

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

12 November 2015

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Leonardi, Cherry (2015) 'Points of order? Local government meetings as negotiation tables in South Sudanese history.', *Journal of Eastern African studies.*, 9 (4). pp. 650-668.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2015.1105440>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor Francis Group in *Journal of Eastern African Studies* on 01/10/2015, available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17531055.2015.1105440>

### Additional information:

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

# Points of order? Local government meetings as negotiation tables in South Sudan

Cherry Leonardi\*

*Department of History, Durham University, Durham, UK.*

*(Received January 15, 2015; **accepted xx**)*

This paper explores the long-term, local-level history of state formation in South Sudan over the past century, by focusing on local government meetings. The resilience of local state institutions and practices has been overlooked in recent state-building agendas and by scholars critical of authoritarian government and failed decentralisation in South Sudan's history. But this paper argues that meetings of local government officials and chiefs have long been significant institutions for negotiating the state and performing its authority. Yet they were also risky and unpredictable events for state officials, who at times struggled to control the critical and unruly talk of the participants. These officials were made vulnerable by the very logic and performance of the meeting as a binary dialogue between 'state' and 'society', constituting a boundary which was otherwise blurred or non-existent among the local elites who recognised each other as legitimate negotiators in meetings. The performance of this dichotomy contributed to the idea of the state as an entity standing separate from society, to which people might appeal against the failings and corruptions of local government, and with which a contractual relationship was continually being negotiated. The performative aspect of these meetings should not simply be dismissed then as evidence of their impotence or control by the state, but rather as a vital means by which the state has come to be imagined and negotiated at the most immediate local levels of government.

**Keywords:** Negotiation table, negotiation arena, meetings, South Sudan, state formation

Word count: ~ 10,500 (notes and references included)

---

\* Email: [d.c.leonardi@durham.ac.uk](mailto:d.c.leonardi@durham.ac.uk)

In March 2007, a four-day meeting was held in Lakes State, Southern Sudan to discuss and establish a new state-level council of traditional leaders. Supported by the Swiss government and organized by a Southern Sudanese consultancy company, the meeting brought dozens of chiefs to Rumbek, the state capital, together with several government officials and ministers from county, state, and central governments. The meeting's 'facilitator' and reporter, a senior South Sudanese academic and consultant, opened the floor to the chiefs on the first afternoon with a request that they be "time-conscious, stay focused on the agenda, be brief in their remarks, and avoid repeating each other". By the second day, however, some resistance to such limitations emerged:

The commissioner of Cueibet County suggested that the Chiefs should be given the whole of that day to talk off their heads instead of going into groups for discussions. He underlined that the Dinka believe in talking out their issues. The suggestion was seconded by Chief Majak Malok from Rumbek East County. He said that the government leaders are the ones confusing the whole situation in our region.

At this point the Facilitator/Consultant emphasized that the purpose of the conference was to come up with resolutions through discussions. He said that all the communities in the Southern Sudan like to talk and talk and talk, but we have to get down to solving problems through group discussions—which allowed us to handle several problems at a time. The four days conference, he reminded them, has limits such as the logistics and the time factor. He said that the way forward is to be derived from such discussions so that reports are for all who want to see how we are moving forward.<sup>1</sup>

The facilitator and other organizers succeeded in keeping the meeting to its agenda and in producing the required resolutions concerning the formation of a Lakes State Council of Traditional Authority Leaders (CoTAL), which fed into the longer-term process of establishing CoTALs across South Sudan.<sup>2</sup> Several of the participants in the 2007 meeting hailed the importance and novelty of this process as a means of restoring the authority of chiefs and of contributing to peace and good governance in the new era instituted by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Seven years on, and three years since South Sudan's independence, such optimism seems poignantly misplaced: while the establishment of the CoTALs remains incomplete, their peacemaking potential appears both more desperately needed and more uncertain than ever in the midst of South Sudan's internal conflict.

This Rumbek meeting had epitomized a particular moment in South Sudan's history at a time when the momentum for peace and independence was generating new internationally-supported efforts at state-building, in which traditional authority was being given a key place in local government and in nation-building narratives and legislation. External actors in particular tended to assume that such state-building was starting from scratch;<sup>3</sup> even the leading chief in the Rumbek meeting asserted that “[f]or the first time in South Sudanese history, we have formed a permanent structure under the guidance of the traditional leaders”.<sup>4</sup> But as I argue elsewhere, chiefs had been central to the structures and processes of state formation at the local level for the past century or more.<sup>5</sup> And the formal or semi-formal ‘meeting’ has itself been a central mechanism of local government since the colonial era. It is important to recognise that the new South Sudanese state has emerged not only through political and military struggle, but also through the historical experiences and institutionalisation of state orders at this local level.

This paper argues that there was actually nothing very new at all in the rhetoric, rituals, and role of the Rumbek meeting in 2007; instead it resembled longstanding practices and patterns of negotiating the state at the local level. Such meetings have long been used by government officials as a performance of state authority and legitimacy. But this performance requires multiple actors, who may seize the opportunity to assert their own versions of a legitimate state. The paper therefore emphasizes the ways in which meetings have often placed state officials and convenors in a vulnerable, uncertain position when faced with ‘talk’ that they struggled to control. The history of local government meetings certainly reveals the enduring, if shifting and inconsistent, authoritarianism of state actors in Southern (now South) Sudan. But it also demonstrates the truculence and outspokenness of ‘subjects’ whose robust oral political cultures and practices have never been easily silenced or controlled. As other scholars have increasingly argued, focusing solely on the authoritarianism or assumed weak legitimacy of states neglects the extent to which the symbols and discourses of state authority have to be “performed into existence”, and the limits to which such performances can be controlled or their meaning fixed by state elites.<sup>6</sup>

Meetings might appear too banal, ubiquitous, and impotent to be considered as distinctive institutions of the local state in South Sudan. Scholars have tended to discount the potential for negotiating government at this local level, emphasizing instead the authoritarian, centralizing, and repressive character of the Sudanese state, its alienation from Southern Sudanese society,

and the lack of any genuine opportunity for debate, decision-making, or democracy in local government. Despite a recurrent state rhetoric of decentralization, the local government councils that were first established under British rule and remodelled under successive Sudanese governments were in reality mechanisms of an overall centralizing agenda.<sup>7</sup> These councils are seen at best to have widened the composition of the local elites that had been entrenched under colonial indirect rule, centring on 'traditional' chiefly families.<sup>8</sup> The scholarship on local government reforms in British African colonies is similarly sceptical about the extent of change these wrought, either in the power of local elites or in relations between central and local government.<sup>9</sup> Writing in the 1970s, John Howell argued that "representative and effective local government in the southern Sudan [had] failed to evolve", depicting chiefs as largely conservative, parochial, and subordinate to higher political authorities.<sup>10</sup> Later studies of the local councils established under the rebel government of the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLM/A) after 1997 have also tended to emphasize their limited capacity and authority.<sup>11</sup>

It is hardly surprising then that the government and external agencies involved in post-conflict state-building have tended to assume that their task is one of 'construction' rather than 'reconstruction'. The only local institution recognized in such efforts has been the chief, or 'traditional leader',<sup>12</sup> whose authority is assumed to derive from indigenous legitimacy rather than from the state, and to have been undermined by war and autocratic governments.<sup>13</sup> The long history of other local government institutions and cultures, in which chiefs have played a central role, is thus largely disregarded or dismissed. Yet for many South Sudanese people, the local government has provided their most common experience of the state: the people I interviewed between 2004 and 2009 tended to refer most frequently to the *mufattish* (district/county commissioner) and to the *mejlis* (council) or *debit mejlis* (executive director of the council) as both the spatial and institutional centre of government, even though the local councils had long since stopped functioning. As Howell observed in the early 1970s, among rural Sudanese "the local government council may be seen as simply 'the Government' or *el-Hakuma*".<sup>14</sup> Understanding popular experiences of government and ideas of the state clearly requires paying attention to this most immediate layer of government, where practices and institutions of negotiation have proven more enduring than central governments.

More fundamentally, the state-building agenda of the past decade<sup>15</sup> – with its narrow model of a ‘strong’ state and its focus on formal institutions, laws, and physical infrastructure – misses the vital performative, discursive, and imaginative work of state formation, which is apparent in the long history of meetings. This paper focuses on local government meetings, which have primarily involved dialogue between and among local government officials and chiefs, with increasing additional participation by, for example, ‘women’ and ‘youth’ representatives more recently. The paper proposes that such meetings have constituted what Haggmann and Péclard term a “negotiation table”, distinguished from the broader “political space” of the “negotiation arena” by their formalities:

Two common denominators characterize negotiation tables and distinguish them from negotiation arenas: first, interactions and decision making occur on the basis of an existing procedure or protocol (diplomatic conventions in the case of meetings between heads of state, customary law in the case of village meetings); and second, participants at the negotiation table recognize their counterparts as legitimate stakeholders in deciding upon a particular political matter.<sup>16</sup>

These authors also remind us to avoid the overly positive or harmonious connotations of the term ‘negotiation’: “Contrary to commonsensical assumptions, negotiation does not occur between co-equal parties or in an inclusive manner... the political configurations and institutional arrangements that result from such negotiation processes must be seen as imprints of domination by the more powerful over weaker groups”.<sup>17</sup>

This paper argues that local government meetings are indeed revealing of the hierarchies, formalities, and restrictions that have structured political dialogue and produced the political elites who constitute and control the local state. But it also argues that these inequalities and limitations should not obscure the significance of the negotiations that take place in these meetings, and of the ideas about the state that they have produced. Despite the absence of a clear boundary between state and non-state actors among the local elites, the purpose of the meetings is to enact a dichotomy and dialogue *between* state representatives and ‘communities’: an opportunity for government to speak *to* society and (though less so) vice versa. In the process, meetings help to constitute the very idea of the state as a discrete entity.<sup>18</sup> This performance of a binary conversation is structured by political hierarchies among and between both sides, and by the bureaucratic conventions and procedures to which the Rumbek facilitator clung. But as his struggle to keep the participants to the meeting’s agenda reveals, it is also a process fraught with

tensions and unpredictability. The meeting is a performance of state authority and political order, but it is also a moment in which the limits of state control may be exposed, even if only momentarily, because the fiction of genuine dialogue has to be maintained and therefore space given for subjects to speak.

The paper begins by exploring the institutionalization of the meeting as the primary “negotiation table” for local government in South Sudan, and traces its changing forms through the colonial and postcolonial eras. The paper then focuses on the tensions and unpredictability of meetings, and on the ways in which not only the meetings but also their records seek to exclude certain individuals or sectors of society or to deny their right to speak. Yet as the third part of the paper shows, even the recognized participants in meetings have found ways to express grievances or to criticize government, albeit within the bounds of the bureaucratic conventions governing speech-making. The paper focuses here in more detail on the discourse of these meetings, arguing that their constraints and formalities have helped to produce a remarkably consistent performance of state-society negotiation, in which the idea of a moral contract between government and people has been propagated: an idea which, as Haugerud argues of the Kenyan *baraza*, “inspired popular expectations that could fuel dissent as well as compliance”.<sup>19</sup>

### **Meeting as local government institutions**

Meetings have always been central to local-level politics and government, both before and beyond their constitution by state actors. The first European visitors in the nineteenth century documented assemblies and gatherings in which spiritual, political, or military leaders gave speeches: “the chief makes use of all the rhetoric at his command”.<sup>20</sup> Such meetings have had their own means of formalizing proceedings through, for example, the Dinka functionary known as the *agamlong* who repeats the words of speakers in a loud voice, to both amplify and regulate speeches. Even apparently informal gatherings such as the Mundari *toket*, translated by the anthropologist Buxton as “meeting-shade” – an assembly held in the shade of a big tree – were clearly structured by hierarchies and conventions as to who could participate or speak: “influential persons (*nyutu dun*), who were both skilled arbitrators and the heads of landowning lineages and lineages of longstanding client or outside affiliation – people ‘who had the power of words and could convince people without fuss’”.<sup>21</sup> The ability to speak well has always been an important aspect of political and spiritual leadership, but only certain people had the opportunity

to demonstrate this ability. The conventions of meetings gave precedence to the senior men and helped to constitute their assemblies as “negotiation tables”, despite their appearance as informal gatherings.

Meetings were central to the negotiation of new trade and exchange with foreign forces in the nineteenth century, as firstly merchants and then Turco-Egyptian government officers travelled up the Nile and established stations across southern Sudan. The first governor of the Egyptian province of Equatoria, Samuel Baker, recorded a meeting with Bari ‘headmen’ at Gondokoro in 1871, after he had captured their cattle to compel a negotiation. Speaking through a Bari interpreter, Baker demanded materials and labour for his new station before returning the cattle. “A long conversation ensued among the headmen, several of whom rose in succession, and addressed the meeting with great energy and fluency.” The meeting agreed to appoint a new ‘chief’ at Baker’s behest, and negotiated the provision of thatch grass and oxen to the station. This agreement (as understood by Baker) quickly broke down and Baker launched attacks on local villages, convinced of the duplicity of “the natives”.<sup>22</sup> But this is suggestive of the particular discursive conventions employed by speakers in formal meetings, as well as of the inevitable misunderstandings and mistranslations of their negotiations. What was perhaps most significant about Baker’s meeting with the Bari headmen was the way in which it clearly involved the mutual recognition of the two sides to the negotiation, thus constituting a “negotiation table”. Through such processes, the foreign traders and officers came to recognize certain individuals as ‘chiefs’ or ‘headmen’, while in turn the local negotiators recognized the power of the new forces and sought to contract with them in order to secure both protection and profit, often by participating in raids on other settlements.<sup>23</sup> Such meetings were instituted by locals as much as by the government as, for example, in the 1880s when a “deputation of Agar chiefs” came to the government station at Lado to complain about the abduction of their children by traders and soldiers.<sup>24</sup>

Such tendencies for certain entrepreneurs or interlocutors to come and meet with government continued in the early colonial period, often resulting in their recognition by colonial officials as ‘chiefs’.<sup>25</sup> From the 1920s, the government established chiefs’ courts, and British administrators began to use the higher or appeal sessions as chiefs’ meetings, primarily for the dissemination of government orders:



In my opinion the principal objects of Chiefs' courts are at present... (4) To be used as a means of communication between the District Commissioner and the people. Chiefs' Courts entail a regular gathering together of people from all over a District or Sub-District and give an opportunity to the District Commissioner to announce and explain the reason for any new policy he may wish to initiate. The native is an inveterate gossip and no surer means of spreading a Government order and the reason for it can be adopted than by explaining it to all assembled at a Chiefs' Court and allowing them to discuss it.<sup>26</sup>

By the 1930s, colonial officials were increasingly highlighting the importance of meetings or councils for general administration, envisaging eventual "Municipal Councils": "In the meantime the B [chiefs'] Court may provide a convenient bridge since its sessions are in fact always attended by the bulk of the village headmen." The purpose of meetings was still primarily for the DC "to explain our intentions to the people and to assess the reactions of public opinion to them". But it was envisaged that eventually councils would be "making suggestions to us", and that "in a council of elders an admixture of a younger and educated element would probably be advantageous".<sup>27</sup> By the 1940s, town councils certainly had more varied membership than just chiefs and headmen, and were taking on a wide range of local government functions and bureaucratic procedures:

Juba Town Council dealt with brickmaking, town roads, times of meeting and the necessity for giving members a better idea of their duties and responsibilities. To this end a sub-committee was formed to discuss the 'literature' needed to educate the members in their job, eg copies of the warrants, the Local Government townships legislation etc.<sup>28</sup>

When provincial and national assemblies were instituted in the 1950s, many of the southern members were chiefs, but some were teachers or other literate government employees. The small class of literate Southerners were also organizing political committees and holding "both formal and informal meetings".<sup>29</sup>

However, both the British officials and the new northern Sudanese administrators who were taking over from them in the 1950s were determined to control or prevent potentially subversive 'political' meetings, which were made subject to government approval. Chiefs' meetings, on the other hand, remained a principle local government mechanism, and, if anything, increased in significance after independence in 1956. The uprising in Equatorial towns that began with the Torit army garrison mutiny in August 1955 left a legacy of government paranoia and increasingly repressive security measures. Yet almost immediately after the uprising, the

government began to revive chiefs' meetings.<sup>30</sup> Some of these were clearly very short and sharp: an opportunity to exhort chiefs to cooperate in maintaining security and informing on any fugitives. One meeting in Yei lasted just one hour; clearly there was little opportunity (and perhaps little desire on either side) for the chiefs to say anything.<sup>31</sup> Several chiefs had taken part in the uprising and were imprisoned or had fled; the remaining chiefs were clearly careful to reiterate their loyalty to the government. But it is nevertheless revealing that chiefs and headmen in Zande District made speeches about the significance of meetings in themselves, as a means of bringing peace and restoring order. One headman thanked the DC for arranging a meeting in Tembura because it "shows that the government is in existence"; a sub-chief "welcomed the DC's speech, and expressed his gratitude for the restoration of order in the area". The chiefs and government officials clearly portrayed the meeting as a means of reconstituting the local state after the crisis of 1955, and were happy for it to be as public as possible: it was reportedly held "in the open" rather than in the council chambers because "there was a big crowd in attendance (about 1500 men & women)".<sup>32</sup>

The newly independent administration also placed considerable emphasis on organizing 'tribal' or 'border' chiefs' meetings, which had been a regular colonial mechanism for the specific purpose of resolving sectional conflicts and disputes. At such meetings in 1957, chiefs signed bonds taking on personal liability in the form of cattle for any contraventions of the peace agreements; more than ever they were being treated as the individual embodiment of their 'communities' in these meetings. One 1957 meeting of Mundari and Dinka chiefs stressed that of all the grazing rules they produced, "[t]he most important rule is that annual meeting shall be held", again underscoring the weight given to meetings as an institution in themselves.<sup>33</sup> Written resolutions and agreements were the required outcome of 'tribal' meetings, which were sporadically revived in the 1970s and 1980s to address local conflicts.

Following the 1972 Addis Ababa peace agreement and establishment of the Southern Regional Government, a new system of local councils was also implemented across the south. As in other parts of Sudan, these councils embodied and further entrenched local political elites, made up of chiefs and headmen, together with prominent local businessmen, educated politicians, and other 'big people'. Again since the 1990s, a range of committees, councils, and ad-hoc meetings and 'workshops' have proliferated under SPLM/A civil administration or the direction of NGOs, churches, and other agencies. Many of these assemblies have been similarly

made up of local elites, albeit nowadays including specific representation of women and youth. This was evident in 2007 when an election to a new county council was held in Yei. It had been widely publicized as a public election by radio and loudspeaker in advance of the day itself, and it was held in an open space in the town. When I arrived, however, I found a gathering of perhaps fifty 'voters' seated on plastic chairs under the trees, most of whom I recognized as chiefs, headmen, and elders, together with some women and politically active younger people. In front of them were local government officers from Juba and Yei, who made initial speeches before allowing candidates to make their own speeches. In many respects this event was a typical 'meeting', in its composition and style, until the point when the voting had to take place and there was considerable confusion among the officials as to the correct procedure (in the end a large hat solved the lack of a ballot box). It certainly reinforced the influence of the established local political elite.

Unsurprisingly, attending meetings has become seen as a central aspect of chiefs' work. During a study of traditional authorities in 2004, people were asked about the role of chiefs and a typical response was "the chief takes our voice to meetings".<sup>34</sup> Chiefs' ability to organize meetings in their own villages was also frequently cited as a measure of how active and able they were. Local government administrators emphasized that when they needed labour or when there was any project or work to do, they held meetings with chiefs and expected chiefs to organize meetings of their communities. Perhaps even more significantly, a number of people I interviewed over the last decade described 'law' as something that was 'made' in meetings of government, chiefs, and elders.<sup>35</sup> Even in the context of wartime, meetings were significant for relations between the SPLA and the civilian population: one headman near Yei emphasized the importance of attending meetings with the SPLA to "talk and bring out laws" to handle the problems of the war, including regulating requisitioning and conscription.<sup>36</sup>

As Hagmann and Péclard emphasize, negotiations like this also entail mutual recognition among the participants,<sup>37</sup> which was crucial to establishing the SPLM/A as a new government, as well as to the authority of the chiefs that it recognized or appointed. But the new rebel government, and the state that it ultimately secured, was building upon structures and practices of local government with a long history. The precise composition, languages, and subjects of meetings have changed according to the political context, and, more recently, the influx of international agencies and emergence of 'civil society' organizations with democratization,

gender, and human rights agendas. But the records of meetings over the past century also reveal striking commonalities in their purpose, procedures, and discourses, and demonstrate the institutionalization of the meeting as a central negotiation table for local government. This negotiation table has structured local political discourse as a binary state-society dialogue of orders, questions, and responses, with implications discussed further below. Yet it has also entailed mutual recognition among the participants and thus contributed to entrenching local political elites who in fact encompass and blur any boundary between state and society. Speaking at a meeting depends on recognition of one's position and status so that of course participants are eager to be 'given the floor' even if they have little new to add to what has already been said – generating the problem of repetition that the facilitator of the 2007 Rumbek meeting sought to prevent. But the regulation of speech, in terms of who can speak and what can be said, is also a fundamental aspect of what is being negotiated at this table; however stable and enduring the hierarchies of local government might appear, they are tested as well as reinforced by meetings.

#### **Talk and talk and talk: the limits of bureaucratic control**

The propensity of South Sudanese to “talk and talk and talk”, as the facilitator of the Rumbek chiefs' meeting in 2007 put it, is frequently commented on with varying degrees of admiration, wry amusement, or outright frustration by government or international agency personnel seeking to use the meeting as an organizational and mobilization tool for 'development' or peacemaking. The very value of the meeting as a means of communication and dissemination, long recognized by government officials, depends upon the ability of the latter to control the 'talk' of the participants, at least within the confines of the meeting itself. Of course, even if they could not stifle dissent or debate in the meeting, they could certainly regulate what was recorded in the reports or minutes, which makes the historian's reliance on the official record problematic, as ever. But some reports reveal more than others, whether due to the efforts of a particularly rigorous minute-taker, or because local officials had reason to bring tensions or grievances to higher attention, or because higher authorities demanded more detailed reporting. There is of course no way of knowing for sure how accurately the speech of participants was transcribed and (usually) translated. But the obvious problems with these sources are nevertheless in themselves revealing of the political tensions, inequalities, and constraints of meetings as negotiation tables,

and are indeed part of the bureaucratic process of turning the ‘talk’ of subjects into the appearance of order and consensual governance.

A prominent feature of colonial reporting is the frequent reference to the disordered, noisy, and troublesome speech of ‘the natives’ when gathered in groups or crowds, no doubt reflecting the underlying vulnerability and often limited linguistic comprehension of British officials when faced with the ‘restless clamouring’ of their subjects.<sup>38</sup> Even the talk of chiefs and elders could be described in this way, posing a challenge to the ability of officials to control meetings. An early British governor of what would become Equatoria Province described being visited at Loka by the chiefs of the former Belgian Lado Enclave, newly incorporated into Sudan in 1910:

Each Chief brought his small party of followers and also his deck chair and pipe, and proceeded to make himself at home in my verandah, reposing in his chair, smoking his pipe and expectorating all over the floor, but taking great interest and joining in the conversation in a loud and boisterous manner and at times backed up by three or four of their followers, all talking loudly together. Apparently they had been accustomed to do this with the Belgians. As some had brought complaints and minor cases they wish settled, I found it necessary to very soon clear my verandah and get to work.<sup>39</sup>

The ‘loud and boisterous’ talk of the chiefs is here juxtaposed with the real ‘work’ of government, which entailed controlling and channelling speeches into the official hearing of ‘cases’. A later government visitor to the same province reported a particularly heated meeting to discuss the contentious issue of government expropriations of land for forest reserves, involving “the alcoholic Chief and certain raucous spokesmen of the tribe”. In an instantaneous enactment of bureaucratic order, the British District Commissioner, Mr Duke, set up his table to convene the meeting on the ground:

I think I shall never in my life forget the lorry stopping and the driver automatically producing from the rear a table and chair, on which Duke placed himself au beau milieu de la route, discussing the pros and cons with a fat file in front of him; neither shall I forget the feverishly expectant eyes of the tribe, watching the discussion as it proceeded in Moru, Arabic and English alternately.<sup>40</sup>

In such public meetings, the audience or crowd played a significant role, albeit as a collective, wordless voice or observer. Most of the records of meetings make little mention of audience size or participation, but many meetings were and are held in open spaces or buildings with open

sides, attracting large audiences (as do the chiefs' courts). The presence of an audience both enhanced the value of the meeting for disseminating government orders and propaganda, and added to the unpredictability of the meeting as what Haugerud terms a "risk-laden occasion".<sup>41</sup>

One record of a meeting that does mention the audience is particularly revealing of 'the moving boundary' between what could or could not be said at a public meeting and by whom,<sup>42</sup> as well as for evidence of the mediating role of minute-taking in constructing these boundaries. A political meeting held at Thiet in the lead-up to the 1958 elections attracted around 300 people, including women, to listen to an address by the MP, Alfred Wol, who spoke in favour of federalism. He then invited questions, using the traditional Dinka *agamlong* to regulate the forum:

One of the attendants replied by telling the Repeater 'Agamlong' to repeat his question with a loud voice. But Chief Mathok Malek stopped him from talking on the grounds that he is a chief and 'the talk should be left to the members of the public'. The would-be questioner kept quiet.

Various members of 'the public' then asked critical questions. One complained that the southern representatives were too divided in parliament to achieve federation: "we have seen that we need medicines for ourselves and for our cattle, we need schools, but none of these is here now." "Another member of the public said you our children have courage but what I hear from the others is that we are ignorant, incapable of making cars and aeroplanes, where will you find these things if you federate the country (divide the country literally) and are we very ignorant?" [The reporter appears to have included a literal translation of the Dinka idiom for federalization here.] MP Wol responded by arguing that people might be illiterate but "you are highly reasonable and wise". At this point, however, the record states that a "mad man" sang a song, and that everyone joined in with it. Another speaker complained about the MPs' inactivity once they arrived at Parliament, concluding with what appears very much like a curse: "God is great, if any of you forgets us again, he, God, will thunder him."<sup>43</sup> The "mad man" then got up and sang what is now described as "his war song", but "it was replied by about three only, people having been fed up". The madman said "I want to tell you why there has not been rain. It is the 'Turuk' who spoilt the rain." "The members of the meeting laughed." MP Wol seems to have interpreted the word *Turuk* as a reference to northern Sudanese, promising that federation would solve this problem too and it would be the *Turuk* who had no rain afterwards. But *Turuk* is a term used more widely

to refer to government personnel, including Southerners like this MP.<sup>44</sup> The meeting reportedly ended, appropriately enough, with a “rain ceremonial song”.<sup>45</sup>

One wonders whether Wol regretted the innovative step of convening a public meeting, rather than the usual meeting of chiefs, and thus expanding the boundaries of who could speak and what could be said – or sung, songs being a particularly effective way of voicing criticism. The report of the meeting appears to have been produced by someone who could understand Dinka – most likely a junior district administrative officer or clerk. His description of the singer as a ‘mad man’ is very revealing of the government practice of censoring or dismissing those who did not conform to the rules and formalities of the meeting as negotiation table. But in this case, the man’s speech and other political criticisms were nevertheless recorded. Strikingly, the reactions of the ‘public’ were also noted: their participation in the first song, their later disinterest, and then their laughter at the criticism of the *Turuk*, leaving a degree of ambiguity as to their support of the ‘mad man’. But he and the other speakers succeeded in turning the meeting around to express some of their grievances and concerns, culminating in a traditional song for rain.

Figures like this singer, or spiritual authorities like rain chiefs and spear-masters, were not among the usual participants in government meetings, and their role and influence is largely excluded from the colonial and postcolonial local government records. At a chiefs’ meeting to resolve sectional conflicts in Rumbek in 1984, an important spiritual leader was accused of cursing the youth of another section so that they lost the conflict to the forces of his own section, and the meeting took the unusual step of summoning him to answer for this. The meeting report, which was otherwise quite detailed in recounting individual speeches, made clear that this interaction was ‘off-stage’, outside the normal conventions of such a meeting: it notes only that there was a “long exchange of words” between what it termed “the witchdoctor”, the commissioner, and the chiefs, before he “blessed” them and departed.<sup>46</sup>

The documentary record thus hints at the much wider ‘talk’ that would have gone on around any meeting, both among the participants and audience before or during the meeting, or when they subsequently reported and discussed it with those not present. No doubt a great deal of what was said at meetings is not reported at all, or is heavily summarized, misinterpreted, or glossed. But the record helps to show what ‘talk’ was officially ‘heard’ and which speakers were recognized. In this sense the minutes and reports are part of what constitute the meeting as a

negotiation table, by cementing the recognition of particular speakers and by producing a formal recorded discourse to be passed on to higher government authorities. Whatever self-censorship and self-regulation governed the speeches of participants, there was always a further layer of potential censoring by the official scribe, which perhaps fed back into the discursive rules of meetings. At the same time, though, there was always room for the slippage of these rules, whether because an individual clerk was amused or annoyed by particular statements, or because certain meeting participants or audience members spoke out of turn or broke or stretched the rules. In this sense a 'table' is perhaps too fixed an object with which to describe the constantly shifting boundaries of what and who was part of the negotiation – the shade of a tree makes a better metaphor and site for these meetings, to recall Buxton's account of the Mundari *toket*. But both the meetings and their records were continually establishing those boundaries, by distinguishing recognized negotiation from the talk of the wider political arena outside.

### **Meetings as negotiation tables**

When tables do feature quite literally in the architecture of meetings, they very much reinforce the hierarchies and the dichotomy between government and society; in this sense they remain an apt metaphor for the structures of negotiation. Meetings have always been used by the government officials behind the table primarily to transmit messages and orders, and secondarily for *limited* consultation: to get answers to particular questions, or to compel the resolution of conflicts. Meeting records largely document the imperative speeches of governors and commissioners, who 'urge', 'tell', and 'order' the chiefs to follow government directives.<sup>47</sup> The space opened for discussion after such speeches was usually a very limited one, and those chiefs whose speech was actually reported were clearly adept at sticking to the limits of acceptable discourse, and taking the opportunity to curry government favour. Political hierarchies are constantly evident, both in terms of who was able to speak at a meeting, and in terms of the order in which they spoke or the attention paid to what they said. But however formal and formulaic much of the dialogue might have been, it was never simply scripted. Chiefs and other speakers found ways to express grievances, to criticize government, and to negotiate some aspects of administration. And in a more general sense, the structuring and performance of meetings as a dialogue between state and society has provided an opportunity to negotiate ideas and discourses of a state-society contract, which has in turn contributed to popular expectations of the state.



In their quest for legitimacy, the speeches of government officials in meetings have tended to emphasize notions of contract or reciprocal bargaining, demanding cooperation and compliance in return for state protection, services, and development. In the early to mid-colonial period, their rhetoric was often paternalistic, promising protection in return for tribute, and professing concern for the welfare of 'their' people, for whom the chiefs were the trusted spokesmen:

Throughout the year the burden of the District Commissioner's exhortations to the chiefs has been 'I am your servant, you are the important people the fathers of your tribesmen, their well-being and their interests are your immediate and most important concern – tell me what they have to say, give me your opinions'.<sup>48</sup>

At chiefs' meetings in the later 1950s, new Sudanese administrators urged chiefs to maintain security and to make their people work hard and cultivate more crops, and in return they would receive agricultural assistance and medical services.<sup>49</sup> The governor of Equatoria made explicit in a speech to one chiefs' meeting in 1957 the relationship between hard work, payment of taxes, and state service provision: "To preserve our independence and meet our needs of life we must produce more crops in order to be able to pay more taxes which will be spent by your Councils on your services".<sup>50</sup> Southern politicians reiterated similar messages at political meetings. Before he was interrupted by the "mad man", Alfred Wol began the public meeting at Thiet with a typical government exhortation: "I am advising you all to cultivate well this year and to cultivate well yearly".<sup>51</sup> In 1974, a meeting was held at Gemeiza to discuss proposals for a sugar scheme with the Mundari population. Clearly facing concerns about the impact of the scheme on their grazing and cultivation areas, Hilary Paul Logali, the Southern Regional Minister of Finance and Planning, tried to reassure them that the scheme would only bring benefits: "What the Mundari people needed, the Govt. shall give, since according to the socialist Principles, the people are the Govt".<sup>52</sup>

The discourse of government officials opened up the potential for chiefs and others to negotiate along similar lines, with the payment of taxes a particular focus for bargaining and contracting. In the 1930s and 1940s, chiefs argued in their meetings with colonial officials for more favourable relationships between the prices obtained for their crops and the rate or timing of taxation. Both the government-fixed prices for cash-crops like cotton and the high prices charged by (mainly northern Sudanese) traders were a frequent source of complaint. As one DC

reported “the Dinka are convinced that the merchants and the Government are two aspects of the same thing – and I have been twitted at public meetings for being very thick with the merchants”.<sup>53</sup>

Even in the tense atmosphere of the immediate post-independence period, the Zande chief James Tembura argued that since his area suffered from a lack of cash crops (coffee, cotton, tobacco), his people should not be expected to pay as much tax as other areas where there were more lucrative crops. He also complained about the lack of medical services in Tembura. Increasingly by this time, chiefs and other speakers were demanding government services in return for the payment of taxes.<sup>54</sup> In 1955, Yirol Council announced a relisting of eligible taxpayers: “The Council... felt that only by increasing the number of tax payers and by show of a fair reflection on population can it hope to get more revenue and a fair share of the Central Government social services”.<sup>55</sup> Twenty years later, chiefs in Juba asserted the need for their negotiation of taxation, and emphasized the vital role of the ‘meeting’ as negotiation table: a meeting of chiefs called in 1977 by the Southern Regional Government to enquire into the arrears in tax collection asserted that the problem lay in the failure of the government to call such a meeting previously: “taxes were not straight because chiefs had never been brought together to talk on taxes”.<sup>56</sup>

As Haugerud writes of the public meetings (*baraza*) that have become central to Kenyan political culture, such meetings have very often been where “citizens learn to deploy political symbols in ways acceptable to those in power”.<sup>57</sup> In South Sudan, such symbols include the bureaucratic rules and procedures of the meeting itself, which chiefs and other participants have frequently deployed to criticize government officials. As early as 1924, in the midst of producing a set of ‘customary’ laws to use in their new government-recognized courts, the Amadi chiefs passed “a few resolutions” “recording an objection to high prices charged by merchants and requesting the D.C. to take action”.<sup>58</sup> The bureaucratic ‘resolution’ has remained an important outcome of certain kinds of meeting, reflecting the potential value of meetings in collectivizing and bureaucratizing the expression of complaints, demands, and agreements. On the other hand, such resolutions often reflect or rubber-stamp government agendas. But more generally, the bureaucratic formalities and rules of meetings have provided a means by which chiefs and other participants could assert their own knowledge of government procedure to challenge and criticize government personnel.

This was apparent in 1984, when government officials, chiefs, and elders were called to “peace meetings” in Rumbek to address recent inter-sectional conflicts among the Agar Dinka.<sup>59</sup> The meetings were held in the office of the Lakes Province Commissioner, Gabriel Mathiang Rok, who originated from the province. He began the meeting by establishing a stark sense of separation between the “Agaar civilized citizens” or “intellectuals”, with whom he had been meeting in Wau and Rumbek, and the chiefs or “Native Administrators”, who were blamed by the educated government elite for failing to prevent the sectional fighting. After threatening the chiefs with arrest or deposition, he made clear the purpose of the meeting: “H. E. the Commissioner told the chiefs that they were going to sign a bond of peace on Oath before the Province Judge at the conclusion of the meeting”. By enacting a dichotomy between the educated elite and the chiefs, the government was thus able to treat the chiefs as responsible for the fighting. But conversely, this provided an opportunity for the chiefs to distance themselves from the government with which they were working, and to criticize it. Yet their criticisms evoked the very cultures and procedures of the government itself, and they were careful to follow the established conventions, including opening their statements by expressing their “great pleasure to attend the meeting” and their desire for “peace and progress”. One chief emphasized that ‘no chief likes fighting to reduce the number of his tax-payers since no chief exists without tax-payers’, reiterating the administrative basis of chiefly authority, and the central role of taxation in negotiating relations with government.

But the chiefs quickly moved on to blame “the intellectual classes” for undermining “Rule of law” by interfering in chiefs’ court cases, and to assert the importance of law and proper judicial procedure to the resolution and prevention of conflicts. One ‘young’ chief blamed the government “for non-implementation of the resolutions agreed in conferences”. Another ‘young’ chief declared a “point of order”: “In that he observed from many colleagues who talked they didn’t concentrate on the agenda”. Such criticisms were a common way of asserting a superior knowledge of procedure. Of course government officials also used such procedures to restrict the ‘talk’ of the chiefs; when one chief accused the province prison commissioner of provoking conflicts, he “was stopped by a point of order to confine himself to agenda”. Another chief “asked the Commissioner to give him permission to point out some government malpractices. The request was refused.” The various criticisms made by the chiefs did not make their way into the formal ‘resolutions’ of these meetings, which concentrated on the responsibilities of chiefs to

report and prevent fighting. But the chiefs' criticisms of government "malpractices" and judicial failings were recorded in the meeting reports, and it is clear that they seized the opportunity to assert their superior knowledge of how government was supposed to work, and to distance themselves from its current corruptions. One senior chief "praised the past English Government and blamed the present Regional Government for improper Administration". By expressing their criticisms in the very language of the government, the chiefs (mostly) stayed within the bounds of acceptable discourse in these meetings, and exposed the inability of government officials to silence them.

Such tactics were also apparent over twenty years later, when a newly-appointed governor of Central Equatoria State visited the town of Yei for the first time after the 2005 peace agreement and establishment of the new Government of Southern Sudan. The governor held a public rally in Freedom Square, at which he and various dignitaries made speeches. Towards the end, the manager of a local civil society organization stood up to read a 'memo' produced by the chiefs of the area. It included sharp criticism of the behaviour of soldiers in the town and a request for the barracks to be moved further away from Yei, as well as complaints about the logging of teak plantations. The crowd nodded and applauded with a degree of amusement at the audacity of the chiefs to criticize the SPLA authorities so publicly. But the tactic of using the bureaucratic tool of the 'memo', and enlisting the politically well-connected CSO manager to read it at such a public meeting, enabled the chiefs to make more vocal criticism than they might otherwise have attempted.

At the Rumbek chiefs' meeting in 2007 with which this paper began, chiefs followed many of the long-established conventions of discourse and procedure. The first chief to speak began in the usual way by expressing "his happiness with the occasion" and his "wish to embrace the culture of harmony". But he then immediately "proposed that they, Chiefs, should be informed in writing in advance for occasions like this, complaining about the need to be put in the picture ahead of time—with all details of the event to take place. He advised anyone organizing such meetings to note his remarks." This chief had thus quickly seized the opportunity to establish his own authority by criticizing the organization of the meeting; his remarks were echoed by some of the other chiefs, forcing the organizers to respond with an apology and a promise to better follow "procedures" in future. Another chief similarly began by

expressing his happiness at the creation of the forum, but then went on to voice his scepticism about its efficacy:

He noted that he attended several conferences and workshops and a lot of resolutions have been made and promises were made but, to his surprise, nothing came forth. 'It is you leaders who travel to Juba and Khartoum who are accountable for such failures.'<sup>60</sup>

An even more revealing exchange took place at another meeting organized as part of the same initiative to establish councils of traditional leaders, this time in Western Equatoria State. The state government sought to use the gathering for the longstanding purposes of local government meetings, requesting the organizers "to prolong the meeting for one day to give the state government the opportunity to inform the chiefs as community representatives about a variety of issues". However, "even before the presentation started the chiefs took the opportunity to set their own agenda". They made a series of complaints about encroachment on their judicial authority by other courts and about their lack of consultation on land allocations. The state government then attempted "to sensitize the chiefs to prevent poaching and to support the wildlife authority", which provoked 'critical remarks' from the chiefs:

The first chief stressed that often security staff such as soldiers, police or prison authorities are involved in poaching. The chief explained that it would be difficult for the chiefs to work together with security agencies to fight poaching as these agencies are at the same time involved in poaching. Chiefs became loud and started to talk but were stopped. Some chiefs walked out angrily.<sup>61</sup>

An attempt by the state Ministry for Agriculture to lecture the chiefs about illegal logging met with a similar reaction. As the international consultant who wrote up the meeting report noted, the chiefs clearly turned around this particular dialogue with the government to articulate their own grievances and criticisms:

The chiefs challenged the ministries when they felt that the state government asked for their support to solve problems caused by the state government itself. The chiefs used the meeting which was planned by the government as an event to inform chiefs as a platform to raise their concerns... The chiefs seemed to realize that they share many problems... Challenging the administration seemed to be easier as a member of a council than as an individual.<sup>62</sup>

While the state government had, as usual, seen this meeting as an opportunity to promulgate its orders and exhort chiefs to enforce them, this occasion instead demonstrated the perennial risks

of bringing chiefs together and presenting them with a government discourse that they could turn back on its speakers. The ability to speak boldly in such meetings was often cited by my informants as a criterion of good chiefship. One elderly woman near Yei recalled a famous chief of the colonial period: “He was brave, so much that he would even bang the table, right in the government official’s face. He could silence people. He spoke straightforwardly.”<sup>63</sup> Given the hierarchical symbolism of the table in meetings and courts, ‘banging the table’ makes a good metaphor for resistance or holding the government to account.

What is striking in the meetings discussed above is the way that chiefs and other participants articulated complaints and criticisms in terms of an ideal state and proper government. Meetings in South Sudan have not necessarily propagated national unity or become arenas for national political discourse in the way that Kenyan *baraza* did.<sup>64</sup> But they have been used by government officials over the past century to legitimize government orders and demands by creating a performance of dialogue and discussion, and by consistently speaking in contractual terms, promising as well as threatening, and raising expectations as well as fears. In turn, the chiefs and other recognized community representatives have adopted this discourse to make demands and to negotiate reciprocal bargains. Whether or not this ‘talk’ had any effect on government is perhaps less significant than its wider effects in raising popular expectations of the state. Meetings have become seen as an opportunity to express these expectations, to demand services, and to (carefully) protest government failings: a church preacher in 2005 asserted that “villages need meetings for development”.<sup>65</sup> In one sense, these effects suggest the success of government officials in using meetings to establish the legitimacy of state authority. But, in another sense, they show that the idea of the state and its discourses of law and bureaucratic order have also become a language of protest and demand.

## **Conclusion**

The authoritarianism of the Sudanese state’s political culture is hard to dispute and even harder to dislodge, as the increasing opposition in recent years to its inheritance or equivalence by the South Sudanese state testifies. But if local government meetings reveal this authoritarianism in the imperative speeches of officials and the hierarchical construction of order, they also expose the fragility of government control over a population that has, to say the least, proved consistently difficult to rule. In perceiving discussion as the best means of dissemination,

colonial government officials and their successors constituted meetings as opportunities for the elites of the local state, particularly chiefs, to question, debate, and at times challenge government policies. This necessitated the explanation and justification of policies by officials in order to gain their endorsement and legitimization by the meetings. But the resulting official rhetoric of a state-society contract – involving state protection and service provision in return for compliance, labour, and taxes – produced ideas and expectations of the state which took a firm hold in wider society, and which chiefs and other meeting participants could deploy to criticize government failings within the discursive conventions of bureaucratic meetings.

These meetings may not have produced many tangible outcomes – the room to negotiate government orders, let alone to hold government officials to account, was always extremely limited. But that should not obscure their *effects*, in Mitchell's sense of the state *as* an idea or 'effect' produced by such performances, which "should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist".<sup>66</sup> The ordering of these meetings as a two-dimensional, hierarchical exchange created the impression of a clear divide between government and society that was blurred or non-existent in the everyday politics of the local state. The performance of this dichotomy has contributed to the idea of the state as an entity standing separate from society, to which people might appeal against the failings and corruptions of local government.

The performance also exposed the vulnerability of government officials, reminding them of their weakness in the face of 'noisy' subjects. They might react reflexively to this experience, silencing chiefs in the meeting or its record, and reminding them of their dependence on government. But officials were trapped by the logic and structure of the meeting as a performance of state-society dialogue: by making chiefs the mouthpiece of 'society', and by recognizing them as 'legitimate counterparts' at the negotiation table, they could less easily sanction them as individuals for their speeches in meetings. Of course this worked both ways: by participating at this negotiation table, chiefs also gave their recognition to government officials as legitimate counterparts, even as they criticized or challenged them. And when chiefs returned from meetings, they in turn became the mouthpiece of government orders. Meetings thus simultaneously reminded officials and chiefs of their mutual dependence and mutual vulnerability, and ultimately confirmed their collective membership of the local political elite. Above all these meetings demonstrate that, however authoritarian the state may be, its authority

has never been simply a top-down projection of power, but rather the product of the multiple local-level negotiations and performances through which it has taken hold in the political imagination and experience of these local elites, and in wider society.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Katrin Seidel and Timm Sureau very much for organising the original conference ‘Emerging South Sudan: Negotiating Statehood’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in 2013 and for their patient and constructive editing of this paper and collection; and the conference participants for their comments on an early version of the paper, particularly Richard Rottenburg. Thanks also to Chris Vaughan, Martina Santschi, Zoe Cormack and Justin Willis for their advice and suggestions on the paper, as well as to the anonymous JEAS reviewers.

---

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> PASS, “Traditional Leaders Conference”.

<sup>2</sup> The CoTALs were prescribed in the Government of Southern Sudan’s Local Government Act 2009, Sec. 119-121.

<sup>3</sup> The typical view was reflected by International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, *The International Dialogue*, 8: “In 2005 there were no Southern Sudanese institutions in place with the capacity to tackle these challenges. Government and administration had to be built from scratch.”

<sup>4</sup> PASS, “Traditional Leaders Conference”.

<sup>5</sup> Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.

<sup>6</sup> Rasanayagam et al., “Introduction”, 20; Vaughan, “Negotiating the state”.

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan, “Reinventing the wheel”; Willis, “Tribal gatherings”.

<sup>8</sup> Howell, “Councils and councillors”.

<sup>9</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

<sup>10</sup> Howell, “Political leadership”, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Rolandsen, *Guerrilla Government*.

<sup>12</sup> Traditional Authority was formally recognised in the Interim Constitution (2005) Art. 173(i), 174-75 and in the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011), Art.166 (6i) 167f.

<sup>13</sup> Prah, *Unity in Diversity*.

<sup>14</sup> Howell, “Introduction”, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Lacker, *International state-building*.

<sup>16</sup> Hagmann and Péclard, “Negotiating statehood”, 551.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 545

<sup>18</sup> See Mitchell, “The limits”.

<sup>19</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture*, 72.



---

<sup>20</sup> Vinco, "First Christian", 101; Werne, *Expedition*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Buxton, *Chiefs and Strangers*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> Baker, *Ismailia*, 255-62.

<sup>23</sup> The Bari headmen sought and failed to make such a contract with Baker; two men who became his interpreters were more successful: *ibid.*, 259, 269.

<sup>24</sup> Gray, *A History*, 149-50.

<sup>25</sup> Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*.

<sup>26</sup> Brock, A/Governor, to Civil Secretary, 7 October 1924, National Records Office, Khartoum (hereafter NRO) Mongalla Province (MP) 1/1/2. Chiefs' courts were given formal recognition in the Chiefs' Courts Ordinance (1931).

<sup>27</sup> Governor Nalder to DCs and Civil Secretary, 'The future of Native Administration in Mongalla', 5 February 1935, NRO Civsec 1/39/105.

<sup>28</sup> Equatoria Province Monthly Diary, November 1949, NRO Dakhliia 57/5/13.

<sup>29</sup> Equatoria Province Monthly Diaries, June, July and September 1949, NRO Dakhliia 57/5/13; June and October 1951, NRO Dakhliia 57/9/24; and February, April, July and September 1952, NRO Civsec2 30/3/6; Howell, 'Political leadership', 115.

<sup>30</sup> [Rolandsen and Leonardi, "Discourses of violence"](#).

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of a meeting of DC and chiefs, Yei, 15 November 1955, recorded by William Deng Nhial, South Sudan National Archives, Juba (SSNA) Equatoria Province (EP) 1.A.16.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of Tembura Chiefs' Meeting, Tembura, 10 November 1955, by Ahmed Hassan, DC Zande, SSNA EP 1.A.16.

<sup>33</sup> Juba Rural Council Monthly Diary for January 1957, SSNA EP 100.B.4-7.

<sup>34</sup> Leonardi et al., "Report on traditional authority", 11.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dinka male elder and former chiefs' court member, Wau, November 27, 2009; interview with Dinka male elder and mechanic, Rumbek, November 18, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with male Kakwa headman, near Yei, October 4, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Hagmann and Péclard, "Negotiating statehood".

<sup>38</sup> Lakes District Monthly Reports, February-March 1937, SSNA EP 57.D.10.

<sup>39</sup> Governor Owen, "Occupation of the Lado Enclave", May-June 1910, NRO MP 1/8/51.

<sup>40</sup> HB Bullen, "Personal diary of visit to southern Sudan, May-August 1947", Sudan Archive Durham (SAD) 864/2/16.

<sup>41</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, "Ngundeng", 121.

<sup>45</sup> Political Meeting held at Thiet on 10 April 1958, NRO Upper Nile Province (UNP) 1/20/168.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Gok and Agar sections on August 20, 1984, Rumbek, Bahr el Ghazal Province Archive, Wau, Lakes Province 66.B.1.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Haugerud, *The Culture*, 73.

<sup>48</sup> Moru District Annual Report 1939, NRO EP 2/26/94.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of Tribal Gathering, Ibba, February 19, 1957, by J. G. Warrabeck for DC Moru, SSNA EP 1.A.16. [See also Rolandsen and Leonardi, "Discourses of violence"](#).

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 11 pt

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 11 pt, English (U.K.)

- 
- <sup>50</sup> Governor Equatoria's speech to meeting of all chiefs of Zande District, February 18, 1957, SSNA EP 1.A.16.
- <sup>51</sup> Political Meeting held at Thiet on 10 April 1958; also Sub-Mamur's Office, report on Ezbon Mundiri's political meeting of Federalist Party in Amadi on 4 January 1958, both NRO UNP 1/20/168. Cf. Haugerud, *The Culture*, 66.
- <sup>52</sup> Amato Gore Andrea, Executive Officer Juba People's Rural Council, *Trek Journal* 26-27 February 1974, SSNA EP 66.B.1.2.
- <sup>53</sup> Lakes District Handbook, 1940, SSNA EP 1.G.2; Rumbek District Monthly Report, Oct 1937, SSNA EP 57.D.10; Equatoria Province Monthly Diary December 1947, NRO Dakhliā 57/2/5; 'Extract from proceedings of Juba District Chiefs Meeting, February 1-4, 1950', NRO EP 2/9/32.
- <sup>54</sup> Zande chiefs' meetings, 1950s, SSNA EP 1.A.16.
- <sup>55</sup> Lakes District Monthly Report January 1955, SSNA UNP Bor District 57.B.2.
- <sup>56</sup> Minutes of the Head Chiefs' Conference held in the office of the Inspector Local Government Juba District, 6-7 September 1977, by Amato Gore Andrea, SSNA EP 66.B.1.2.
- <sup>57</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture*, 99.
- <sup>58</sup> "Amadi District Notes on Chiefs Courts" (1924) NRO MP 1.1.2.
- <sup>59</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Gok and Agar sections on 20 August 1984, Rumbek; Minutes of the meeting of Commissioner Lakes Province with Aliamtoc Chiefs on 3 August 1984, both in Bahr el Ghazal Province Archive, Wau, Lakes Province 66.B.1.
- <sup>60</sup> PASS, "Traditional Leaders Conference".
- <sup>61</sup> Santschi, "Traditional Leaders".
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with female Kakwa elder, near Yei, October 26, 2005.
- <sup>64</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture*.
- <sup>65</sup> Interview with male Kakwa church preacher, Yei, September 19, 2005.
- <sup>66</sup> Mitchell, 'The limits', 94.

## References

- Baker, S. W. *Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, organized by Ismail, Khedive of Egypt*, Vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1874.
- Buxton, J. *Chiefs and Strangers: A Study of Political Assimilation among the Mandari*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.
- Gray, R. *A History of the Southern Sudan 1839-1889*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Hagmann, T. and D. Péclard. "Negotiating statehood: dynamics of power and domination in Africa". *Development and Change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 539-62.
- Haugerud, A. *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

- 
- Howell, J. "Councils and councillors, 1969-72". In *Local Government and Politics in the Sudan*, edited by J. Howell. Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1974.
- Howell, J. "Introduction: local government and politics". In *Local Government and Politics in the Sudan*, edited by J. Howell. Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1974.
- Howell, J. "Political leadership and organisation in the southern Sudan". University of Reading, unpublished PhD thesis, 1978.
- International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. *The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding: contribution by the Government of Southern Sudan*, 2010. <[www.oecd.org/countries/sudan/44924610.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/countries/sudan/44924610.pdf)> [accessed 6 May 2014]
- Johnson, D. H. "Ngundeng and the 'Turuk': two narratives compared", *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 119-39.
- Lacker, W. *International State-Building and its Limits*. Berlin: SWP, 2012.
- Leonardi, C., D. B. Mijak, and E. A. D. Höt. "Report on traditional authority in Western and Central Equatoria". Nairobi: UNDP, unpublished report, 2005.
- Leonardi, C. *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of chiefship, community and state*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013.
- Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Mitchell, T. "The limits of the state: beyond statist approaches and their critics". *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77-96.
- PASS "Traditional Leaders Conference, Lakes State, South Sudan, Rumbek, 12-15 March 2007" (2007), <[www.houseofnationalities.org/TraditionalLeadersConferences\\_LakesState.asp](http://www.houseofnationalities.org/TraditionalLeadersConferences_LakesState.asp)> [accessed 1 August 2012]
- Prah, K. K. *Unity in Diversity: South Sudan COTALs study and familiarization tour report (South Africa, Botswana and Ghana) January 2013*. Cape Town: CASAS, 2013.
- Rasanayagam, J., J. Beyer, and M. Reeves "Introduction: performances, possibilities and practices of the political in Central Asia". In *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: performing politics*, edited by M. Reeves, J. Rasanayagam, and J. Beyer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

---

Rolandsen, Ø. H. *Guerrilla Government: Political changes in the Southern Sudan during the 1990s*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2005.

Rolandsen, Ø. H. and C. Leonardi. "Discourses of violence in the transition from colonialism to independence in southern Sudan, 1955–1960". *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 4 (2014): 609-25.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: English (U.K.)

Santschi, M. "Traditional Leaders Conference 26<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Yambio, Western Equatoria State". Bern: unpublished report, 2008.

Vaughan, C. "Reinventing the wheel? Local government and neo-traditional authority in late-colonial northern Sudan". *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 255-78.

Vaughan, C. "Negotiating the state at its margins: colonial authority in Condominium Darfur, 1916-1956". Durham University: unpublished PhD thesis, 2011.

Vinco, A. "First Christian to live among the Bari: his Journeys 1851-1852". In *The Opening of the Nile Basin: Writings by members of the Catholic Mission to Central Africa on the geography and ethnography of the Sudan, 1842-1881*, edited by E. Toniolo, and R. Hill. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975.

Werne, F. *Expedition to Discover the Sources of the White Nile, in the years 1840, 1841*, Vol. 2. London: Richard Bentley, 1849.

Willis, J. "Tribal gatherings: colonial spectacle, native administration and local government in Condominium Sudan". *Past and Present* 211, no. 1 (2011): 243-68.