that, with continuing modifications, still predominates in the area today. This reordering of the Sudd profoundly altered the meaning of ethnic identities, but Nilotes who joined one or the other of the neighboring dry-side and wet-side communities also magnified their collective wealth in cattle while maintaining sedentary crafts like metallurgy. Both dry-side and wet-side communities also additively adjusted their spiritual-political beliefs and practices by maintaining

old ideas about lineages and landownership even as they introduced new kinds of officiants to meet the emerging needs of coordinating longer seasonal migrations, settling disputes with strangers, and checking the abuses of landowners growing powerful as population densities increased.

The second chapter built on these (detectable) early extensions of their legacies from the past by relating how dry-side communities developed new ideas about gender and marriageability as they competed with other herders for personnel. In a setting where parents could hope to retire from physical labor and secure a life after death only through their descendants and the lineage legacies they left them, dry-side communities developed a practice of creating marriageability-sets (*riëc*) that assured young males that elders, with their greater wealth and slyness, would not prevent them from marrying by hoarding the marriageable young women. Particular dry-side communities then enhanced this marriageability-set strategy by adding a prominent and popular style of forehead scarification (*gaar*). This innovation again exemplified the cumulative nature of historical change because it built on dry-side herders' existing commitment to exogamy, and the distinct, permanent markings of *gaar* proved a more effective means of recruiting and retaining young men.

The third chapter outlined how the successes of *gaar* in gaining population prompted men and women like Latjɔɔr and Nyaguëc to begin leading bands of *nei ti naath* emigrants into the eastern Sudd, where *gaar* enabled them to gradually assimilate community after community of Padaŋ *jiëëŋ* between the 1820s and the 1860s. But the incorporation of so many outsiders fundamentally transformed these *nei ti naath* communities, as the adoptees began outnumbering people born into established lineages. Communities filled with young men who no longer shared the same spiritual and political heritages, or bonds of common descent, turned to the

marriageability-sets to regain a degree of common identity. Consequently the officiant who initiated these sets, a “man of cattle” (*wut yɔɔk*) named Jaan Win, acquired a far greater stature than his predecessors in this position. This chapter also highlighted the unintended consequences of rapid change by the 1860s by detailing how the collapse of old consensuses about lineage loyalty, and spiritual-political authority, encouraged bloody conflicts among *nei ti naath* whose older methods of resolving disputes had become ineffective.

The fourth chapter explained how *nei ti naath* resolved this political chaos, and rid themselves of slavers associated with Turco-Egyptian commercial activity and slaving in the Upper Nile region, by combining the spiritual-political beliefs and practices of both immigrant *nei ti naath* and the autochthonous *jiëëŋ* of several Padaŋ confederations. The transformative prophetic figure Dundəŋ Bəŋ did not pursue novelty to meet this unprecedented disruption but rather presented himself as a familiar *nei ti naath* “earth-master” (*guan muɔn*), who had also been seized by a *jiëëŋ* divinity (DƏŋ). This prophet’s prominence also exhibited an additive logic as he fashioned a sacred *nei ti naath* rod (*daŋ*) out of a watery wood long used in other ways by spiritual-political leaders among the *jiëëŋ*. Dundəŋ Bəŋ’s most visible achievement, constructing a massive sacred mound, was directly inspired by older, and generally smaller, mounds. In fact the entirety of the new tradition of prophecy he created among *nei ti naath* came from combining existing but formerly distinct spiritual-political traditions.

The final chapter applied this additive logic of historical change to early *nei ti naath* experiences with colonialism by arguing that *nei ti naath* notions of a colonial “chief” (*kuaar*) flowed from gradual, additive political changes associated with sustained commerce and warfare on the Abyssinian frontier rather than from their dramatic military defeat by the British in 1920. This process began in the late nineteenth century when *nei ti naath* (specifically the Gaa-jak)

discovered they could acquire more of the cattle they had long prized by selling elephant tusks to Oromo and Greek merchants along the Abyssinian frontier. Established *nei ti naath* leaders (including the Gaac Jaan Win, who inherited his father's mantle) added firearms to this traffic in 1910 as they and their communities struggled to fend off gun-toting *anywaa* invaders.

Communities who added firearms to defend their way of life also began to revere a new class of borderland war-chiefs like Koryom Tut and Mut Duñ, who received firearms as gifts from Abyssinian governors attempting to intrude in the region. Following the slow, staged British conquest, *nei ti naath* chiefs turned to the new colonial patrons but maintained established reverence for the gun by requesting, and receiving, higher-quality rifles as symbols of the coercive force and patron-client relationships that characterized the earlier phases of colonial rule in the southern Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

Conceptualizing history as cumulative, or additive, beyond framing the narrative structure of this history, also helps explain the distinctive *nei ti naath* historical epistemology, or historiology, that this thesis has elucidated. For example, the opening chapter included narrative stories of the kind that scholars have associated with early African history since the late 1950s and 1960s, when pioneers like Jan Vansina first convinced academic historians that oral sources were credible as evidence from the past. My treatment of these traditions differs from my predecessors', described in the introduction's historiography, by rejecting the false methodological choice between pursuing a confirmable knowledge of the distant past or focusing on how these traditions also reflect recent, lived experiences. My alternative perspective calls for combining the virtues of both these historiographical traditions to describe subjective knowledge that goes beyond a study of the twentieth century. The first chapter relies on knowledge from outside *nei ti naath* communities, particularly on archaeology, but it also positions this outside

knowledge in the supporting role of making sense of what *nei ti naath* oral traditions have already told us was most meaningful about the distant past, to them.

The second chapter added a new form of *nei ti naath* knowledge, the names of marriageability-sets (*riēc*) that, as in the generation of “Turning-Hearts” (*Gær-loic*), convey how *nei ti naath* experienced the processes of mass-assimilation on a collective level. This knowledge differs from the oral traditions introduced in the earlier chapter because *nei ti naath* men have engraved knowledge of these sets on their own bodies, and because this knowledge refers to particular moments in time. *Nei ti naath*, who have known the past through personal connections with the names in genealogies rather than through the abstract and impersonal numbers that structure western historiography had no need for Gregorian dates since they can maintain knowledge relevant to the present in detailed sequences, and link specific marriageability-sets to particular events and people, without worrying about the number of years since Jesus’ (attributed) birth. This chapter also highlighted an alternative to the western Gregorian project by showing how the overlap between the “Turning-Hearts” set among *nei ti naath*, and the reign of a particular *rādh* among the *cøllø*, or a particular Padañ shrine master, provided a richer, and confirmed, narrative by combining the inherited knowledges of multiple communities.

The third chapter introduced further layers of *nei ti naath* own knowledge of the past by presenting a number of historical songs and by describing changing patterns in the birth names of remembered individuals. Historical songs like the Ballad of Latjōr and the Song of Gaac Gurial are the stories that Eastern Jikāny teach their children about the transformative assimilations from the 1820s through the 1860s. At a more abstract level, individuals with names like “Drought” also revealed historical contexts of both time and space that the songs omitted, at least



once these thousands of names have been grouped by marriageability-sets and by their natal communities (*cieŋ*).

The fourth chapter added written accounts to this deepening matrix of *nei ti naath*, and other, knowledges, as well as the personal recollections of *nei ti naath* who had participated in, or witnessed, events that the chapter describes, as recalled by grandchildren today who knew them personally. The written sources were composed by foreigners with varying levels of detail that ranged from Gordon's cursory account of a conversation with Nuäär Mer in 1874 to Douglas Johnson's probing interview with a son of Dundey Bōŋ, who had witnessed the construction of the prophet's mound in the 1880s. Despite their own limitations, these sources are categorically different than the contemporaneous European travelers' logs that discuss specific persons instead of vague and overtly biased discussions of the generic "Nuer".

The final chapter on the early colonial experience sets these compounding and broadly mutually confirming forms of indigenous historical knowledge beside a dense body of conventional colonial written documents. The resulting narrative highlights how *nei ti naath* exhibited greater control over the political innovations of that period than the British could manage, or even recognize, without minimizing how processes of militarization created gun-toting chiefs among the *nei ti naath*, or the naked brutality behind bland British narratives of colonial pacification and civilization. This chapter details how this phase of the colonial experience was transformative for *nei ti naath*, but not a rupture, because the indigenous knowledge that informs the entire thesis does not arise from the sudden arrival of literate Europeans nor exaggerate their importance.

The specifics of *nei ti naath* history and historiology explored in this thesis, and primarily those of eastern *nei ti naath* (*jikāny*), also led to more general discussions about presentism,

epistemology, and the inclusion of African voices in studies of Africans that have roiled scholars, Africanists and others, who know nothing of “the Nuer”, or perhaps only a little from their all-but-obligatory but stereotyped presence in basic texts, or reading about their iconic ethnographer, E. E. Evans-Pritchard. *Nei ti naath* historical sources like marriageability-sets and birth names are not universal, but, as examples in the introduction revealed, they illuminate similar practices that other communities across Africa have maintained and that might allow for parallel research strategies there. More importantly, this thesis hopes to encourage future researchers to pursue other, numerous, and highly diverse practices that local communities elsewhere in Africa, or anywhere else in the world, have developed for knowing their own pasts. This commitment to pursuing indigenous knowledge can not only cure the presentism and ethno-centrism that otherwise afflict the field but also equip scholars to write meaningfully African history.

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## Personal Interviews

Each person named below each offered hours, days, or in some cases weeks of their time to provide knowledge that undergirds this thesis. I have included information about which community (*cieŋ*) they identify with to as a way of highlighting their particular perspectives. I have also included marriageability-set (*ric*) of the persons I consulted when relevant.

### *South Sudan*

#### *Nasir town, Upper Nile State, 2012-2013*

Duoth Deŋ Balan	Cieŋ Luony Thior (Laan)	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Göny Pur Buop	Cieŋ Minyol (Waŋkec)	Sudan (initiated c. 1957)
yöth Guandöŋ Kör	Cieŋ Thiép Biciok (Waŋkec)	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Kiliee Yut	Cieŋ Yual	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Gäay Kör Rëëth	Cieŋ Minyol (Waŋkec)	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Lul Kuoth Deŋ	Cieŋ Minyol (Waŋkec)	Ren-Gaac (initiated c. 1937)
Puok Deŋ Cuol	Cieŋ Kuek Biciok (Waŋkec)	Sudan (initiated c. 1957)

#### *Korenge Payam (Nasir County), Upper Nile State, 2012-2013*

Nhial Deŋ	Cieŋ Thiép (Waŋkec)	Mawumbith (initiated c. 1983)
Kuek Kiir	Cieŋ Thiép (Waŋkec)	Sudan (initiated c. 1957)
Gaatluak Gëë	Cieŋ Thiép (Waŋkec)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)

#### *Nordeng Boma (Nasir County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Wal Bithow Deŋ Gucker	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Dak Bithow Deŋ Gucker	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Simon Kan Deŋ Gucker	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Kok Mut Oman	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Yual Mut Oman	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Pal Kueth Pal Oman	Gucker community ( <i>anywaa</i> )
Cuol Deŋ Guan	Cieŋ Thiép (Waŋkec)
Lam Guandöŋ Kör	Cieŋ Thiép (Waŋkec)

#### *Koat Payam (Nasir County), Upper Nile State, 2012-2013*

Gaac Kek Nyuot	Cieŋ Wath (Yual)	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Peter Rëëth Diew	Cieŋ Thor (Yual)	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Yiee Gaac Thil	Cieŋ Thor (Yual)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Bië Duop Joak	Cieŋ Duop (Yual)	Puot-Ciöt-Gëer (initiated c. 1973)
Bol Yien Deŋ	Cieŋ Thor (Yual)	Mawumbith (initiated c. 1962)
Gaac Dothoal Diew	Cieŋ Waŋkec	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)

Car Deŋ Kuic	Cieŋ Gaw (Gëë)	Dëë-Kɔl (initiated c. 1955)
Bië Duop Joak	Cieŋ Duop (Yual)	Puot-Ciöt-Gëer (initiated c. 1973)
Biël Biciok Lam	Cieŋ Camjiok (Yual)	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Lök Nyuon Deŋ	Cieŋ Malek (Yual)	Puot-Ciöt-Gëer (initiated c. 1973)

*Jikmir Payam (Nasir County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Rialgak Diet Okar	Puokuenye ( <i>anywaa</i> )	Lith-Jaan (equivalent)
Omuot Bukjiok Duon	Gucker ( <i>anywaa</i> )	Lith-Jaan (equivalent)
Panom Nyuŋe	Lual ( <i>anywaa</i> )	Lith-Jaan (equivalent)
Gaatlauk Omot	Cieŋ Wan (Wan̄kɛc)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Yien Cuol Wël	Cieŋ Wan (Wan̄kɛc)	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Lual Kuey Lual	Cieŋ Wan (Wan̄kɛc)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Deŋ Teny Bilbil	Cieŋ Wan (Wan̄kɛc)	Dëë-Kɔl (initiated c. 1955)
Pal Rëëth Wic	Cieŋ Wan (Wan̄kɛc)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)

*Ulang town (Ulang County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Deŋ Nhial Nay	Cieŋ Laan (Donjol lineage)
Pal Juoc	Cieŋ Koway (Laan)
John Gaac Cuol	Cieŋ Koway (Laan)
Jök Luak Duop	Cieŋ Koway (Laan)
Thomas Tut Thoan	Cieŋ Guandon (Laan)
Simon Kueth Rëëth	Cieŋ Guandon (Laan)
Tonyik Ruot Khor	Cieŋ Buop (Laan)

*Mathiang town (Longechuk County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Tap Luak Wer Dun̄diit	Cieŋ Nyijaan̄ni	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Nyak Tuon Wan	Cieŋ Nyijaan̄ni	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Thomas Buth Tol Ruac	Cieŋ Nyijaan̄ni	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
James Luny Yual yöthnyan̄	Cieŋ Kaan̄ (Thian̄)	Nyan̄lek (initiated c. 1976)
Peter Pal Wandin̄ Räl	Cieŋ Kaan̄ (Thian̄)	Yualwau (initiated c. 1972)
Cuol Mut Luony	Cieŋ Kaan̄ (Thian̄)	Nyan̄lek (initiated c. 1976)
Kor Rëëth Thoal	Cieŋ Ren̄	Puot-Ciöt-Gëer (initiated c. 1973)
Liec Kon̄ Guoy	Cieŋ Ren̄	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Kan̄ Cuol Wan̄	Cieŋ Ren̄	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Yien Kiec Rëëth	Cieŋ Ren̄	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Dëet Bor Thoç	Cieŋ Ren̄	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960))
Nhial Puot Rëëth	Cieŋ Ren̄	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)

*Maiwut town (Maiwut County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Thakdel Manytap Macar	Cieŋ Wau
Kan̄ Nhial Wer	Cieŋ Wau

*Jukow Payam (Maiwut County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Dɛŋ Buth Dɛŋ	Cieŋ Cany	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Nhial Puɔt Rɛ̃ɛ̃th	Cieŋ Rɛŋ	Lith-Jaŋ (initiated c. 1944)

*Wɛc Gaatluak in Wuɔr Payam (Maiwut County), Upper Nile State, 2013*

Yon Luny Duir	Cieŋ Wau
Wakɔw Dɛŋ Bol	Cieŋ Wau
Taŋ Kuɔny Ciy	Cieŋ Wau
Cuɔl Thɔt Kɛt	Cieŋ Wau
Thuɔk Majiok Thɔan	Cieŋ Wau
Gaac Kiir Minytuil	Cieŋ Wau
Lul Gak Latjɔɔr	Cieŋ Wau
Buɔm Taŋ Nyeyöth	Cieŋ Wau
Tɔp Lual Kuny	Cieŋ Wau
Dak Kuɔk Dup	Cieŋ Wau
Macuiny Kɔk Gaac	Cieŋ Wau
Wiu Rɛɛt Duir	Cieŋ Wau
Kumɛ Rik Thɔan	Cieŋ Wau
Gaatwɛc Gaac Puɔc	Cieŋ Wau
Luɛŋ Kɔk Gaac	Cieŋ Wau
Cuɔl Tɛny Cuil	Cieŋ Wau
Maluth Dɛŋ Can	Cieŋ Wau
Rɛɛt Majiok Thɔan	Cieŋ Wau

*Ethiopia*

*Newland District, Gambela town, Gambela Region 2012-2013*

Paul Puk Duel Kɛl	Cieŋ Cany	Lith-Jaŋ (initiated c. 1944)
Peter Bandak Bol Tut	Cieŋ Cany	Puɔt-Ciöt-Gɛɛr (initiated c. 1973)
Muɔn Luak Can Pacuɔl	Cieŋ Cany	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Pal Köör Nyaŋ Kan	Cieŋ Cany	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Gɔanäär Jɔk Mut JaŋWin	Cieŋ Cany	
Yuat Puɔc Lim	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Gaatluak Liew Nyuɔn	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Kueth Yoga Banuan	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Puɔt-Ciöt-Gɛɛr (initiated c. 1973)
Nhial Kuek Yio	Cieŋ Wau	Puɔt-Ciöt-Gɛɛr (initiated c. 1973)
Gaatluak Tuŋ Tut	Cieŋ Wau	Puɔt-Ciöt-Gɛɛr (initiated c. 1973)
Gaatluak Lual Ruac	Cieŋ Wau	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Wiyual Dhɔaŋ Rik	Cieŋ Wau	Thar-Kɔal (initiated c. 1955)

*Matar town (Wanthoa Woreda), Gambela Region 2012-2013*

Cuəl Gaac Luac	Cieŋ Nyaŋ (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Tuitui (initiated c. 1964)
Bol Cuəl Can	Cieŋ Nyaŋ (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Ja-Gaac (initiated c. 1960)
Them Guandŋ Duot	Cieŋ Nyaŋ (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Thok-Thok (initiated c. 1953)
Dec Cuotkuac Buth	Gaat Cika (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Yanlik (initiated c.)
Duot Duop Jany	Gaat Cika (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Dogice (initiated c. 1986)
Riek Mac Buth	Gaat Cika (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Puot-Ciöt-Geer (c. 1973)
Thok Pal Bol	Cieŋ Ningeer (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Reŋ-Gaac (initiated c. 1937)
Thiəl Cuəl Lam	Cieŋ Ningeer (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Puot-Ciöt-Geer (c. 1973)
Baŋuot Mak Duoth	Cieŋ Ningeer (Gaa-Guoŋ)	Puot-Ciöt-Geer (c. 1973)

*Jukow Woreda, Gambela Region 2013*

Jiop Gaatcai	Cieŋ Thiap (Waŋkec)	Milica (initiated c. 1984)
Koat Riem Cany	Cieŋ Thiap (Waŋkec)	Ruan-Kon (initiated c. 1989)

*Darŋ Cattle Camp (Lare Woreda), Gambela Region 2013*

Tonyik Teny Macar	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Reŋ-Gaac (initiated c. 1937)
Bol Rika Bijin	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Lith-Jaan (initiated c. 1944)
Tut Kopay Yar	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Puot-Ciöt-Geer (c. 1972)
Cuəl Mut Luony	Cieŋ Thiaŋ Tar	Nyanlek (initiated c. 1976)

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