



THE POETICS OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN DINKA SONGS IN SOUTH SUDAN

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Abstract:

Political historians often described the civil war in Sudan as a ‘theatre of proliferating conflicts’. While independence for South Sudan may have closed the curtain on one act, it has given rise to a new spectacle, depicted through a narrative of internal conflict and extreme underdevelopment, and directed predominantly by the state and its international development partners. This article seeks to counter the official discourse about post-conflict reparation by considering ways in which peace and reconciliation are imagined at the local level. In particular, it considers the agentive role of Dinka songs, analyzing the ways in which they bear witness to the memories and aspirations of one group within the diverse cultural spread of South Sudan society. In so doing, it explores how the infusion of old poetic forms and structures with new actors, roles and imaginaries gives force within a culturally sanctioned framework of legitimacy, thus offering a potentially meaningful arena for the narration of a locally relevant national script.

Keywords: South Sudan, Transitional Justice, Dinka Songs, Truth-Telling, Citizenship, Post-Conflict Nation-Building.

Resumen:

Los historiadores políticos han calificado a menudo la guerra civil en Sudán como un “escenario de proliferación de conflictos”. Si bien la independencia de Sudán del Sur puede haber corrido el telón de un acto, también ha dado lugar a un nuevo espectáculo, representado mediante una narrativa de conflictos internos y de subdesarrollo extremo, y dirigido predominantemente por el Estado y sus socios internacionales para el desarrollo. Este artículo pretende contra-argumentar el discurso oficial sobre la reparación post-conflicto considerando formas en las que la paz y la reconciliación son imaginadas a nivel local. En particular, considera el papel activo de las canciones Dinka, analizando las formas en las que dan testimonio de los recuerdos y aspiraciones de un grupo dentro de la amplia diversidad cultural de la sociedad de Sudán del Sur. En este sentido, el artículo explora cómo se infunden formas y estructuras poéticas antiguas en nuevos actores, roles e imaginarios, reforzando de esta manera un marco de legitimidad sancionado culturalmente, lo cual ofrece un ámbito potencialmente significativo para la narración de un guión nacional relevante a nivel local.

Palabras clave: *Sudán del Sur, justicia transicional, canciones Dinka, narración de la verdad, ciudadanía, construcción nacional post-conflicto.*

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I can't imagine how a bereaved cattle rustler would stop a revenge urge simply because some Europeans, Americans, Asians and other Africans have met in Juba in the name of peace and reconciliation. In other words, internationalization of local issues is not a solution to South Sudanese conflicts.²

1. Introduction

The reflections presented in this essay have their roots in a 3-year research project on Dinka music in South Sudan.³ During the process of recording, annotating and analyzing a large repertoire of songs collected from respondents across a number of Dinka-speaking states, I became increasingly fascinated by the prevalence of themes pertaining to historical memory, justice, conflict resolution and civic engagement. It occurred to me that the dialogue contained within these poetic expositions appeared to be running concurrently with, yet largely separate from the official narrative about national healing that is being generated by government ministries and their international development partners.⁴ While there is little disagreement that peace-building and national reconciliation is imperative to the development of a unified, democratic country, there appears to be growing concern – made evident in the songs and corroborated by a burgeoning literature on transitional justice in South Sudan – about how such a process might be implemented in order to answer to the needs of a diverse population. Much of this anxiety is directed at the potential privileging by the government of top-down mechanisms of international law and human rights practice,⁵ thus foregoing the opportunity to create equitable and inclusive conditions by which both past and present conflicts may be addressed and resolved. The call for the development of both formal and informal instruments and arrangements for the promotion of reconciliation and nation-building is prevalent in

² Mawe, Ahang: “Will the upcoming national reconciliation and healing in South Sudan be a success?”, *South Sudan News Agency*, 30 April 2013, at

<http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/opinion/articles/will-the-upcoming-national-reconciliation>

³ This project, entitled ‘Metre and Melody in Dinka Speech and Song’, was a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh and SOAS, University of London, with funding from a British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) ‘Beyond Text’ grant. I would like to extend my gratitude to Bob Ladd, Bert Remijnsen, Elizabeth Achol Ajuet Deng, Simon Yak Deng Yak, Peter Malek and Mawan Mourtat for their contribution to the annotation and translations of the songs, and to Eddie Thomas and John Ryle for recommendations made on an earlier draft of the paper. Thanks also to Brigid O’Connor for pointing me to relevant sources in South Sudan.

⁴ Bickford, Louis (2004): “Transitional Justice” in Shelton, Dinah L. (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, Vol. 3, Farmington Hills, Macmillan Library Reference, pp. 1045-1047. According to Bickford, transitional justice consists of both judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms that focuses on ‘how societies address legacies of past human rights abuses, mass atrocity, and other forms of severe social trauma, including genocide or civil war, in order to build a more democratic, just, or peaceful future.’ (p. 1045). Transitional justice comprises 4 components: criminal prosecutions (that address perpetrators of violence); reparation (material compensation and public apology); institutional reform of abusive state institutions (armed forces, police and courts), and truth commissions (public disclosure of patterns of abuse aimed at better understanding underlying causes of serious human rights violations).

⁵ McEvoy, Kieran and Lorna McGregor (eds.) (2008): *Transitional Justice from Below: Grassroots Activism and the Struggle for Change*, Oxford, Hart Publishing; Baliey, Naseem: “The strategic instrumentalization of land tenure in ‘state-building’: The case of Juba, South Sudan”, *Africa*, vol. 83, n° 1 (February 2013), pp. 57–77; Deng, David. K. (2013): “Changes of Accountability. An Assessment of Dispute Processes in Rural South Sudan”, *South Sudan Law Society* at

http://www.pactworld.org/sites/default/files/Challenges%20of%20Accountability_FINAL%20May%2016.pdf;

Kindersley, Nicky: “Internally Displaced”, 4 April 2013, at

<http://internallydisplaced.wordpress.com/2013/04/13/the-sudan-council-of-churches-riek-machar-and-a-journey-of-national-healing-thoughts-on-peace-and-reconciliation-in-south-sudan/#more-561>.



current writings on South Sudan; some, such as Jok Madut⁶ go so far as to suggest that the exclusion of civil society from the national platform poses the greatest threat to national cohesion in the country. Jok Madut's counsel is validated by Ryan who advocates that 'Lasting peace requires people, communities and leaders with the skills, capacities and opportunities to work together to reconcile political and sectarian divisions. The absence or presence of these skills and capabilities can make the difference between violence and instability on the one hand, and peace and growth on the other'.⁷

This paper argues for greater institutional receptiveness to citizen representation in the national reconciliation process in South Sudan. In particular, it appeals for a better understanding of local cultural ecologies of communication (i.e. relational systems and contexts of communication) and the assimilation of truth-telling in diverse and multiple forms. As noted by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), because truth-telling in transitional societies plays a critical role in providing a publicly sanctioned space for people to speak and be heard, it is imperative that truth commissions understand and incorporate different systems of disclosure.⁸ This is of particular significance when communicating with a population that has little access to either literacy or to the dominant language of a society.

More specifically, the paper will focus on the agentive role of Dinka songs,⁹ drawing in particular on the following observations: The first extends the notion that songs carry rhetorical power in Dinka society, offering a culturally sanctioned site for the public disclosure of personal, social and political histories and future agendas. As suggested by Francis Mading Deng, 'Songs everywhere constitute a form of communication which has its place in the social system, but among the Dinka their significance is more clearly marked in that they are based on actual, usually well-known events and are meant to influence people with regard to those events'.¹⁰ Additionally, concerns made public in songs carry different moral authority in Dinka customary law to that of oral discourse, serving as a venerated platform for the recounting of historical events, for the re-establishment of trust between individuals, clans and communities, and for the reaffirmation of damaged cultural identity.¹¹

The second observation takes its lead from the way that songs were utilized during the 2nd civil war, their social and political capital evidenced by their widespread deployment to mobilize action, to transmit information over vast geographic areas and to boost morale.

Finally, the argument draws on the use of songs in current Dinka cultural practice, and in particular on the way that they continue to be composed and shared between clan members

⁶ Jok, Jok Madut (2011): "Diversity, Unity, and Nation Building in South Sudan", *Special Report-United States Institute of Peace*, n° 287, pp. 1-15.

⁷ Ryan, Jordan: "Infrastructures for Peace as a Path to Resilient Societies: An Institutional Perspective", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 7, n° 3 (2012), p. 17

⁸ "What is Transitional Justice?" *International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)* at <http://ictj.org/about/transitional-justice?gclid=CLy85rTGsbgCFTMgtAod8RgAeA>; "United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice. Guidance Note of the Secretary-General", *United Nations*, (March 2010), at http://www.unrol.org/files/TJ_Guidance_Note_March_2010FINAL.pdf

⁹ The focus on Dinka songs specifically is based purely on information available at the time of writing, and is not intended in any way to privilege one group over any other. A similar argument may be applied to the song cultures or oral traditions of any one of the 60+ ethno-linguistic groups in South Sudan.

¹⁰ Deng, Francis Mading (1973): *The Dinka and their Songs*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, p. 84.

¹¹ Makec, John Woul (1988): *The Customary Law of the Dinka People of Sudan*, London, Afroworld Publishing, p. 211.



across the world; their remit as vital channels of communication about clan, region and national politics now implicated in the complexity of networks, identifications and intimacies of a globally dispersed people.¹²

Building on these justifications, the paper construes the making and sharing of songs in Dinka society as ‘acts of citizenship’, framed as the active mediation by individuals and groups of ideas, opinions and ideologies aimed specifically at sociopolitical intervention and amelioration.¹³ Through the analysis of a selection of songs, the paper will examine how the infusion of old poetic forms with new actors, roles and imaginaries are given force within a culturally sanctioned framework of legitimacy, thus offering a potentially significant counterweight to what are often considered remote, regulatory and culturally inappropriate institutional discourses on peace and reconciliation.

2. Transitional Justice in South Sudan

A formal peace and national reconciliation process in South Sudan has been on the agenda since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. With Independence in 2011, President Kiir announced the government’s plan to organize a Peace and National Reconciliation Commission, charging Vice-President Riek Machar with the responsibility to build on work previously conducted by the Southern Sudan Peace Commission (which had been in existence since the signing of the CPA) and the former Ministry for Peace and CPA Implementation.¹⁴ In President Kiir’s words, the Commission, which would operate with support of multilateral and bilateral public partners and international and national NGOs, and in cooperation with national State and local authorities, would support ‘an inclusive and people-driven process in order to achieve true reconciliation’.¹⁵ The need to expand a transitional justice process post-2011 was built largely on the recognition that unity in South Sudan is built on a fragile notion of nationhood, its multiple ethnicities held tenuously together by a collective history of struggle against Sudan and Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule before it.¹⁶ As noted by Jok Mdut, ‘Despite violent discord within the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the creation of ethnic militias that fought bitter wars against it,

¹² Impey, Angela: “Keeping in touch via cassette: Tracking Dinka songs from cattle camp to transnational audio-letter”, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, nº 2 (2013), pp. 197-210.

¹³ Yúdice, George (2003): *Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham, Duke University Press; Avelar, Idelber and Dunn, Christopher (eds.) (2011): *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship*, Durham, Duke University Press.

¹⁴ For a more detailed summation of the history of the peace process in South Sudan, see ‘South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission - Strategic Plan 2013-2015’, Juba (2013). It is worth noting here that in the Transitional Constitution 2011 (Article 36(2), Part 3, Fundamental Objectives and Guiding Principles) it is stated that all levels of government shall: (a) promote and consolidate peace and create a secure and stable political environment for socio-economic development; (b) initiate a comprehensive process of national reconciliation and healing that shall promote national harmony, unity and peaceful co-existence among the people of South Sudan; (c) inculcate in the people a culture of peace, unity, cooperation, understanding, tolerance and respect for customs, traditions and beliefs of each other; and (d) mobilize popular energies and resources for reconstruction and development.

¹⁵ Martins, Alex: “Reconciliation committee Chairman encourages peace mobilisers”, *Initiatives of Change International*, 30 April 2013, at <http://www.iofc.org/reconciliation-committee-chairman-challenges-peace-mobilisers>

¹⁶ Mawut, Lazarus Leek (1983): *Dinka Resistance to Condominium Rule 1902-1932*, Khartoum, University of Khartoum, Graduate College Publications.



the undeniable fact is that all South Sudanese remained focused on the need for unity of purpose and ranks in the struggle for self-determination'.¹⁷

Since Independence, inter-ethnic clashes over cattle, land and natural resources have escalated, threatening to further destabilize internal security and to undermine efforts to build a viable economic infrastructure. The situation is elaborated in the following excerpt from the *South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission - Strategic Plan 2013-2015*:

Along with independence came the challenge of building a new nation with the legacy of the past. Decades of war divided people along tribal lines, there is a high internal displacement. Cattle rustling is rampant and the huge presence of small arms exacerbates conflicts related to tribal practices such as elopement and child abduction, in addition to those related to competition for land and resources. Cross-border conflicts with neighbouring countries, refugees, a weak civil service, weak rule of law, lack of economic opportunities, the needs of returnees and former combatants, corruption, nepotism and poor accountability are but some of the additional stresses weighing upon the new nation.¹⁸

The country has not yet been able to establish a formal justice system capable of meeting the basic requirements of all South Sudanese, and customary systems remain instrumental in resolving a wide range of civil disputes. According to Deng,¹⁹ the development of a formal justice system will require the government to overcome a number of challenges, not least of which will be widespread impunity for inter-communal and politically motivated violence. As peace and justice are inextricably interconnected, Deng proposes that conflict sensitive programming will necessarily require a thorough understanding of the complex socio-political dynamics that underpin violence, and substantial time and resources will need to be invested in research and analysis: 'These tasks require people and institutions that have experience with cutting-edge research techniques, an in-depth knowledge of South Sudan and its history and practical experience working in pluralist legal systems'.²⁰

On April 14 President Salva Kiir abruptly canceled a national reconciliation effort that the Vice President Riek Machar Teny had initiated in the last quarter of 2013. The reasons for the cancellation have been widely debated²¹ and remain outside the remit of this paper. Suffice to say that in April 2013, President Salva Kiir officially reinstated national reconciliation as one of the priority agendas for South Sudan, appointing the non-partisan religious leader, Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul, to Chair a new committee charged with launching a national campaign for reconciliation under the auspices of the Office of the President and the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission.²² In accepting his role, Archbishop Deng Bul echoed the commendations made by President Kiir and Deng²³ above by calling for greater inclusivity and public consultation, appealing to peace mobilizers to

¹⁷ Madut Jok, *op cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁸ "South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission - Strategic Plan 2013-2015", Juba, 2013, p. 11.

¹⁹ Deng, *op cit.*, p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹ The Sudd Institute: "Peace and Reconciliation in South Sudan: A Conversation for Justice and Stability", *Special Report*, 7 June 2013.

²² The committee will comprise three Christian bishops, a leader from the Muslim community and representatives from women, youth and civil society organizations, as well as from each of the ten States (IoCI 2013). As to whether placing the process entirely in the hands of religious leaders is an appropriate approach has generated a range of new and different debates. The Sudd Institute, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²³ Deng, *op. cit.*



assist in gathering data across the country in order to reveal the sources of lingering tensions and conflict among South Sudanese. In a press release by the IoCI, he is quoted as saying: ‘We will touch every corner, every state, every payam, every boma, and you will be part of the structures to take national reconciliation across the country’.²⁴ In an interview with Juba-based Radio Miraya, the Archbishop further qualified that the commission will ‘creat(ing) the space for people to come and talk to each other..., that is why we say we are going to talk to the people on the ground because (y)ou can’t say you want to make peace when you don’t know what is in the hearts of the people so we need to let people speak, where ever and whatever they are’.²⁵

The emphasis on civil society participation in reconciliation is further developed by Thomas who highlights the need to draw on the many peace initiatives that have started in South Sudan during its many years of conflict:

The past lessons of reconciliation, and the past roles of civil society in reconciliation, will shape experiences today. South Sudan has a rich resource in its traditions of restorative justice, of reconciliation, and civil society needs to pay attention to those traditions, and the way that they worked during the war. The formal associations that are represented here – like human rights, electoral, religious and other organisations – need to work through these traditions. They need to stand up for the rights of non-state actors in reconciliation.²⁶

Despite the widespread call for the inclusion of civil society, the development of local instruments and for a ‘thicker’ understanding of local conditions within transitional justice processes, there is a continued reliance on bespoke models and solutions to truth and reconciliation.²⁷ Compounding this in South Sudan is concern as to whether the government is yet able to accommodate open, frank disclosure that may challenge the somewhat singular national liberation narrative, that would allow individuals to question the ideologies and actions of the likes of John Garang and the SPLA, and that would question the nation’s apparent unity of purpose.²⁸

3. Assimilating Competing Memories and Different Kinds of ‘Talk’ in Transitional Justice

Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of transitional justice mechanisms aimed at restoring peace and implementing reparation in the aftermath of state violence and civil war. Inherent to all of these procedures is the ongoing concern with how to reckon with competing memories of violent pasts for contemporary democratic political objectives. The organized collection of survivor and witness narratives has constituted an integral part of transitional justice efforts in recent decades, and testimonies are generally taken to be

²⁴ Martins, *op. cit.*

²⁵ “Reconciliation to address grievances: Archbishop Deng Bul”, Radio Miraya, 19 June 2013, at <http://www.radiomiraya.org/interviews2/11451-reconciliation-to-address-grievances-archbishop-deng-bul.html#gsc.tab=0>.

²⁶ Thomas, Edward: “Reconciliation and the consolidation of peace – the role of civil society”, Unpublished notes from Justica Africa meeting, (July 2011).

²⁷ McEvoy and McGregor, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Kindersley, *op. cit.*



evidence of and an instrument for a victim-centered approach.²⁹ Yet, although much of the work undertaken on testimonial narrative offered in truth commissions has tended to focus on the content of survivor testimony, there is an emerging body of scholarship that has begun to focus on 'the forms such narratives take, the contexts of their production, and their ongoing local, national, and transnational circulation'.³⁰

Truth hearings themselves are often interpreted in narrative or theatrical terms; the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) being one such example that is typically represented as a 'theatre of justices'.³¹ Cole's framing of the TRC in performative terms is derived partly from the way it was staged within the context of a formal court proceeding, contained within which were a range of public and embodied elements, and partly because of how it assumed a ritualistic function as 'part legal court, part (Christian) ritual of forgiveness and atonement, and part psychological talking-cure/catharsis'.³² These performative dimensions were made all the more apparent by the way the TRC took center stage in the South African media, the objective being to render the hearings a truly national experience rather than restricting them to a small handful of selected commissioners.³³ As to whether such publicly staged hearings successfully granted victims voice and agency in South Africa has frequently been brought to question. Indeed, such a format, which was determined by the protocols and epistemologies of a court of law, has been charged with casting victims into a passive role, 'allowing them to speak only when spoken to by an agent of the court, and even then to speak only on certain terms and topics ... In addition, the principles of evidence and truth operative in the court are often woefully inadequate to grapple with the psychological complexity of trauma, especially trauma perpetrated on a massive scale'.³⁴

Furthermore, the court-based truth-telling format often involves an unnatural narrative disjuncture manifest in the extraction of discourses from one setting and their insertion into another, where they are often reworked to accord with Northern-derived and highly regimented discursive formulae. French argues that this de-contextualization of survivor and witness testimony underscores the need for a 'natural history of discourse' that is responsive to 'culturally and contextually contingent semiotic processes'.³⁵ Similarly, Briggs proposes that the value of such discursive features and processes is that they 'project cartographies of their own production, circulation, and reception'³⁶ revealing ecologies of communication that underwrite what is understood to be the real story of past violent experiences. Underscoring such an argument, Jackson³⁷ questions the primacy of speech in development practice and testimony and highlights the need for greater sensitivity to, and accommodation of a plurality of speech registers (e.g. poetry, stories, songs, bodily praxis).

²⁹ French, Brigitte: "The Semiotics of Collective Memories", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 41, n° 1 (2012), p. 343.

³⁰ French, *op. cit.*

³¹ Posel, Deborah (2002): "The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What Kind of Truth?" in Posel, Deborah and Graeme Simpson (eds.): *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press; Felman, Shoshana (2002): *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

³² Cole, Catherine. M. (2009): *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, African Expressive Cultures Series, p. 129.

³³ Cole, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Cole, Catherine. M.: "Performance, Transitional Justice, and the Law: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Theatre Journal*, vol. 59, n° 2 (2007), p. 170.

³⁵ French, *op. cit.* p. 344.

³⁶ Briggs, Charles L.: "Mediating infanticide: theorizing relations between narrative and violence", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 22, n° 3 (2007), p. 332.

³⁷ Jackson, Cecile: "Speech, Gender and Power: Beyond Testimony." *Development and Change*, vol. 43, n° 5 (2012), pp. 999–1023.



Despite the call for the inclusion of diverse communication modalities in peace and reconciliation processes, very little rigorous ethnographic research has been undertaken on culturally embedded mechanisms of disclosure and forgiveness, nor are there many practical guidelines as to how these mechanisms might be included in formal transitional justice strategies. Yet increasingly, scholars and human rights activists are beginning to recognize the importance of culture in supporting a transitional justice process ‘from below’.³⁸ The following statement issued by the ICTJ (2012) serves as useful direction:

Oral tradition plays an important role as a source of law, a basis for claims, and a guarantee of action in indigenous societies. The performance of ceremonies to witness or commemorate is an important element in validating and dignifying storytelling.... Such an approach demands bold discussion: How can we assess the validity of oral tradition as evidence? How do different cultures treat time and causality in narratives of the past? Who speaks for a community, and how may that differ from community members’ individual accounts? On the basis of these reflections, truth commissions focused on indigenous rights could devise innovative techniques for taking statements, processing data, and developing standards of evidence. Similarly, learning from indigenous peoples on the most appropriate forms to transmit information should inform a truth commission’s approach on outreach and dissemination of its findings.³⁹

4. Dinka Songs as Testimony

Debates about the social and political currency of African oral ‘art’ have occupied scholars for numerous decades. Finnegan (2012), Furniss (2004, 2008), Barber (2003, 2007), Keil (1979) Pongweni (1982), and Gunner (2008)⁴⁰ are amongst a growing stable of scholars in African Studies who advocate for the place of orality in culture and memory, and as essential to an understanding of human cognition. The place of *songs* in oral history or political testimony is not as well recognized, however, although historians such as Vaughan (1985), Vail and White (1983; 1991), Harries (1987), Finnegan (2007) and Sletto (2009)⁴¹ have

³⁸ Baines, Erin K.: “The Haunting of Alice: Local Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda”, *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 1 (2007), pp. 91–114; McEvoy and McGregor, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Arthur, Paige; Eduardo González; Yukyan Lam; Joanna Rice; César Rodríguez-Garavito and Deborah J. Yashar (2012): *Truth And Memory: Strengthening Indigenous Rights through Truth Commissions: A Practitioner’s Resource*, International Center for Transitional Justice, p.5, at <http://ictj.org/publication/strengthening-indigenous-rights-through-truth-commissions-practitioners-resource>

⁴⁰ Finnegan, Ruth (2007): *The Hidden Musicians. Making Music in an English Town*. Wesleyan, Wesleyan University Press; Furniss, Graham (2008): “On the multiple dimensions of memory in the oral communicative moment”, Paper presented at the Seventh Conference of the International Society for Oral Literature in Africa (ISOLA), University of Salento, Lecce, Italy 11-15 June.; Barber, Karin: “Text and performance in Africa”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 66, n° 3 (2003), pp. 324-333; Barber, Karin (2007): *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Keil, Charles (1979): *Tiv Song. The Sociology of Art in a Classless Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press; Pongweni, Alex. C.J. (1982): *Songs that Won the Liberation Struggle*. Zimbabwe, College Press; Gunner, Liz. (2008): *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴¹ Vaughan, Megan: “Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland”, *Past and Present*, n° 108 (1985), pp. 177-205; Vail, Leroy and Landeg White: “Forms of Resistance: Songs and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 88, n° 4 (1983), pp. 883-919; Vail, Leroy and Landeg White. (1991): *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia; Harries, Patrick (1987): “A forgotten corner of the Transvaal’: Reconstructing the history of a relocated community through oral testimony and song” in Bozzoli, Belinda. (ed.): *Class, Community and Conflict. South African Perspectives*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press.; Finnegan, Ruth (2012): [2nd Edition] *Oral*



argued persuasively for their role in historical reconstruction, offering an important space for the voices of those otherwise marginalized or politically silenced. Doubts cast on the validity of songs as testimony tend to be attributed to their apparent transience, their inclination to alter over time and with different performers, and their expression in performance. To most people in the Global North, 'performance' tends to be synonymous with entertainment rather than with embedded social or political practice. In defense of song as oral history, musicologist Richard Widdess aptly points out that 'orality can too easily be seen as a negative condition, a condition of the stereotypical Other, a view that then lends unwelcome support to the Western academy's lingering insistence that only music written in scores is really worth taking seriously. We need to understand what orality *is*, not what it is not.'⁴²

In the following section, I make a case for songs as socially and politically embedded communication extending their role as 'acts of citizenship' that resonate in both the affective and pragmatic registers of human experience. By drawing on the symbols, resonances and meanings that inhere in shared cultural practice, I contend that songs offer a significant platform (sonic, contextual and discursive) for the elicitation and preservation of memories; they exercise emotional and ideological power, and play a decisive role in the reconstruction of individual and social identities. Songs also provide a space for the negotiation with power, operating as a veritable *vox pop* that is invoked to validate or criticize, and thus to communicate how power and the state is experienced or imagined more generally.

Within the Dinka musical canon, the significance of songs is determined by how poignantly they address real events and experiences, and how effectively they inspire moral reflection; a mutuality that endorses the potency of song in political dialogue. In this regard, songs are a locus of *communicative reciprocity*, serving as a vehicle for both introspective reflection and public pronouncement.

Prior to considering their role in national reconciliation, it would be prudent to outline the convention of song making in Dinka culture, briefly describing the mastery and meanings of song performance, and explaining the significance afforded them in Dinka society as a public political platform.

Dinka have a vast taxonomy of songs – praise songs, historical songs, political songs, cathartic songs, shaming songs etc. - each judiciously categorized according to specific functional, musical and performative distinctions. Every man and woman will accumulate a repertoire of personal songs during their lifetime that will chronicle personally significant events, relationships and experiences, and will be performed, either solo or as a group, on different occasions and for different purposes. A good composer may earn great respect from his/her clan and wider community; a social status that draws on a broader consideration that a good 'keeper of words' is a measure of person's wisdom, leadership, and good neighborliness, and extending the notion that good human relations are derived from the accommodation of one's own interests to those of others.⁴³

Literature in Africa, World Oral Literature Series, Cambridge, Open Book Publishers.; Sletto, Bjørn Ingunn: "'We drew what we imagined', Participatory mapping, Performance and the Art of Landscape Making'", *Current Anthropology*, vol. 50, n° 4 (2009), pp. 443-476.

⁴² Widdess, Richard: "Songs without notes: Orality, writing and music in South Asia", *Inaugural Lecture*, SOAS, University of London, 13 March 2008.

⁴³ Deng, *op. cit.* p. 15.; Evans-Pritchard likewise characterizes the Nuer as a people whose 'values are embodied in words through which they influence behavior' Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1940): *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, p.135. Additionally, he notes the widespread use of the word *cieng*, which refers variously to home,



Dinka songs follow a simple, narrative structure and rhetorical devices, such as metonym and metaphor, are employed in a range of ways to elaborate actual and relational meanings. However, songs are not intended merely as public pronouncements; in offering poetic fragments of a narrative only, composers rely on their audience's intimate knowledge of people, contexts and local meanings to fill in the gaps and thus to engage in the imaginary world of the narrative.

Thematically, all songs appear to incorporate combinations of a number of core conventions:

1. The first builds on rhetorical devices to anchor relationships and reaffirm clan and cultural identities and senses of belonging. This includes the judicious naming of clan members or leaders and places, using ox names⁴⁴ or secondary denotations to describe their deeds or character, thus ascribing meanings that are often understood only by clan or ethnic-territorial insiders.
2. Songs always call on finely envisioned allegorical references to nature and seasonality, securing their content to specific landscapes or territories, and thus elaborating shared physical and cultural senses of place.
3. The concept of emplacement is further explored in the existential tension between the individual and the collective, which is likewise expressed via multiple social and aesthetic references to cattle and nature.
4. Temporality and history are an equally recurrent theme, conveyed through the acknowledgement of bonds between people across generations (lineages, clan, or political leadership), thus revealing chains of reciprocal encounters that reinforce individual and group identities in the present.
5. This relational dimension of songs is further enacted in performance, which is characteristically directed at multiple audiences, simultaneously offering a space for self-reflection and intended for consumption by others, thus rendering the singer accountable to both him/herself and to the collective.
6. Significantly, songs are used as a vehicle for social and political regulation, which is mediated through a 'poetics' of antagonism and resolution. In Dinka society, songs are a culturally legitimate site for the frank public disclosure of a range of issues and experiences, often allowing for intense emotionalism and accommodating expressions otherwise considered outrageous or offensive. However, according to Deng, the ultimate objective of this 'fighting with song'⁴⁵ is the reinstatement of unity and harmony, an allusive concept

lineage and good social relations. Similarly, Burton, in his research with the Atuat, notes that individuals are defined as members of social groups by their words: 'One aspect of the Atuat theory of society indicates that the individual "brings" or "has a word," thereby declaring and defining a perception of, and participation in, a wider series of social relations.' Burton, John W.: "Figurative Language and the Definition of Experience: The Role of Ox-Songs in Atuat Social Theory", *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 24, n° 3 (2008), p. 263.

⁴⁴ As pastoralists, who share a passionate attachment to, and identification with cattle, the poetic formulation of songs is stylized largely through detailed imagery of cattle. For example, personal ox are invoked as the embodiment of strength, conviction and solidarity, and thus referred to in order to praise oneself, one's clan or lineage.

⁴⁵ Deng, *op. cit.* p. 79.



encapsulated in the Dinka term *cieng*, which is loosely translated as ‘rule’, ‘custom’, or ‘to inhabit’, ‘to respect’; ‘to live together’.⁴⁶

These core tenets are rehearsed in songs that were composed to relate traumatic experiences of war; equally, they provide the temporal, spatial and cultural anchors that are called upon in songs that are composed and shared amongst the globally dispersed Dinka diaspora today.

5. Analysis of Truth-telling and Active Citizenship in Dinka Songs

The National Program for Healing, Peace and Reconciliation is guided by the following core values: i) Pluralism, ii) Inclusivity, iii) Peacemaking, iv) Social Justice, v) Forgiveness, vi) Healing, vii) Atonement, and viii) Sovereignty.⁴⁷ In this section, I will examine the interpretation of these values in a selection of Dinka songs, focusing on two fundamental concerns in particular: The first deals with the role of songs in truth-telling and the disclosure of past violent abuses; the second reveals how songs frame procedures for national reconciliation and healing. Consideration will be given in both categories to how songs give validation to the restoration of identity and self-esteem through their elicitation of particular images of the individual and society embedded in the rhetoric of resistance and emancipation. [It is significant to note that the following songs were somewhat randomly selected for analysis from a large collection of recordings, most of which dealt with similar themes. They are therefore by no means exceptional in their content or rhetorical structure.]

What is consistent in all of the following examples is that they are composed/performed from a deeply personal position and recount actual events experienced during the 2nd civil war. Additionally, they all contain within them both personal reflection and public counsel, thus supporting the notion of *communicative reciprocity*, transacted by their role as vehicles of personal reflection of feelings, ideas and experiences, as well as public testimonial. All songs provide for some level of personal catharsis, made evident in both their deployment of affective language and in their candid descriptions of personal and group suffering. While the songs may have been individually composed and are intended for solo performance, some of them would be sung collectively. All would be performed in contexts that are defined by mutually understood communicative structures and boundaries, and are thus entirely exclusive of external intervention with regard to production, circulation and reception. In this regard, they stand in contrast to a formalized court hearing, which is directed through strict roles and hierarchies; their rhetorical convention correspondingly making possible a mutually understood framework for frank and open disclosure of experiences, feelings and events.

While the songs uniformly reveal the personal and collective fragility of South Sudan, they are also highly pragmatic, recommending mechanisms by which to deal with challenges in an inclusive, peaceful and effective manner.

⁴⁶ *Ibid. op. cit.* p. 14; Lienhardt, Godfrey (1961): *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁷ For further details, see ‘The Comprehensive Strategic Dimensions for Healing, Peace and Reconciliation for all South Sudanese.’ The Office of the Chairman of the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation for South Sudan, 2013, Juba



5. 1. Truth-Telling: Giving Voice to Past Abuses

Jiēnda yoo, Muonyjānda yoo, Muonyjāndadīt cīt anyaar (The Dinka are great like the buffalo)

Song Owner: Kodok Chan (Twic Section, Warrap State) (Rek)

O our Dinka, o our Dinka, our Dinka, our Dinka are great like the buffalo⁴⁸

The Dinka of Deng Achuuk, who created all humans beneath the tamarind tree and placed

⁴⁸ Jiēnda yoo, Jiēnda yoo, Muonyjānda yoo Muonyjāndadīt cīt anyaar
 Muonyjān ē Deŋ Acuuk, Monyjān wān ciēk aciēk ē cuin aŋāc ku wēl ē cin ē cuēc
 Muonyjāndīt wēckē wenyīn
 Bē nydun aci thou Gārān Mabiör Atēm Aruē i
 Ku aci piny ē Junup wēl ē cin cuēc
 Gārāndīt akēc ben thou thon ē Deŋ Nhial wār tem ē Deŋ wei akin kān ē baai guiir
 Gārān!
 Mabiör Atēm Aruē i aci piny ē Junup wēl cin cuēc
 Wār cī piny ē Muonyjān wār cī yen ee nom gut ē luuŋ
 Wān nē k ē bē ny wān nē k ē Jon Gārān Mabiör Atēm Aruē i
 Ciēr Abun ē Maroor ē Riān kek Deŋ Macam Aŋuī aacool ē jam ku aaru ē jam
 Wān cī rīny ē Jon Gārān cī yen ee nom kuen ayeer
 Jamtōn cī maa jam Rabeka tiŋ ē Gārān Mabiördīt
 Wār jiem ē ma Nyandēndīt
 Nyandēn ē Col aci Muonyjān duut
 Muonyjān ee cuet rō t mēc cī mēn ē yuōm
 Jiēnda yoo - Muonyjānda yoo
 Jiēnda yoo - Muonyjāndadīt cīt anyaar
 Muonyjān cak wēl ye piŋ tē jem Kiir Mayārdīt
 Kek Riāk Macār Teny ku Diktor Yac Arop ē Makērdīt
 Ku jōl aa Lam Akōl ku Deŋ Alōr ē Kuol Kiir Mayār lueel: Muonyjāndadīt cīt anyaar.
 Pālku thon ē Gārāndīt.
 Gārāndīt aci tiom ē Junup wēl ē cin ē cuēc, ku dōmku dō ō r
 Ku ritku baai piny bī baai ciēt tim ē giēer
 Pinydan ē Junup
 Piny laan ē raan cool ee piny laan ye nō k ē kē ē c
 Wār nē k Deŋ ē Nhial ku nē k Karabino Kuanyin Bol ē Deŋ ku nē k Jamuth, Anyaar Mayō
 Idīt
 Yen cī piny ben kuŋ wēn Mabiör Atēm Aruē i
 Yo pālku tiēel
 Ku pālku luōm
 Ku ritku baai piny bī baai ciēt tim ē giēer
 Bē nydan Junup
 Mathon ŋak nom
 Bē nydan Junup
 Mathon guiir baai
 Bē nydan Junup
 Anyaar kuōc a cōl Kiir ē Mayārdīt
 Tiōmdan ē Junup acie kuum thon ariōc
 Ku bāny cī jec SPLA wār kō ō th ēēn acie bāny dek yiic thon ariōc
 Akumada akumada akumadan ē Junup akuma ee nom ŋuan
 Adek yic SPLA ku adek SPLM
 Ku adek yic yārka cābia
 Ku jec ē kamador jec kamador guiir baai
 Jec kamador guiir baai
 Tiōmdan ē Junup acōl tiom yīk ŋek bī tiōp acō l ē wun
 Diktor Yaac Diktor Yaac Arop Makērdī akumadan Junup akuma dek yic kōc dīt
 Acie akuma ee dhuk ciēn abi ye nom aatak ē bē t
 Wēliom Mathiān Awēer ē Biōk Thiān Awēer ē Thiān Agitjak
 Ku Wēliom Martin Magoc Kur ē Deŋ Yak Adol Leŋ akic lueth kaŋ lueel
 Akōl lueel yen ke wēl piny Junup



them at his right hand
O Dinka, wipe your eyes
Because your great leader, Garang Mabior Atem Aruei, has died
But he has placed South Sudan at his right hand
Garang has not died like Deng Nhial who was cut down before he could restore order to his country
Garang!
Mabior Atem Aruei has placed South Sudan at his right hand
At that time, the world of the Dinka came to a stand still
The time when John Garang Mabior Atem Aruai was slain
Cier Abun Maror Rehan and Deng Macam Angui spoke day and night
When John Garang's people risked their lives on the streets of Khartoum
When Rebecca, the wife of the great Garang Mabior, spoke
When my mother Nyandeng spoke
Nyandeng, daughter of Chol, restrained the Dinka
Who were ready to throw themselves into the line of fire
Our Dinka, our Dinka are like the great buffalo
Dinka, have you heard the words of Kiir Mayardit
And Riak Machar Teny and Dr. Yac Arop Makerdit
With Lam Akol and Deng Alor Kwol?
Kiir Mayar said: The Dinka are like the buffalo
Let go of Garang's death
He has placed South Sudan at his right hand
And let's embrace peace
Let's build the nation with strong foundations, like the Gieer tree
O South Sudan,
Land of the black people that will forever reject oppression.
When Deng Nhial, Karbino Kuanyin Bol of Deng and Jamuth, Anyiaar Mayuol
died fighting for the land
The land struck again and took the son of Mabior Atem Aruai
Let us leave envy
And backbiting
And build the nation with strong foundations, like the Gieer tree
O leader of South Sudan
O celebrated leader
O leader of South Sudan
The builder of the nation
O leader of South Sudan
The brave buffalo, the one they call Kiir Mayardit
O South Sudan, our land, you will not be led by a cowardly bull
The SPLM leadership has no cowards amongst its ranks
The South Sudan leadership has four divisions:
The SPLA, the SPLM, the people's movement
And the commando army that protects the nation
South Sudan is our land and the land of our ancestors
O Dr. Yac Arop Makerdit,
We are led by great people
Who do not retreat or procrastinate.
William Mathiang Awuur Biok, Thiang Awer Thiang Agitjak
And William Martin Magoc Kur Deng Yak Adol Leng



Never lie when they speak for South Sudan.

This song embraces the theme and sentiments typical of so many Dinka songs composed during the war. Locally categorized as a ‘song of history’ (*diet ke käckäc*), it details the story of the 2nd civil war as enacted through the SPLA leadership. While concerned principally with recounting seminal events that determined the shape of war, it summons the discursive features of a praise song (*diet ke keep*), naming individual leaders, acknowledging their lineages or clan names, and using natural references (buffalo, Gieer tree) to commend their valour, deeds and triumphs. Rather than promote war, however, the focus of the song is on the restoration of peace and security. In this we see traces of the Dinka notion of *cieng* (i.e. the reinstatement of unity and harmony), providing insight into how, despite decades of persecution and war, popular political attitudes and aspirations continue to be shaped by culturally defined moral objectives.

An additional indication of the composer’s moral stance can be found in the song’s use of both traditional poetic conventions and Christian imagery. The latter is rendered most forcefully in the Jesus-like virtues ascribed to the SPLA leader, John Garang De Mabior, who is depicted as redeemer and guardian of the nation, and through whose alleged magnanimity is invoked broader Christian convictions of atonement, tolerance and forgiveness.

The song praises the Dinka (though arguably references all South Sudanese) for their strength, courage and political certitude, citing culturally meaningful signifiers to reinforce a sense of mutuality manifested in resistance, resilience and emancipation. This sense of national unity is accentuated in the depiction of Nyandeng (John Garang’s widow) as ‘mother’, thus portraying the South Sudanese through an intimate, familial frame, unified by the Christian image of an all-loving, pacifying maternal figure.

Ku puön ë raan col bī thöñ kejö? (To what shall we compare the heart of a black man?)

Song Owner: Marco Piol (Malual Section, Awiel, Northern Baar el Ghazal State) (Rek)⁴⁹

To what shall we compare the heart of a black man?

The heart of the black man is exceedingly strong

In those difficult days in South Sudan, we survived by slaying our own cattle

Wild food was our diet

Brothers, we grazed like animals

⁴⁹ [Yen ee col Marko Piöl Majon Piöl Athiaan. Yen ee manh Awil pan ye cöl Marial Baai]

Ku puön ë raan col bī thö ñ ke një?

Puön ë dë l col jəl ril bī tæm.

Ku puön ë raan col bī thö ñ ke një?

Puön ë dë l col jəl ril bī tæm.

Wäär Junumda cuk pür ayän buoc,

Tim tö gok ku yen ye miéthda,

Wë t cuk nyuäth ë wal nyuäth ë wal cüt lë i.

Yok cī päl wei këya këya,

yok cī päl wei kam Apirika.

Yok cī päl wei këya këya,

yok cī maan kam Apirika.

Wek yoo, wek yoo,

wek yoo, wek yoo ...

Koc ye thë k ë yanh tök ka kek ë röt kony



We were ignored in Africa
We were reviled in Africa
you ... you...
Those who share the same faith should help one another

This song offers a more personal and emotional exposition of the civil war experience than the previous example. Its relevance to the truth-telling process is revealed by the way it offers a frank exposition of the individual and collective suffering of the South Sudanese. The composer reflects on a broader political dynamic, articulating the misery inflicted on the South Sudanese as a result of their abandonment by African governments at a particularly challenging moment of the civil war. The song accredits the survival of the South Sudanese to that of mutual support and unity of purpose, affirming their solidarity through the use of denotations such as ‘brother’ or ‘the black man’. Through the presentation of fractured images, the song offers a poignant exposition of their desperation, the extreme severity of which is depicted by having to slaughter their own cattle for food.

Majök Bil ë kuëi, Ciëer awel (Majok, shining like the evening star)

Song Owner: Akoy Tiemraan Mayom Deng Chol (Twic East Section, Jonglei State) (Bor)

Majok, shining like the evening star⁵⁰
Majok, shining like the evening star
I bought a colourful bull with a white tail for my clan
Like a bird, I bought a white and black bull for my clan
Who will comfort me and remove the tears from my eyes when I cry for our destroyed land?
Village of Anok Nyingeer, who will comfort me? Oh!
Wurnyang took my cows from me, oh!
Our cattle have gone
A gourd of cow's milk was left on the ground
A gourd from my bright cow
A gourd of cow's milk was left on the ground
The Nuers played like hyenas
Famine came to the village where a gourd of the cow's milk had been left on the ground
A gourd from my bright cow
A gourd of cow's milk was left on the ground

⁵⁰ Majök Bilkuëi, Ciëer Awel

Majok Bilkuëi, Ciëer Awel ca wut yō c Magë ë r Kuëi Ayöl yäär
Marum ca wut yō c Marial Jök ee
Yee ŋa dut a yic ee ŋa wec a nyin ku yēn dhiëu pan deen ci riääk?
Paan Anōŋ ë Nyiŋjäär ŋa dut a yic, eei
Wurnyaŋ ca weŋ nyaai a cin, eei
Wok cinë weŋda ke jäl
Kon ë weŋ ee dön panom ajöm yäär gök
A yeei kon ë yäär biëi
Kon ë weŋ ee dön panom ajöm e yäär gök
Nuë ë r aci kãŋ nyō ò k cimen Anui, eei
A riääk baai kon e weŋ ee dön panom ajöm yäär gök
A yeei kon ë yäär biëi
Kon ë weŋ ee dön panom ajöm ë yäär gök



This song, which is also categorized as *diet ke käckäc* (song of history), refers to the 1991 Bor Massacre, which followed shortly after a division had developed within the SPLA. Although the split between the factions started on the grounds of ideological disagreements between their leaders, the fight rapidly degenerated into an ethnic confrontation, with Riek Machar Teny, a Nuer and chairman of the SPLA-Nasir faction, and Garang, a Dinka, drawing their respective ethnic groups into an all out Dinka versus Nuer battle.⁵¹ The schism incited members of the breakaway SPLA-Nasir faction to launch an attack on the Dinka Bor, resulting in the death of thousands, the loss of homes and livestock, and the displacement of many more thousands to neighbouring states.⁵² The song offers a highly emotional account of the massacre, illuminated through emotionally charged images and inferences. As is the convention of most personal songs, the singer introduces his piece by praising his bull - Majok - and by soliciting the attention of his audience through the use of a high, sustained vocal register. As Majok is also the personal name that would have been given to the composer as a boy according to the seniority of his mother and to a known hierarchy of colour-patterns,⁵³ this poetic strategy is invoked to simultaneously identify himself and his place within his family and clan group. The personal bull is used as a sustained metaphor in the song, simultaneously describing exact events and invoking an entire social and cosmological system.⁵⁴ In a comparable symbolic gesture of emplacement, by likening his bull to stars in the night sky, the singer situates the animal – and by association, himself and his clan – within its physical locality, typically playing on visual analogies of brightness and light to draw attention to his personal distinctions, and to those of his people and his place. The natural world is further played out through the metonymic reference to the ostrich (similarly black and white), which extends the poetic layering in the song and intensifies the sensuous evocation of place.

Having secured himself in his natural and cultural landscape, the singer describes the battle and its aftermath, identifying his village by the name of its leader, Anok Nyingeer, and appealing to those within his wider familial circle for support. The singer makes direct reference to Wut Nyang, the Nuer religious prophet who had encouraged the Lou Nuer to join in the attack,⁵⁵ invoking the offending image of a hyena to describe his treatment of the Dinka. The ultimate loss experienced by the Dinka Bor is manifest in the repeated image of an abandoned gourd of milk; a deeply haunting depiction into which is gathered a multifaceted world of pastoralist inferences involving cattle, land, livelihoods, clan relations and cultural identity.⁵⁶

Tiæel alëm ë yök (We have to sacrifice cattle to free ourselves from hatred)

Singer: Deng Fanan [Deng Kuot Thieec] (Agwok Section, Gogrial, Warrap State) (Rek)

What shall we do? Brothers, what shall we do?⁵⁷

⁵¹ The Sudd Institute, *op cit.* p. 8; Johnson, Douglas (2003): *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, Oxford, James Currey.

⁵² The Bor massacre remains deeply unresolved in the collective memory of South Sudan and there is continued fear that without an effective process of reconciliation, tensions between the Dinka and Nuer could escalate.

⁵³ Evans-Pritchard, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Deng, *op cit.* p. 97

⁵⁵ Johnson, Douglas (1997): *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁵⁶ Impey, *op cit.*

⁵⁷ Buk nõ jal loi? Wë ë t buk nõ jal loi?

Makur ku Magak!

Buk nõ jal loi? Buk nõ jal looi?



Makur and Magak!
 What shall we do about North Sudan and South Sudan?
 We have to sacrifice cattle to free ourselves from hatred
 It will need the sacrifice of cattle to dispel it from Sudan
 We cannot let hatred destroy an educated nation
 We have to sacrifice cattle to free ourselves from hatred
 We cannot let hatred destroy an educated nation
 It will need the sacrifice of cattle to dispel it from Sudan
 Makur!
 Makur and Magak!

This song focuses on the theme of atonement and draws on the notion of sacrifice, as embedded in both Christian and traditional Dinka spiritual principles, as a mechanism by which true and lasting peace may be achieved. What is relevant in the song is that it demonstrates a profound desire for conciliation. However, rather than placing the responsibility of appeasement in the hands of Sudan – the historical enemy and presumed perpetrator of violence - it acknowledges the work that needs to be done by the South Sudanese themselves in order to rid themselves of bitterness and hostility. Herein, it advocates, lies the essence of emancipation and the strength of the new nation.

5.2. Framing Procedures for National Reconciliation and Civic Responsibility

This category of songs, though indicating certain correspondence with the theme of historical disclosure, is noted for their demonstration of ‘acts of citizenship’ in which composers recommend practical mechanisms for good governance of South Sudan. All songs comment on the need for participatory democracy and concede to the necessary mutuality between civic responsibility and conscientious leadership. The details in the songs are specific and often instructive, offering solutions as to how public institutions should conduct their affairs in order to establish an economically and politically viable nation. Although appearing to wholeheartedly support the SPLM, they nevertheless demand accountability by the government in its management of public resources, and warn of the dire social and political consequences on the future the independent state if not responsibly handled.

Piəŋkë wët diëen! (Listen to my words!)

Singer: Deng Fanan [Deng Kuot Thieec] (Agwok Section, Gogrial, Warrap State) (Rek)

Have you not seen it? Have you not seen it?⁵⁸

Cumal ee Thudän ku Junup ë Thudän
 Tieel, tieel alë m ë yō k
 Alë m ë yō k ku bī lam wei, bī lam wei baai Thudän da
 Pandit ë kəc cī piöc yen ë ben ë päl tieel bī tieel rac
 Tieel, tieel alë m ë yō k ku lam wei panda
 Ayee! Pandit e kəc cī piöc yen ë ben ë päl tieel bī tieel rac
 Tieel, tieel alë m ë yō k ku lam wei Thudän.
 Makur! Makur ku Magak!

⁵⁸ Kë ckë tŋ? Kë ckë tŋ?

Naa benkë kuöc loi

Yen baai ka ŋuot kë bak piŋ



If you mishandle the nation once again,
 Then you will see
 You will see it with your own eyes
 God sees everything
 If you mishandle it,
 You will remain at a loss
 But if you handle it well
 Then you will be rewarded
 Listen to my words
 Spoken on behalf of four forces
 Makur!
 The nation's forces
 The military and the police
 Guard the law
 And the prison guards have power
 Which they will bring to bear on those who oppress us
 The SPLM is like a fighting stick
 The only fighting stick
 If a man deviates
 And rejects the community and the youth
 Then we will challenge him

Kεεc rem wei ku dɔm dhaŋ (The young men rebelled and took up arms)

Singer: Marco Piol (Malual Section, Awiel, Northern Baar el Ghazal State) (Rek)

The young men rebelled and took up arms⁵⁹

Aŋot ɛ bak guo tiŋ we nyiŋ
 Nhialic acee abɛ ɛ 1
 Kuöckɛ tiɛŋ ciɛɛm
 Ke wek bi pɛk ke gäi
 Ke nyiɛ ckɛ tiɛŋ cuëëc
 Ke yen aŋuɛ n kɛ ya
 Na kuöckɛ tiɛŋ ciɛɛm
 Ke wek bi pɛk ke gäi
 Na nyiɛ ckɛ tiŋ cuëëc
 Ke yen aŋuɛ n ka ya
 Piɛŋkɛ wɛ t diëɛn
 Wɛ t akut ɛ yic ŋuan
 Makur!
 Piɛŋkɛ wɛ t diëɛn
 Kɛn akut ɛ yic ŋuan
 Kɛn akut ɛ baai
 Jundi ku bolith
 Aamac caap ɛ ganun
 Ku thujuun aala riel
 Na yökkɛ kɔc rec wät la gup ithemäär
 Kaa dutki nyin akuma
 Ku SPLM yen athöŋ ke ka tuel oo
 Atuel töŋɛ
 Naa yec raan rɔt wei
 Ku ci mɛ t akutic
 Ku bi ya cäräkia ku bi rɔt mɛ t cabap
 Ka kɛc ku ber ŋic yen raan wek bolith ku cabap bak jal tiŋ
 Bak jal ŋic oo
⁵⁹ Kεεc rem wei ku dɔm dhaŋ



Rebellion will bring about emancipation
 The young men rebelled and took up arms
 We want our rights and freedom
 Now that peace has returned
 Let's organise the army and the police
 Build hospitals and schools
 If you are in public office, don't squander public funds
 Some people are corrupt; don't squander public funds
 Some seek personal wealth
 But wealth alone is not our aim
 You have to develop the country first
 Wealth alone is not our aim
 Aim to do good for this land
 Because many people have died in its defense
 Remember this land
 Everybody is mourning
 Who hasn't lost a relative for this land?
 Who amongst us has fared better than the rest?
 Even those who were not in the firing line
 Did not fare any better

Yeṅö yen baai tär ë mäac abī kəc röt nök? (Why do we kill one another and destroy the country over power?)

Singer: Deng Fanan [Deng Kuot Thieec] (Agwok Section, Gogrial, Warrap State) (Rek)

Let me ask you a question, Sudan: ⁶⁰

Këec wei yen awaar wok
 Këec rem wei ku ðom dhaṅ
 Wok wíc yic ku nholmäu
 Namën cī piny piäth
 Namën cī piny piäth
 Guiirku jieec ku bolith
 Guiirku jieec ku corta
 Pan akīm pan abun
 Pan akīm pan abun
 Namuk luoi ka duk tuk ë wëu
 Neṅ kəc kō k ye tuk ë wëu
 Muk tholta ku duk tuk ë wëu
 Neṅ kəc kō k ye tuk ë wëu
 Ee raan tīṅ jieek
 Jieekdu ë rot acie yen
 Yīm koṅ guiir ë baai
 Jieekdu ë rot acie yen
 Luoi kë path ë pinykën
 Ee piny cī kəc kuan juëc nyaai
 Liec yī kō u ë pinykën
 Ee raan ëbën yen dhiau ë yok
 Ða ṅö ṅ ë raan cī piny nyaai
 Ða ṅö ṅ ë raan cī piny nyaai
 Wok ëbën dek raan ṅuë ë n
 Wok ëbën dek raan ṅuë ë n
 Ku acin kəc waar tō geu
 Ka ṅot ë jöt ke riāṅ tōṅ
⁶⁰ Wek ba thiëec tōṅ wek Thudän
 Yeṅö yen baai tär ë mäac abī kəc röt nō k?



Why do we kill each other and destroy the country over power?
Let us entrust power to one person
But give the people the right to choose that leader
Let's abandon lawlessness
Let's stop bothering and conspiring against each other
And ruthlessly eliminating people one by one
It is cruel, cruel, Sudan!

6. Conclusion

Peace and reconciliation in South Sudan is rapidly becoming one of the most pressing issues in the country, yet in as much as there is a need for an effective national programme in order to quell growing internecine violence and advance social and economic development, so the restoration of peace is rapidly becoming implicated in high-level political game playing. The aim of this paper has not been to analyze the history of restorative justice in South Sudan, however, nor to reflect on the motivations behind the political machinations underlying the current peace-building process. Rather, it has attempted to respond to the call made by political leaders, activists and researchers alike for greater citizen representation in the transitional justice process by exploring some of the ways that peace and reconciliation are imagined and engaged with at the local level. In so doing, the paper has argued for a deeper understanding of local cultural ecologies of communication (i.e. cultural systems and contexts of public disclosure) as well as the creative assimilation of truth-telling in diverse and multiple forms (i.e. in orality, songs, and bodily praxis). Such a suggestion posits that cultural thinking complements and sets new agendas for moving beyond prevailing structural mechanisms, whose tendency is to ignore action, agency, and intersubjective meanings.

Thus, by drawing on an analysis of truth and reconciliation processes elsewhere in Africa - most of which have assumed the hierarchical mechanisms and epistemologies of an international court of law, often assessed as remote, restrictive and culturally inappropriate - this paper has explored the place of songs in Dinka culture in their capacity as alternative or complementary processes of public disclosure. Through a narrative analysis of a selection of Dinka songs, I have attempted to explore their value in terms of 'acts of citizenship' aimed specifically at addressing concerns that are central tenets of national reconciliation, such as pluralism, inclusivity, peacemaking, social justice and forgiveness.

While the capacity of songs to effect transformation in societies marked by violence and political exclusion may be limited, in so far as they are given force within a culturally sanctioned framework of legitimacy, and their performance is unregimented by externally imposed strictures and narrative forms, they offer a potential counterweight to formal, top-down systems of disclosure. Equally, while their political or social capital may not be readily measured in quantitative terms, songs undoubtedly provide a stage for powerful encounters with the past and the present, as well as for the candid performance of emotions, opinions and

Bi ya riääk apë l ë raan tönj mac yen
Ku bï ya caap yen ye riel gam
Ku acin löñ, löñ löñ akan
Pälkë jöñ adhom, ye koc röt dhom
Bï koc yaa miit tök tök tök
Arac arac eei Thudän



historical retellings. Finally, as acknowledged by Fullard and Rousseau, in their capacity as public hearings, the engagement of songs with citizenship issues in particular can open significant discursive space for new public positions and forms of agency.⁶¹

⁶¹ Fullard, Madeleine and Nicky Rousseau: “Truth-Telling, Identities and Power in South Africa and Guatemala”, *Research Brief, International Centre for Transitional Justice*, (June 2009), p. 1. at www.ictj.org.