



WHAT HAPPENED AT WUNLIT?

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE 1999 WUNLIT PEACE CONFERENCE

SOUTH SUDAN CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES PROJECT

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An oral history of the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference

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THE RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE (RVI)

The Rift Valley Institute (www.riftvalley.net) works in eastern and central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political and economic development.

SOUTH SUDAN CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES PROJECT

RVI's South Sudan Customary Authorities Project seeks to deepen the understanding of the changing role of chiefs and traditional authorities in South Sudan. The SSCA Project is supported by the Swiss Government.

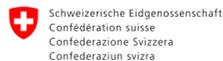
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Preface

Wunlit was the most successful peace meeting in the history of the Sudans, a meeting where customary authorities took a leading role. It brought together representatives of Nuer and Dinka communities west of the Nile, communities that had been divided by the 1991 split in the SPLA. The meeting acted as a prelude to the reunification of the SPLA and became the start of a process that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 and, eventually, to the independence of South Sudan in 2011. In the decade since then there has been a succession of failed peace agreements in South Sudan and a national dialogue with no clear outcome. This report is an account of the Wunlit meeting in the words of the original participants, conducted in the light of the continuing state of conflict in South Sudan and the relevance of the history of peace-making to the current political situation.

Wunlit was an oral event, transcribed and translated by a secretariat, a feat of documentation unequalled in the subsequent history of peace meetings in the Sudans. Thanks to this it is possible to draw on a record of the events of the meeting made at the time, largely in the words of the participants. The present investigation, two decades on, is also an exercise in oral documentation, revisiting the event through the recollections of surviving participants, notably the chiefs, elders and men and women of influence who travelled long distances to attend it. Epigraphs for sections of this report are taken from the original Wunlit report and other documentary sources. Newly recorded interviews, transcribed and translated, form the narrative. The project is transgenerational: the researchers involved – too young to remember the event themselves – engaged with their elders through the practice of memory to elicit the legacy of the meeting in the minds of the participants. The researchers put a set of broad questions to the interviewees: What was their experience of the meeting? What did it mean to them? Why and to what extent did it succeed? In doing so they became modern incarnations of the

agamlong — the interpreter — a central figure in the inter-community meetings of customary authorities in Nilotic cultures.

The South Sudan Customary Authorities project

This report is the culmination of the South Sudan Customary Authorities Project, funded by the Swiss government. The goal of the project is to deepen understanding of customary authority in South Sudan, particularly the changes that have taken place over decades of conflict. To this end, the project engages chiefs and elders, and other community representatives—youth in particular—to discuss their role in peacebuilding and governance.

This report is the culmination of the South Sudan Customary Authorities Project, which, since its establishment in 2015 with Fergus Boyle as Project Coordinator and John Moore as Regional Director, and its continuation under successive RVI representatives in Juba – Ellie Hobhouse, Daniel Watkins and Anna Rowett – has generated more than a dozen field-based reports, three documentary films, and numerous meetings of chiefs and elders held in locations in South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. Supporting the development of young researchers has been a critical part of the project and is also one of Rift Valley Institute’s core aims. The Catholic University of South Sudan, which has a strong interest in peace-making in South Sudan, including through the Institute for Justice and Peace Studies, is a long-standing partner in this work and, consequently, a natural partner for this project.

1. Introduction

The Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference was convened in February 1999 in the Dinka area of Tonj, at Wunlit village, close to the border with Nuer territory. It was the most successful peace meeting in the history of the two Sudans, an event where customary authorities—chiefs and elders—took a leading role. The meeting was convened at the height of Sudan’s second civil war between the Khartoum government and South Sudanese insurgents. The war encompassed a number of overlapping conflicts within the South itself that caused widespread insecurity. The Wunlit meeting brought local peace to a significant area of the country, and helped pave the way for a wider peace, first between the two factions of the SPLA, and thence, in 2005, between the SPLA and the government in Khartoum.

Sudan’s civil war had begun in 1983 with the formation of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA) in opposition to the Khartoum government’s Islamist project. What began as a southern insurgency led by veterans of the Anyanya guerrilla movement from Sudan’s first civil war (1963-72) and supported by the socialist government of Ethiopia, soon transformed itself into a national movement, expanding the war into other parts of Sudan.¹

Throughout the initial phases of the war, the SPLA drew much of its support from the Nuer and the Dinka—large-scale agro-pastoralist communities that occupy the central floodplain of the upper Nile—seizing control of large sections of the South and adjacent territories. SPLA administration of the liberated areas in subsequent years relied on the network of chiefs’ courts within the system of Native Administration first established by British administrators in the mid-twentieth century. These courts administered customary law, tried cases of theft, bodily harm and personal injury, levied fines, collected taxes, and organized

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¹ Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars: old wars and new wars*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016.

labour parties for public works.² To this, the SPLA added the duty of providing recruits to be transferred to the army's training camps in Ethiopia, and rations for the soldiers serving inside Sudan.

The fall of the socialist regime in Ethiopia in 1991, and its replacement by a coalition of Ethiopian and Eritrean insurgents supported by the government of Sudan and by the United States, precipitated a crisis in the SPLA. Not only were SPLA forces forced to evacuate their Ethiopian bases, but more than 200,000 Sudanese refugees also returned en masse to Sudan, mainly to areas under SPLA control that were ill-prepared to receive them.

This event changed the equation of the war, tilting it in favor of Khartoum. SPLA commanders in Nasir—near the Ethiopian border—led by Riek Machar, the most senior Nuer commander in the SPLA, had to deal with the majority of these returnees. In August 1991 they announced a coup against the leadership of John Garang. They attempted to reorient the SPLA's main objective from reform of the Sudanese state to secession for South Sudan. However, they failed to rally the majority of the SPLA to their side and were increasingly forced to rely on mobilizing Nuer communities against the mainstream SPLA and its civilian support base. This led to an odd alliance, with the Nasir faction of the SPLA (SPLA-United) ostensibly fighting for independence from Khartoum but relying on Khartoum for military support and incorporating pro-Khartoum Nuer militias into their forces. Riek Machar tried to maintain the fiction of independence from Khartoum for several years, but in 1996 he signed a Peace Charter with Khartoum, followed by a formal peace agreement and incorporation into the national government in 1997.

The split in the SPLA introduced a new level of conflict into Nuer and Dinka communities, their territories now claimed by one or other faction. This was especially so in the border areas between Nuer and Dinka, where previously the chiefs on either side worked in collaboration to maintain peace and prevent cattle-raiding. The split did not

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 2 Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community & state*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013.

simply intensify Nuer-Dinka conflicts; it also precipitated a series of civil wars among the Nuer themselves.³ By 1998 communities that had seen relative peace before the 1991 split were now mired in conflict. Kerubino Kuanyin, a Dinka who was one of the SPLA's founders, defected and led a Khartoum-backed militia operating in the Dinka areas of Bahr el-Ghazal. The forces of Paulino Matip, the Nuer leader of one of the original Anyanya 2 militias formed in the early 1980s, were actively engaged against those of Riek Machar.⁴ The communities west of the Nile were the most affected by these spiraling conflicts.

This was the context in which momentum for a wide-ranging peace conference developed. Nuer and Dinka civilians were active in searching for external mediators who could bring the factions back together. In this, the international contacts of the New Sudan Council of Churches and the UN Operation Lifeline Sudan were critical in generating external support and maintaining internal civilian support. Initially both John Garang and Riek Machar were hostile to the idea of a peace conference that neither could control, but the weight of public opinion began to tell, especially when important figures within the SPLA, such as the former secretary-general of the SPLA's relief wing, Mario Muor Muor, and the SPLA's chief of general staff, Salva Kiir Mayardit, came on board.

Organizing the event required unprecedented cooperation between churches, traditional leadership and political-military forces. This was facilitated by the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), an organization that had been operating in SPLA-controlled areas since the early 1990s, supported by an international church network and by Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), the UN relief programme in Sudan. It required careful preparation, from the initial chiefs' meeting on the neutral territory of the UN camp at Lokichokio, to the reciprocal grassroots visits

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3 Douglas H. Johnson, "The Nuer civil wars", in Günther Schlee & Elizabeth E. Watson (eds), *Changing Identification and Alliances in North-East Africa*, vol. II (Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books), 2009.

4 Human Rights Watch, 'Famine in Sudan, 1998: The Human Rights Causes', Human Rights Watch, 1999.

of Dinka and Nuer chiefs to each other's territory.⁵ The conference was organized following an established structure for inter-tribal meetings that the network of chiefs' courts had been designed to host, and which chiefs knew well, but at Wunlit this was done on a much larger scale. It gave a wider voice to traditional leaders and other community representatives from Bahr el-Ghazal and Western Upper Nile and brought about a cessation of hostilities between the Nuer of Western Upper Nile and the Dinka of Lakes, Warrap and Twic. The meeting functioned on the premise in the Nilotic tradition shared by the Nuer and Dinka that peace can only be achieved when all know clearly the entirety of the wrongs committed.⁶ By speaking from the heart and leaving no grievance hidden, the two communities aired their grievances against each other, and by doing so each had to acknowledge the wrongs they had committed against the other. Wunlit demonstrated that while pastoral communities are good at fighting, they are also good at talking.

The resulting peace agreement operated at several levels, and the transcript of the proceedings of the Wunlit meeting, and the memories of some of the participants that are recorded in this report, show that both Nuer and Dinka traditional authorities were aware of the connection between these levels. Ultimately it enabled the reunification of the SPLA, a necessary precondition to enable the SPLA to negotiate the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Wunlit was organized through civil structures of leadership rather than politicians and military leaders—it was a forum for dialogue between civilians.⁷ The final agreement at Wunlit included an ambitious plan to expand the process to other South Sudanese communities engaged in conflict, but it proved unable to replicate it. A meeting of east bank Nuer

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 5 Mark Bradbury et al., *Local Peace Processes in Sudan: a baseline study*, London & Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2006; Rift Valley Institute, *We Have Lived Too Long to be Deceived: South Sudanese discuss the lessons of historic peace agreements*, Juba University Lectures 2014, London & Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2015.

6 Bradbury et al., *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*.

7 Bradbury et al., *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*.

and Dinka scheduled to convene at Lirliir in 2000 failed, partly due to Riek Marchar's opposition.⁸ This meant that some of the communities most affected by the 1991 split remained unreconciled to each other by the time South Sudan achieved independence in 2011, with fatal consequences for the internal peace of the new nation. This new conflict within South Sudan is the subject of frequent reflection on the part of those interviewed for the present report.

Many of the participants quoted here express their longing for a revival of the Wunlit process, to cover the whole of South Sudan. This would require, one chief here said, going "through the Wunlit peace documents and try to analyse what went wrong and what went right." This oral history of Wunlit aspires to be part of that process.

⁸ Bradbury et al., *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*.

2. Methodology

Building on oral history research methods developed during the first three phases of the South Sudan Customary Authorities project, the fourth phase focused attention on the 20-year anniversary of the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference. The objective was to commemorate this celebrated peace process and explore the role of customary authorities in peacemaking.

Orality takes up a central place in South Sudanese societies, particularly in transgenerational transmission of community histories and memory. This is especially true for the Dinka and Nuer communities who sought to mediate inter-community conflict during the Wunlit Peace Conference. Many of the chiefs and community leaders who were interviewed as part of this oral history are important carriers of community memory and hold local archives of peace meetings in the form of personal memories, narratives and songs. Some also hold historical documents in the form of hard copies of agreements and laws.

In the oral history interviews conducted for this project, interviewees place their personal histories into wider clan and family genealogies and chieftaincy inheritance; inter-ethnic marriage relations; and trans-border cattle movement and trade networks. They draw on the memories of decades of inter-clan and inter-community peace meetings to explain and contextualize events around Wunlit.

The 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference is discussed in relation to memories of the 1983-2005 war and especially the 1991 split in the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). The main focus during the oral history interviews was on the time immediately before the Wunlit peace conference. This included the selection procedures and preparations for those that attended; the journey to and reception in Wunlit; and the day-to-day experiences of the peace conference itself.

Chiefs and other interviewees speak in intimate and detailed voices about the uncertainties they experienced being in Wunlit, and the discussions they held within their communities about this prior to

departure. They speak about the excitement, and fear, of travelling in an airplane for the first time; and the relief of being received by dancing and singing women upon their arrival in Wunlit. They describe in great detail what Wunlit looked like and how the tukuls that housed them during the conference were constructed, as well as how people bathed and ate during their stay there.

Only a few of the people who participated in the project had any immediate visual references to the now-changed setting of the 1999 Wunlit peace conference. Many interviews took place in the home areas that people had departed from to participate in the Wunlit peace conference 20 years earlier. Some of the interviewees with a Nuer background were displaced from their homes during the 2013-2019 civil war and were interviewed in the Bentiu and Juba Protection of Civilians Camps (PoC). Some of the interviewees with a Dinka background were displaced from their home areas because of inter-clan conflict.

Chiefs and female community leaders expressed excitement when asked to remember their participation in the conference, but for some it was also an emotional undertaking. Positive memories of the years between Wunlit and the independence of South Sudan were often reinterpreted through, and sometimes overshadowed by, post-independence experiences with local and national conflict and displacement. The oral history interviews offer a retrospective on the Wunlit Peace Conference through a contemporary lens. They show how events that happened twenty years ago have shaped the lived realities of the participants and their communities.

Many of the researchers who participated in this Wunlit oral history collaborated on research conducted during previous phases of the South Sudan Customary Authorities project. As such, they were already familiar with the oral history method. However, other researchers had graduated more recently from the Catholic University of South Sudan and had more limited research experience. Some of them had participated in a long-running oral history training collaboration between the Rift Valley Institute, the Catholic University of South Sudan and Likikiri Collective and were part of an oral history research methods training conducted

with faculty and students of Juba-based universities. To address the variety of research experience amongst the project team, the oral history interviews were conducted in pairs, which provided an opportunity for early-career researchers to learn from their colleagues and strengthen their interviewing techniques.

In the drafting of an oral history interview guide, which would help the team structure their interviews, the research team drew on the official transcript of the Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference and engaged with existing literature on the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference and chiefs and peace meetings in South Sudan.

The oral history interview guide focuses on three periods: before, during and after Wunlit. The interviews touch on a range of subjects related to the peace conference itself and its aftermath. Interviewees were asked to talk about when they first learned about plans for a peace meeting and what happened during the meeting. They reflected on the problems the peace conference solved and how this changed the life of participating communities. Finally, they offered ideas on what effects Wunlit had on the future of South Sudan and what people learned during that conference that is relevant to the situation in the country today.

The research team had the ambitious aim of interviewing all the surviving participants of the Wunlit—the transcript of the peace conference lists 318 signatories to the Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant. Researchers revisited many of the places where participants travelled from to attend Wunlit. As a result, the Wunlit oral history is multi-local and spans six main locations and different Dinka and Nuer communities: Ler, Bentiu, Yirol (Atuot), Warrap, Panyijar and Rumbek (Agar). Full-length oral history interviews were conducted with sixty-six individuals in these six locations and eight more people, mainly organizers of the original conference, were interviewed in Juba.

The oral history interviews were a space for intergenerational learning and exchange between the researchers—many of whom are in their 20s, 30s and early 40s—and interviewees, who are in their 50s and 60s, or older. Whereas the researchers were brought up in the world

of formal education and have lived for a period of their lives outside of South Sudan, many of the interviewees did not enjoy access to formal education during their lifetimes. Age difference was emphasized during interviews when interviewees would often refer to their interviewers as “my son.” The interviewers and interviewees shared language, ethnic and sometimes clan identifications.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the chiefs and community leaders. Very few of these interviews were one-on-ones as these compounds are places of gathering and communion. As a result, the oral history interviews are multi-vocal and other people present during the interview interposed their views and narratives; coaxed the memories of the ‘official’ interviewees; or would outright disagree with their retellings and perspectives.

In this report, we are accessing the memories of chiefs, female community leaders and traders through a layer of translation. Apart from a few of the oral history interviews in Juba, which were conducted in English, all of the interviewees spoke in their various South Sudanese languages, in Dinka (*thong muonyjang*) and Nuer (*thok naath*). Each of the interviews were transcribed in their original language and then translated into English. It is these English translations that are represented here. In the process of translation, local vocabularies and ideas are lost: concepts of political and customary authority, terminology of peace and war and expressions of surprise or disappointment.

The researchers were intensely involved in identifying significant passages from the oral history interviews: those they felt that were particularly revealing or could contribute new and deeply personal insights to existing knowledge on Wunlit. On the basis of their engagement with the interviews, the South Sudanese researchers in consultation with John Ryle, drafted a chapter division for the report, ensuring that the voices of the interviewees and interviewers were foregrounded. In his final compilation of the report, Douglas Johnson has drawn on these identified fragments.

3. Before Wunlit

Formerly we observed certain restrictions. The young men had the right to kill other warriors, but never did they kill old people or children or women or young boys. Today, however, we have transgressed, killing any we meet, young and old, woman and child. Because of this slaughter God has brought us together in this meeting to discuss these things. It is now many years since we have been reconciled and cut away our conflicts, and our hostilities of recent years still remain.

Kuar Muon (Beny Tiop) William Ray Kuong from Ganyliel⁹

The weight of custom, the ties created by intermarriage, and the administration of justice through the customary courts had all combined to prevent escalating conflict between pastoralists in the past, but the conduct of armed groups in the civil war following the 1991 split in the SPLA had weakened those constraints.

Relations between Dinka and Nuer Communities

Relations between the cattle-owning Nuer and Dinka have alternated between conflict and cooperation, often mediated by the network of chiefs' courts established by British administrators. One factor that mitigated conflict was frequent intermarriage between the two peoples, as the Nuer Jagei Chief George Mawic Dual related.

There was a problem that occurred between the people. Before there was a sub-clan called Kuyi in the Haak clan. This clan married many women from the Dinka and their daughters were married by the Dinka. Even the man called Mawich Ruot is from Kuer but he has stayed long in the Dinka land. So there was a peace coexisting between them and they intermarried also. When the problem occurred there was no more movement between them. I am talking of the problem of the 1991 (the split in the SPLA). This is what I know about the situation.

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⁹ Wunlit Report, *Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace & Reconciliation Conference*, Nairobi: New Sudan Council of Churches, 1999.

The Nyuong Nuer, the southernmost community of Western Nuer, border on several neighbouring Dinka communities, as Simon Kuok Biliu explained:

Anyway, between us and Dinka, we have marriages with Dinka, we married from them and they married from us as well. A lot of people married Dinka daughters, and a lot of Dinka married Nuer daughters. We crossed our border a lot. For instance, that side of Amuogpiny, Rumbek and Jinyanga, those of Yirol, we had married with each other. We understand ourselves because we have their daughters and they have our daughters.

Border Chief Muon Machak of the Nyuong Nuer recalled that before the civil war

The relationship between Dinka and Nuer was strong that we had so much intermarriage with all sides supporting themselves in the payment of dowries. No one could start a fight against another person. There was love and harmony in the places like cattle camps; trading was booming on all sides... cultural festivals were celebrated by both communities; these activities continued up to the time the government carried out the armed struggle against (us) and created the interests against not only Dinka and Nuer but the rest of South Sudanese communities.

Intermarriage as a means of maintaining peace and access to common resources was often fostered by Nuer and Dinka chiefs marrying each other's daughters. As the Nyuong cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top explained:

Our relation was just sharing things in common. Those who have small lineage with them are Gatdiel.¹⁰ They have that kind of relationship, but not all the Dinka, just from Wuol section. These were the only sections that have the lineage with Nyuong. Gatdiel Section from Nyuong and Wuol section from Dinka.

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¹⁰ 'Children of the founding lineage' of the tribe, to which other lineages are attached.

This was confirmed by the Dinka Agar chief Manyiel Lieny Wuol, a grandson of the renowned Agar war leader Wuol Athian who allied with the Nuer in 1883 to attack and destroy the Egyptian garrison at Rumbek but then turned on his Nuer allies. His marriage to a Nuer woman in the twentieth century helped to bring peace between the two communities. Manyiel Lieny Wuol explained:

There was relationship. We did fight because of cows and we normally come together and face the law of traditional authority. I had married a Nuer lady. Even Wuol himself had married a Nuer girl called Nyakuoth Niang who gave birth to Riak Wuol, and Riel Wuol. We have also married to Nuer daughters and they do stay with us during the rainy season and we stay with them during dry season along the river.

In the ante-bellum period the border chiefs of the Nyuong Nuer of Panyijar and the Agar Dinka were responsible for maintaining peace between the two communities and preventing cattle raids by their young men seeking to acquire cattle with which to marry. They were known as ‘the two Maluals’: Malual Arop of the Agar (whose son, Marial Malual Arop, was at Wunlit) and Malual Wun Kuoth, who was also known as Malualdit (Big Malual) or Gatwun (Son of Wun) of the Nyuong. As Malual Wun Koth’s daughter, Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth, explained:

The relationship between the people of Panyijar and the Dinka, there were no problem. They used to live friendly among themselves. They used to have free movement without restrictions. The problem was only from the leaders above.

Two Nuer traders, David Bany Lam and James Riek Luak Teny, agreed. David Bany explained it as follows:

...our relationship with other people, especially Rumbek and Yirol (I will not talk of Bentiu) was that we share the journey together. If they come to us in Panyijar, they come to buy cows.

If they finish buying their cows, we go with them with our cows to their area. If we reach their area, they welcome us very well. We then take our cows and sell them with their cows together.

James Riek Luak Teny acknowledged that sometimes there were quarrels in the past, but that they did not amount to much.

Well before that we the Nyuong used to move with the normal spears. We would quarrel but we didn't fight. In those days we used to listen to the elders. Now you the young generation when you are advised you don't listen. We used to live in peace those days. We even used to quarrel whether at the time we killed a buffalo but we never fight the way you do now. We would take it easy, even when it is between us and the Dinka.

On the whole the Nuer have a rosier remembrance of their past relationship with their neighbours than the Dinka do. A head catechist of the Nyuong, Simon Thak Both, claimed:

During those days our relationship with the Dinka was very good. When they are hungry and need food they would come with their cows and buy from us some food. Even on our side when we were hungry we would take our goats and money and buy ourselves some food from them. The bad thing happened when these two, Riek (Machar) and Salva (Kiir), disagreed on leadership. This leadership that kills someone who is just sitting in his own home is really a recent thing.

The Dinka are our cousins, and now our cows are killed. Even we are killed. I am old because we could not move further anymore. During those days one would go to the Dinka land and spend some good number of days or even months or years. Now people are condensed in one place like water. The Dinka and the Nuer are cousins. During the rainy seasons we would migrate to their areas because their areas could not get flooded during the rainy seasons. They also would migrate to our areas during the dry seasons. That is how we were in those days.

Anei Dhal Wol, a Dinka Apuk chief of Gogrial County, put the blame for bad relations between the two peoples entirely on the Nuer.

The relationship between Dinka and Nuer was not good because there was a long-lasting fighting between Dinka and Nuer and the reason of having that long fighting was because of the cattle. Nuer used to say if the Dinka man has cows and he has no power to protect them, then we shall take them from him by force and that is what we called raiding and the Nuer will take them to their place, and we used to tell them in all the various meetings we attended and Nuer could listen, so this thing to do with cattle raiding is in the heart and blood of the Nuer cattle keepers because for them, they believe in cattle raiding as the source of getting cows. Therefore, we were used to that fighting over the cattle and we could fight and those who are weak could be chased and their cows could be taken. So our relationship with Nuer has never been good until the Wunlit meeting came in and then after that meeting, we became again friends for a while and then fighting again.

Bahon Mabor Deng, the paramount chief of the Atuot in Yirol County—a group with a linguistic link to the Nuer but social ties with their neighbours, the Dinka of Yirol—also put the whole blame for bad relations on the Nuer.

Between us and Nuer, there was a very bad relationship. They were taking our cows... (They) almost finished our cows. We meet in *bar* (salt grass area). We meet in *toch* (grazing land). We had spears. There were not many guns that time.

Ariath Mayar Mareng, a spiritual leader (*raan nhialic*) of the Dinka Abiem in Tonj County, was willing to consider a Dinka share of the blame, mixed in with some divine bungling.

Our relationship with Nuer was not all good. We used to fight because of the cattle, we could not finish one year without fighting one another and this is all because of the cows. That

was how we were staying with Nuer until we all came to Wunlit. Then one of the Nuer's oldest men told us a very interesting story during the meeting that you Dinka and Nuer are not the one having the problem. It was God which brought this problem of fighting to you people, when he called both Nuer and Dinka that you come and I give you some cows, and God said you Dinka your cow is black in color and you Nuer your cow is white in colour, and you will get them tomorrow morning at the riverside. They all went and slept. In the early morning Dinka woke up and rushed to the riverside and picked the cow with the white cow and went away with it and left the black one at the riverside. When Nuer came lately, he got the black and he went back straight to God and said that God what happened? You told me yesterday that my cow is the one with white color and now Dinka has taken it and he left me this black cow. Then God told Nuer that you go and look for Dinka so that you take that white cow away from him, here, this is where our fighting started. Nuer can say I am going to look for my white cow from Dinka and the same thing with the Dinka that I am going to look for my black cow from Nuer and this is why we always fight and today, we need to stop that and we have peace among ourselves.

Chief Madut Aguer Adel of the Dinka Luac, also of Tonj County agreed with this more even-handed assessment.

Our relationship with Nuer who were bordering us was neither all good nor all bad. In other words, it was 50-50, sometimes we could fight and raid one another and the other time we could come together and have peace for a short period of time and that was how we were staying.

The more northerly Nuer, the Jalok and Jikany Nuer, tended to take a more realistic view of their past relations with their nearest Dinka neighbours than the Nyuong quoted here. Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak of the Jalok, speaking from inside the Bentiu Protection of Civilians camp (POC), established by the UN during the post-independence fighting in the South, acknowledged that cattle lay at the heart of the conflict, and

quoted the wise observation of a chief of the Jur Col people, neighbours of the Dinka of Tonj. The Jur Col are not cattle-keepers.

There is no any other problem between the Dinka and the Nuer apart from the issue of cows. There was a chief from the Jur called Matabu Yaru who narrated a history about the beginning of the problem. He said: Once upon a time his grandfather had a cow and the cow got lost and the Dinka got it and kept it. When he came he got the cow from among the cattle of the Dinka. When he found it he wanted to take it. But the Dinka told him you will not take it unless you count all the colours of the cow. So he gave up and instead collected all his other cows and handed them to the Dinka. He only decided to remain with the honey from the bee. So that is why the Nuer and the Dinka still kill themselves because of the cows. There was not any other problem between the Dinka and the Nuer before.

Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil of the Nuer Jikany, also speaking from inside the Bentiu POC, referred obliquely to the myth of the cow and the calf¹¹ as the origin of the problem between Nuer and Dinka.

The Nuer and the Dinka had a problem of a cow and its calf. The Nuer would raid the Dinka and the Dinka would raid the Nuer. This was later followed up by the problem of the Arabs. The Dinka say the cow belong to them and the Nuer would say the cow belong to them. When they have seen it like that, they agreed to let the mother be taken by the Nuer and let the calf be taken by the Dinka. The other Dinka, like the Jurchol, said they will not take part in the sharing of the cow. When it was seen like that, some said ok, let us marry a girl, and some said no, let the cow be taken by the Nuer and the Dinka. So that is the problem. Some would say the cow belongs to the Nuer, and some would say it belongs to the Dinka. Then they say if it is like that, let us

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 11 See Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940, 125-6.

count its hair. Some said it is impossible, so let the Nuer and the Dinka take the cow. This is what is still happening.

Cattle could drive people apart, Deborah Yier Jany, a Nuer woman residing in Yirol, explained, but the common problems shared by all cattle keepers could also bring people together.

Some communities were relating well. People were looking for pastures and water. Cattle were dying and these things were only possible through peace. They knew it. The Nuer and Dinka were enemies in the morning and friends later in the afternoon.

One consequence of mutual raiding, Chief Joseph Kong Yuac Jobil conceded, was that

it happened that the Nuer would marry the Dinka ladies and would bring them to the Nuer land, and the Dinka would also marry the Nuer ladies and take them to their land.

Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac of the Nuer Jagei took this last point further.

We all originated from the Dinka. Even you if I check your background if your father's background is free from the Dinka then your mother's will not. So we all have a Dinka genealogy.

All agreed that if the pattern of conflict in the past had been low level violence, it intensified following the 1991 split in the SPLA. Whatever the ideological differences between the leaders of the SPLA that led to the split, once Lou Nuer civilians joined the uniformed soldiers of the Nasir faction in attacking Jonglei's Dinka civilians, the internal civil war was increasingly fought through ethnic mobilization.

Dhuor Machar Kuer, a sub-chief of the Dinka Ciec in Yirol County could have used the now familiar cry 'I can't breathe' when he described the situation leading up to Wunlit:

By the time people went to Wunlit, there was completely no air (peace). Our meeting in Wunlit was the beginning of South Sudan.

According to Paramount Chief Thiik Riiny Giir of Dinka Apuk in Gogrial, “What with constant cattle raiding and the abduction of women and children on both sides, there was no freedom of movement in between”. And according to Chief Malok Akot Wut of the Dinka Luac in Tonj County, this level of raiding and counter-raiding created a “very high hatred among ourselves”.

Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny, the Dinka Luac paramount chief who later hosted the Wunlit conference, described the serious escalation of Nuer-Dinka fighting prior to the conference.

That time before the Wunlit peace meeting, the relationship between Dinka and Nuer was not good. Before the meeting there was a serious fighting between two of us and we could not even move among ourselves, and that serious fighting was because of the cattle. As Nuer like to say that I am going to take all the cattle from Dinka side and the Dinka say I am going to take all the cattle from Nuer... So our relationship with Nuer has never been perfect—until the meeting of Wunlit was conducted.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek, a Jagei Nuer who later represented Nuer women at Wunlit, described the war weariness that preceded the conference.

Because the Dinka used to come and kill the Nuer and the Nuer would go and kill the Dinka, people said that now we are done with the meeting let no one do anything bad again.

The hope that Wunlit would bring a lasting peace to the civilian populations most affected by the aftermath of the SPLA split was short lived. Post-Wunlit and post-South Sudan’s 2011 independence referendum another external factor intruded into the dynamic of pastoralist competition to further disturb its equilibrium. According to the Nyuong Nuer Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth:

Our relationship with the Dinka was good before the issue of money came in. When the money arrived something bad happened. We used to move together, our cows used to graze together, and when someone needed something from the other

side he/she would go and get it. We used to go to their area because their area has many grasses for our cattle. When we had our own country now there are a lot of conflicts. The money has destroyed our minds. Some years back we had no problem with the Dinka.

Chiefs and the SPLA

The system of chiefs' courts created by British administrators in the 1920s and 1930s required the chiefs to do several things: keep the peace by trying cases according to customary law and levying fines, collect taxes for the government, and organize *corvée* labour for government work projects such as road building. As local government became more bureaucratized, especially after Sudan's independence in 1956, chiefs acquired additional duties.¹² During the first civil war (1963-72) chiefs were often caught between the competing demands of the national government and the Anyanya guerrillas. During the second civil war (1983-2005) there was more solidarity between chiefs and the SPLA insurgents. The demands of the SPLA for recruits, cattle, and grain were similar in kind, if not in scale, to demands that government had always made of the chiefs.

The Luac Dinka Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny saw a continuity in the duties expected of him whether by the national government or the SPLA government.

The time I became the chief, it was the time of Nimeri (1969-85) and he was the president of the Sudan at that time. A man called Yiith Maduok who was the commissioner of Tonj here at that time called me and said we are going to work together and this man was from Bor. Our relationship to the main government of the Sudan and the commissioner was really good because I used to bring money for taxes to the government and the money for

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 12 See Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community & state*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013.

fines also to the government without delaying, so my relationship with the government was good. Also, my relationship with the SPLA was really good because we were doing one thing... My grandfather told me before he died that they were the ones who chased away the British but they discovered they made a big mistake. The Arabs started mistreating us and then we joined the rebellion of John Garang and we fought the Arabs because they were not taking us well and they were forcing us to believe in their Islam. At that time, we the chiefs and particularly me, I used to collect all the bulls from my people and also get some young energetic men to be taken to the training ground and train them to become soldiers and they started fighting Arabs. From there I started collaborating with the SPLA and we fought the Arabs seriously. The government we left in the city was not having good relationship with me again because I joined the SPLA and we formed the Anyanya movement and we were staying in the bush and we could attack them, so the government forces could not get me with my people again since we were with the SPLA busy fighting them.

The Dinka and Nuer communities of Bahr el-Ghazal, Lakes, Upper Nile and Jonglei provinces were among the earliest recruiting grounds for the SPLA. As Chief Gum Mading stated above this solidarity was ideological as well as ethnic. Relations with the national government and with Northern Sudanese in general worsened after 1983, the year that President Nimeiri introduced an Islamic constitution, abolishing the Southern Regional Government established by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement (the agreement that ended the first civil war). Although Nimeiri was later overthrown by a popular uprising in Khartoum, the successor civilian regimes did little to reverse his Islamist policies, and Islamization of government was intensified by the National Islamic Front after they seized power in 1989.

Relations between the SPLA and local Dinka communities were initially positive, as Chief Madut Aguer Adel of the Luac Dinka of Tonj explained.

My relationship with Arabs was very bad and that was why we were struggling with the SPLA so that we have our nation like now and it was also the reason we could give our children to join the army. They were trained to become soldiers and fight the Arabs and we were able to offer some bulls to the soldiers to eat, so that they can fight and bring out our nation—as we have today. Also my relationship with the SPLA was really good and we could work hand-in-hand together and move on together.

Another Tonj County chief, Anei Dhal Wol of the Apuk Dinka emphasized how he saw his role as a chief as compatible with the goals of the SPLA.

My relationship with the government (the SPLA) was good because I was one of the chiefs who respected the government. We worked together and we also used to talk together. The government was the one responsible for all the people up to us who are in the villages here. I respected the government because it was the one having all the powers and recognized the rights of the people. This government is a very strong thing.

In Cueibet County, Chief Matur Wanybek of the Dinka Gok also emphasized his solidarity with the SPLA, drawing a contrast with that of the Khartoum government.

Our relationship with them differed. With the government in Khartoum, we had no good relationship because our movement, the SPLA/M, was fighting them and we were supporting Dr John Garang, so we never had good relationship with them. The only group we had good relationship was the SPLA. We were contributing some cows and bulls and agricultural products. We fought with the Arabs together at that time.

Many of the Nyuong Nuer, too, welcomed the SPLA at its inception, as Head Chief John Toang Chang explained.

The relationship between us and the SPLA came about as soon as it was formed. The time it was formed is the same time I was marked on my forehead (the ritual of scarification formerly

undergone by male Nuer youths) . There was a man called Pual Dhor who used to move together with my brother. They would come and eat together. When it began it was just with spears. They would go to the Congo during the dry season and come back during the wet season and spend the whole winter in our area until they got what they wanted. We used to provide them with milk, meat and even sometimes carry their heavy luggage. That was how it was.

Not all Nuer welcomed the SPLA, though. Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil of the Jikany Nuer recalled the difficulty he had with leaders of the nearby pro-Khartoum Bul Nuer Anyanya-2 militia.

It is true. When the SPLA came from Bilpam (SPLA headquarters in Ethiopia), during the time when the situation was not good, those of Paulino Matip and Bol Nyawan were doing bad things. They were questioning us on why we built schools and the clinics. And also questioned why we purchased lorries. Are you Arabs? We would tell them that we are developing and that we cannot go back, that these schools you are seeing are the ones that will open our eyes in the future. We would tell them that the things you are now doing will certainly come to an end and our children will take over. They later realized that we have done a good thing. But then they wanted to kill us. They did kill some of us. It is those of us who gave them what they demanded who are still alive now.

By and large the Nuer chiefs reported that they complied with the SPLA's requisitions. The Nyuong Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth saw this as a continuation of his duties as chief.

When the government needed something like money or even a cow I would give it. I even had an office that I built, whenever they come they would be accommodated in it. Those are the things I used to do. When something happened we would be called and discuss it, and when something needed to be

discussed we would be called for it. We also used to advise the youth. When the government needed people to join the army we would do the recruitment. Those are the things we used to do for the SPLA.

Many civilians in the Nuer areas regarded their supplies to the SPLA as their contribution to the war effort. Nyuong Nuer trader James Riek Luak recalled:

We would collect bullocks and bring them to the government. We would also collect food items like the crops in tins and bring them to the (SPLA) government. Today we would come to your home and tell you that we need this and that for the (SPLA) government. All these we would collect and take them to the soldiers. Because if they would want to fight the Arab troops they will be able to. Those are the things we used to do when we were in the bush. When there were guns the (SPLA) government would tell us to recruit children to become soldiers.

Simon Kuok Biliu, part of the Nyuong Nuer Wunlit delegation, was one of the recruits the chiefs provided the SPLA with.

As for our case when we were children, we were fed and brought up and become soldiers, our guns were taken away from us and were told to only learn in school. Afterward when we were grown up, we were transferred to military. We were the one who fought people and fired guns. That was it.

There have, however, been disappointments since independence in 2011. Ariath Mayar Mareng, a spiritual leader (*raan nhialic*) among the Dinka Abiem, was particularly disappointed that gaining independence did not bring an end to the fighting.

Our relationship with the Sudan government was very bad, and when John Garang rebelled and we joined him, we became united and started fighting Arabs until we got our independence and then we finally became the nation. From there, I went to attend the independence day meeting in Juba and I said that

South Sudan will remain united and no more separation, but what surprised me now is that we became independent and we still kill ourselves again.

Other chiefs, such as the Apuk Dinka Chief Morris Ngor Ater, regretted that independence had not ushered in a regime of good governance.

The one thing that is causing a lot of problems is the Native Administration. When we take criminals to police to be arrested until their cases are solved, their relatives in police release them and the criminal comes back for you. Here we have no power to handle cases like these. People are not employed on the basis of their qualifications, they are appointed randomly. This is why you find that somebody who has studied medicine employed in the ministry of finance, and somebody who is qualified in finance is appointed to work in hospital. It cannot work like that.

The 1991 Split in the SPLA

The loss of Ethiopian support when the Derg government in Addis Ababa fell to a coalition of Ethiopian and Eritrean opposition groups (supported by Khartoum) in 1991 precipitated a crisis in the SPLA. There were disagreements about leadership style, about democracy within the movement, and the movement's ultimate goal: a reformed 'New Sudan' or independence for the South alone. As the two main factions of the SPLA increasingly mobilized their civilian support bases to fight what was an internal battle, the civilians were still aware of who the real instigators of the conflict were. David Bany Lam, a Nuer trader who travelled extensively outside his home community later summarized the split and the eventual reconciliation:

People fought in 1991, the government of Dr John and Dr Riek, people spent about eight years or nine when they were different. That time the two leaders showed the necessity for people to come together peacefully.

The impact on people who had formerly intermingled was severe. Chief George Mawic Dual of the Jagei described it this way:

This is how it happened: there were Nuer in the side of the Dinka who were herding their cows there. Usually the Dinka cows sleep outside the byer, while the Nuer cows were sleeping in the byer. There were Nuer living with the Dinka. When the problem happened between the Dinka and the Nuer all their cattle were confiscated by the Dinka. And that thing continued. There was a man called Ruot Gatwich Rueh his cows were confiscated. Another man called Majok Ruot had his cattle confiscated, and his brother called Mawut Ruot could not escape the Dinka. That one happened because of the 1991 incident. Those Nuer who were in the Dinka areas remained there and those Dinka who were in the Nuer areas remained there. All the cows were taken by the Dinka and there were a lot of problems among the people. The Nuer could not move to the Dinka areas and the Dinka could not move to the Nuer areas.

However destructive the split was on most communities caught up in the fighting, it did open up opportunities for others. The trader David Bany Lam seized the opportunity to access new goods while still supporting one faction of the SPLA

Yes! Our relationship was with the SPLA because SPLA was our government. We know what SPLA was doing. The SPLA was divided. Some were demanding for independence as they were fighting. But we the civilians could move within in Sudan because Sudan by then was one, which means there were some places which the SPLA could not reach and which we as civilians could. The items we bring from there benefited them. If we brought medicines, they were used to treat the sick, and if we brought clothes, we sold them to our soldiers. And shoes or sandals. Sometimes we made collections and gave them clothes. That's how our relationship was with the SPLA.

Some, like the Nyuong Executive Chief Yoal Dabun Dhoar, never got over their disappointment with what the SPLA became during the factional fighting. Even the Arabs, he said, looked better in comparison.

The only people I found who were friends to us were the Arabs. When the Arabs came I would put on the cloth (the chief's sash) that showed my authority and they would call me chief. I was like a governor. SPLA has become a party for people who quarrel. It is good that there are people who travel in between that bring us what the situation is like on the other side.

The 1998 Chiefs' Meeting in Lokichokio

The UN Operation Lifeline Sudan was mandated to deal with both sides of the civil war, so when the SPLA split it continued to deal with both factions. From its logistical base in Lokichokio, Kenya, it was able to fly airplanes in and out of the SPLA-held territories and had the logistical capacity to bring people out of Sudan to Kenya and also to move people about within Sudan. In addition to working with the political factions and relief wings of the SPLA, it worked with church groups affiliated with the NSCC.

The intractability of the conflict between the SPLA and Khartoum and within the SPLA produced a war weariness among the civilian population, and it was in this context that churches and the agencies making up the UN Lifeline Sudan were able to provide a mediating role. When the Lou and Eastern Jikany Nuer finally agreed to meet in Akobo in 1994 to bring an end to their feud, the meeting received the logistical support of the UN who were able to fly various delegates, including Malual Wun Kuoth as the most senior of all Nuer chiefs, to Akobo to take part in the mediation. Later when it was decided to host a meeting of chiefs in Kenya, as a preliminary to organizing an intertribal meeting within South Sudan, the UN logistics camp at Lokichokio was the obvious site for such a meeting. As the Nyuong Nuer cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top later expressed it:

The war that was hard to be solved, it was when it was just for few months, but when the war spent a year without being solved people got tired with it, looking for the third party to intervene by mediating them. Dinka worried for their cattle grazing areas, and the water points. They asked me a lot of questions, was this really peace? Our cows are almost finished because green pastures and no good water for years. We chat with them at the evening hours and after the meeting.

In his opening address at the Wunlit Conference the Reverend Dr Haruun Ruun, General Secretary of the NSCC, reminded the assembled chiefs and delegates of the series of meetings between Nuer and Dinka leaders that preceded Wunlit. “You all know about Lokichokio Conference of June, 1998”, he said. “You are also aware of the exchange of visits between Nuer chiefs and Dinka chiefs in the run-up to this conference. All who were present were profoundly moved by the sincerity and joy of that encounter between our peoples. You are all aware of all the preparations that have been made to make this conference possible”.¹³

When Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak of Nuer Jalok was interviewed inside the Bentiu POC, he confirmed the importance of the meeting in the UN compound at Lokichokio, Kenya. “It was really difficult from the beginning”, he recalled.

When we were taken to Lokichokio after we came back it was difficult to decide which people to be taken to which area. It was difficult until Salva Kiir said the Dinka will go to the Nuer. They all refused. Riak Machar talked to us and told us that we will go to the Dinka land and that they will not kill us. We were afraid and when we reached there they came to us and our fear disappeared.

Jacob Madhel Lang Juk, then the Dinka Twic Paramount Chief, now the governor of Gogrial State, also noted the importance of preliminary meetings in various Kenyan locations, as well as the contribution

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13 Wunlit Report, *Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace & Reconciliation Conference*.

of mediators from other parts of Sudan, such as the Khartoum-based Dinka politician Samuel Aru Bol, as well as leaders at various times associated with one or other of the SPLA factions: Judge Telar Ring Deng and Paul Mayom Akec.

Wunlit came about as a result of disastrous atrocities being committed. Jieng people began to talk among themselves and Nuer elders among themselves on what would end the violence. The idea was discussed in Kakuma, Lokichokio and Nairobi. The NSCC decided to take the lead in mediating the talks. The question was who had links to the grassroots? It was found that they were the native administrators, traditional authorities such as chiefs, spiritual leaders and elders—the parents of the youths and soldiers who were killing each other. Dhor Ariik from Lou community in (Tonj County) Bahr el Ghazal was one of the leaders who attended the initial meeting in Lokichokio. There were leaders such as Telar Ring Deng, and Paul Mayom Akec. Leaders from Jieng were taken to Nuer land for trust-building visits and later Nuer leaders were also taken to Dinkaland. Finally NSCC planned for logistics for the conferences through churches, and the implementation kicked off, it was well planned. The NSCC went as far as Khartoum to seek permission for this event, that is why those Luac Dinka of (Samuel) Aru attended the meeting, and it was made clear that people of Riek Machar were welcome. Therefore, everyone attended. I think the meeting was attended by about 500 participants.

4. Run-up to the Wunlit Meeting

Other peace meetings attended before Wunlit peace meeting

Lokiochokio wasn't the only meeting preliminary to Wunlit. Reciprocal visits between Nuer and Dinka chiefs were organized, leading to larger meetings within South Sudan. Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil of the Jikany recalled:

Yes we went and solved the dispute between the Lou and the the Jikany in Akobo. You might have heard that there was a war called 'Khor Nyakili', we went with Riek Machar. We united them and there was no more problem. The second one was when the Dinka had a problem between themselves in Pariang we also went to solve it. Even when the Jikany were united we also went there. The other one is we came to Chambek and solved the problem between the Dinka Door and the Adok (Nuer). All these were because we need our country to be stable.

The series of preliminary intertribal and intersectional meetings that preceded Wunlit followed a pattern as old as the chiefs' courts themselves. For the Jalok Nuer Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak, these new meetings recalled the meetings a previous generation of chiefs used to convene.

I cannot know the meetings our fathers use to have with the Dinka. We came to be aware when the incident between Riek and Garang happened. We had previously had meetings with the Dinka in places like Kuer and Mayen Abun. We also had another meeting in Kongor in Bor. We also had another meeting in Rumbek twice. There was another meeting in New Site. Oh no, not New Site, I will remember it later. It is near Kenya.

Chief Anei Dhal Wol of the Apuk attended many inter-Dinka meetings.

I used to attend all the meetings for peace from various places and they used to be for Dinka alone, but the biggest meeting

I ever attended was for Wunlit and I also attended the one of Juba for Independence, I also attended the peace meeting which was done in Wau, I also attended the one of Kuajok and all these meetings were for peace. Also the meetings we commonly attended were for the clans in order for us to be living peacefully and avoid fighting among ourselves.

The Abiem Dinka raan nhialic, Ariath Mayar Mareng attended meetings of Dinka only as well as meetings between Dinka and Nuer.

Yes, we used to do some small peace meetings, even we conducted a community meeting in Pan Kot and that meeting was all about our relationship among ourselves and how we are going to stay peacefully without fighting one another among ourselves we the Dinka. We went and had another meeting with Nuer in the place called Nyieng and held the peace meeting there, and all the Nuer chiefs like Malual Tur (Malual Wun Kuoth), and the other Dinka chiefs like Dhor Arik Mawien and Ayieny Aleu and many other chiefs all went there and we conducted the meeting and it ended peacefully and even all the cows which were raided at both sides were collected and returned them back. From there, we all accepted that no one should fight again between Dinka and Nuer and all the people should take their cattle to toch and there is no fear again of another fighting and there is a freedom of movement among the people and no one should ask anyone again and even no one should steal again someone's cows. So all the resolutions were set and everyone accepted them and then we stayed for a short period of time without fighting Nuer. As time goes on while staying peacefully with fighting one another again, then the Nuer decided to come to the Dinka land as if they are the SPLA soldiers trying to move around and they all followed the cows to toch and they took all the Dinka cows and then the fighting started again between Dinka and Nuer throughout until we were now called again in the meeting of Wunlit. So we conducted a lot of meetings and also before attending the one of Wunlit, we had another meeting among ourselves we Dinka and

we told ourselves that let's leave fighting among ourselves and focus on the issue of the Arabs in order to get our independence and all the Dinka people accepted it and they respected themselves and managed to fight the Arabs until we got South Sudan now like this.

Many meetings were convened first to settle inter-Dinka issues, as Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny, who later hosted the Wunlit meeting, explained

I also attended the various Dinka peace meeting in our area here. I also attended the one of Kuajok and all these meetings were for peace. Also the meetings we commonly attended were for the clans fighting in order for us to be living peacefully and avoid fighting among ourselves.

Meetings along the borders between Dinka neighbors were particularly important in preparation for dealing with Dinka-Nuer border issues, as Chief Matur Wanybek of the Gok Dinka recalled.

I attended very many border meetings and we could solve all the border issues which always cause fighting between Dinka Rek of Warrap State and Dinka Gok of Lakes State, and then finally, I attended the big one of Wunlit which was between Dinka and Nuer.

The Nuer, too, convened meetings among themselves to work out a common position. Although the east bank Nuer were not scheduled to participate in Wunlit, Mrs Aliza David Doboal from the Jagei Nuer in Bentiu County attended a pan-Nuer meeting in Fangak.

One of the meetings I attended was the Pangak meeting. All the Nuer in four different corners attended it and what was discussed was letting the Nuer return to their way of life of before. So that we would be able to have respect for other people resources and their lives. And that death would reduce and our current situation would change. That is what we said in the meeting.

Some of the meetings were convened away from the Dinka and Nuer homelands. The well-travelled Nuer trader James Riek Luak remembered going to Yei.

We once went to Yei where the meeting (Wunlit) was initiated. We went with other two Dinka and we two from the Nyuong, there where the peace process was initiated, was it not? When we came back we went again to Matip Nhial in Waak where we had a meeting and discussed what we had been called for. Again we went to Rumbek for the same government discussions. I attended meetings three times before the Wunlit meeting was convened. These things I did.

Whatever happened at the formal meetings chance encounters along the way often had encouraging results, as the Dinka Chief Morris Ngor Ater recalled:

We went to toch (grazing areas) in the borderlands between Dinka Apuk and Nuer and we met with Nuer old man called Deng Loth. He is a very powerful spiritual leader. He is a man of soul, who loves people to have good life. He loves peace; he is like our own spiritual leader Jok Tong. He is so powerful that whatever he says is respected by all Nuer, with him we made peace and there was calm for long time before thieves from each side started stealing (livestock) , which later on spoiled our good relationship.

There were so many preliminary meetings before the Wunlit meeting took place that the Luac Dinka Chief Malok Wol Madhieu from Tonj county lost count:

I attended very many meetings before Wunlit meeting. Some of the meetings I attended included the meeting of Yei, Rumbek, Cueibet, Bentiu, Marial Bai, Mayom and Mayendit, plus some other meetings I have forgotten. There were twenty-three peace meetings in total. They were for peace only, so that people could become united and stay peacefully without any problem.

Reason for choosing Wunlit as the main place for the meeting

Choosing a suitable site for a meeting inside South Sudan as large as the one planned required careful thought. Deborah Yier Jany, a Nuer woman residing in Yirol who later became one of the mobilizers persuading people to attend later enumerated Wunlit's advantages.

The meeting was planned for Warrap but the venue was changed to Wunlit because people feared the Antonov bombers from the Khartoum government. Wunlit was the village of Chief Gum Mading. We were fighting Arabs and Arabs knew all the major towns in South Sudan. We needed a remote place. Wunlit was chosen because of security. There was good security. It was next to military garrison of Yethkuel. Wunlit is also a border village between Nuer and Jieng. They are bilingual. There is a river and people could drink from the river.

Others, such as the Luac Dinka Chief Malok Wol Madhieu, also commended Wunlit's position on the border between Dinka and Nuer as one of its advantages.

The reason why Wunlit was chosen was that Wunlit is at the border between Nuer and Dinka and it had open ground which was good for landing the planes and for other activities, and also it is in a distant place which at that time, Arabs could not reach during the meeting. In other words, it was good in terms of security.

Chief Matur Wanybeek, an executive chief from Cueibet County claimed that Wunlit's position between the Dinka and Nuer enhanced its security.

The reason why Wunlit was chosen was that it is in the middle between Dinka and Nuer and its security was good and it is well hidden. Arabs could not reach up to there and I think that was the reason why it was chosen for the meeting.

In fact, the choice of Wunlit came as a surprise to Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny of the Dinka Jalawau section, who was chosen to host the meeting.

I heard about the Wunlit peace meeting from the man who was sent by Salva Kiir Mayardit to come and tell me. That person was Mario Muor Muor, he was told that we need Dinka and Nuer best for the meeting. He said, “Since you are from Tonj also, which chief among all those chiefs from Tonj can be good so that we conduct this meeting in his area?” Then Muor Muor said that the best place to host this peace meeting was Wunlit and its chief was Mr Gum Mading Akuecbeny. Muor Muor was told to go to Wunlit for assessment. He came to Wunlit and found me there and he told me he wants all my people and me to have the meeting with him. I called my people of the Jalawau section and Muor Muor told us, “I have come with good news because I was sent to come and tell you that Wunlit has been chosen as the place to host the peace meeting between Dinka and Nuer. There are a lot of conditions to be first met by you and if you can manage them, then you will host it”. All my people—the Jalawau—clapped their hands and they said if Garang has chosen us to host the peace meeting, then tell us those conditions now. Then Muor Muor said if you have agreed, then we need 400 huts to be put in place for the visitors to be sleeping in during the meeting, we need 100 pit latrines to be ready, we need very many chickens to be contributed, we need more bulls to be contributed, and finally we need one big main meeting hall to be built here. And all these things are to be finished within one month. Do you agree or not? Jalawau clapped their hands again and they said these things you have mentioned are small and we will do them within this one month that you have given us. Then Muor Muor said okay, I am going to leave you now and I will be back after one month. We finished all of them within that one month and when he came back, he found everything ready. He was very happy and he went back and then people started coming all to Wunlit for the meeting.

Community Mobilization

The reciprocal visits of Nuer and Dinka chiefs to each other's counties were designed to build confidence. Once people saw their chiefs returning unharmed from an enemy's territory they could be convinced that the peaceful intent of the meeting was genuine. The task of motivating people to send representatives to Wunlit often fell to women such as Deborah Yier Jany, a Nuer mobilizer resident in Yirol.

I mobilized the chiefs, asking "why are you killing each other? Your sons are finishing you off. Your sons were not recruited to fight each other. Who is going to protect this country?" Chiefs were also mobilized by Awut Deng Achuil (a Dinka women's activist with the New Sudan Council of Churches). She came to Yirol and mobilized Jieng chiefs at the border such as Chief Rechdit Anyieth. Mobilization is not something you do in rush. You come slowly and stay like a visitor. You call a chief for informal discussion. I had to move with something, biscuits, coffee, sugar. And I didn't go alone. I mobilized a chief named Magok Gatluak; Magok knew all the other chiefs. They would ask, "what about this woman? Is this your wife?" Magok would laugh and say, "she is not my wife, we are moving for a reason". Then Magok would talk and I kept quiet. But when I opened my mouth the chiefs would be surprised, "how come a woman could talk like that?" Well, we know women are not well valued in Jieng and Nuer culture. I suffered a lot. My family suffered a lot. I left my daughter Nyahon when she was six months old. I was still breastfeeding. I felt the pain of milk days later. In Nuer land, mosquitoes are bad. There was hunger. I was almost giving up. There was no salary.

Border chiefs and cattle camp leaders, on the front line of inter-tribal conflict, were among the most active in mobilizing and selecting persons to attend. The Nyuong Nuer cattle camp leader John Gatkeel Rueli Kuong was one of the most active mobilizers.

What I did on the border when people quarrelled, I mobilized and spread the message of peace, and reconciled the people again. I went to the Dinka. I went to disseminate the messages of peace there to Dinka.

As effective as the internal mobilizers were, they received active support from institutions and persons standing outside the South's political and military structures as the Jagei Nuer chief George Mawic Dual remembered.

Before the Wunlit conference I used to hear of the name only. When it was said that there would be a conference that would be done in Wunlit it happened. Those who came up with the idea of solving the problem between the Nuer and the Dinka are the one who I can credit for bringing peace. The people called the New Sudan Council of Churches. These people are the ones who united people...They were all brought together by the white people. So people were selected and that was the first time for me to attend a conference.

At first neither John Garang nor Riek Machar were in favour of the meeting, but the tide of public opinion, both in the countryside and within the SPLA factions themselves, soon left them with no choice but to cooperate. As the Nuer border Chief Muon Machak recalled

The idea was not originated from these two men, it came somewhere else, and it came from those who were fed up with the conflict happening in the country. I saw the Church leaders at the conference. For Machar and Garang were not directly involved though, but eventually agreed with us and let the conference to go on, for the greater good of the people of South Sudanese.

Whatever the initial reluctance of the two rival commanders they were acknowledged for finally supporting the conference. Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil from the Jikany Nuer of Bentiu gave equal credit to Garang and Machar.

We came to know of the Wunlit meeting through the letters. Riek was a helper of the government in the North. The man named Garang remained in the South with the SPLA. We saw it important to stop the war among ourselves and fight only the Arabs. We must go to Wunlit. The meeting was spearheaded by Garang. When we arrived there we united and agreed that we should stop fighting ourselves and only see our common enemy. After we get our country we will come back to these small issues. That is what we went to discuss.

David Bany Lam, another civilian trader came to believe that the initiative for the meeting came from John Garang and Riek Machar themselves.

When people left for Wunlit in 1999, the news we received for people to go to Wunlit as a matter of fact, the government had more information on what was going on. That time the two leaders showed the necessity for people to come together peacefully.

His fellow trader, James Riek Luak Teny, was more explicit in giving Riek credit for sending him to the conference.

The information was brought by the white people, by a man called Bill Lowrey. He was the one who said the meeting will be done in Wunlit. The one who informed us was Riek. He said that you the chiefs who travelled those many places will go for a meeting in Wunlit. You will go there for the purpose of peace. So it was Riek who brought to us.

Inevitably chiefs formed the majority of those chosen to go to Wunlit. As Simon Kuok Biliu explained:

People and chiefs and some elder people were selected as well as those from the local government, they went as representatives. But mostly the people who spoke a lot were chiefs, they were the right people affected by the conflict, they were the people who united the two factions.

But not all delegates were chiefs. Other segments of the civilian population were represented, as David Bany Lam explained.

News reached us that people will be going to a place called Wunlit. When people left for Wunlit or when we finally knew which people will be going to Wunlit, people met. When people met to discuss who should go to participate in the peace initiative, traditional chiefs were selected to participate in the conference. But other people, a trader like me were selected also, because we the traders were the victims of the war because we move to different places.

Head Catechist Simon Thak Both Niang was part of a church delegation.

I did not know how it came, whether it was said let this number of people be selected I do not know. When people had a meeting in the church I was told, “you have been selected with John Kuong Lieth”. That is how I got a chance to go for the meeting, I was selected by the people.

Outside of South Sudan the conference organizers made sure that women were represented, too. Three Nuer women learned in different ways about their selection. Aliza David Dobuol was informed that the decision to include her in Wunlit had been taken in Nairobi.

In 1999 we were informed in Koch. Our names were brought from Nairobi and we were informed...We were told that your names have been brought from Nairobi and that you will go to Wunlit. That is why we went to Wunlit.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek got the news from her husband.

I heard it from my husband Magey Reat. He told me that he was among the people selected to Wunlit and that I would go with him. We started our journey from Patir and went to Norbor and finally to Ler where we were airlifted to Wunlit. We spent three days before going to Wunlit.

Teresa Deng Kuany was part of a group travelling from Khartoum to Bentiu.

When they talked of sending people to Bentiu I saw my name already chosen, listed and posted on the wall, we were 51 people headed by Wijial Buom,¹⁴ preparations were done and we supposed to leave to Bentiu on 25 Dec and then later to Wunlit but unfortunately that collided with Christmas day and suggestion was proposed for postponing it till 27 Dec and indeed we began our mission to Bentiu on 27 Dec 1998.

The Journey to Wunlit

It was quite a logistical effort to bring so many people from so many different places to Wunlit. It would not have been possible without the help of the foreign agencies. Both modern and ancient modes of transportation were used, as Muon Machak detailed in his account of his journey from his border chiefdom to the landing field in Ler.

This is how we got prepared for our trip to Wunlit, we had to go in two groups. Those of us who were young assembled in Nyal used canoes to reach Ler and the elders boarded the flight like the late Malual Wuon and Ruey Kuong were lifted and en route to Ler via Nyal while the rest of us went on canoes to join them in Ler.

At Ler Riek Machar not only had to reassure the chiefs about the onward journey, but prevented them from turning back, as James Riek Luak recalled.

We did not take anything with us from our homes here. We only took with us our clothing. When we arrived Ler Riek (Machar) said that all the chiefs must be made comfortable. We were given something to eat and we were shown where to sleep. When Riek came he told us “Tomorrow at ten o’clock you will go to Wunlit”.

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14 Retired Civil administrator who was the son of a prominent Dok Nuer prophet and chief.

But the Dinka raided cows of Gaankaal at a place called Binajak. Dinka Agar raided cows and killed about eight people from the Nuer side. Five people were wounded. We told (Riek) “How can we go to Wunlit and now they have raided us again?” He said “This is another matter. You will go today at ten o’clock. You will be taken by a plane. Do not talk about this”.

The cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top confirmed this account.

We were told to go to Adok, as I told you before. When we were in Ler, the Dinka came and raided the cattle in a place called Bithajak, that was not my cattle camp, but one for other people in Panyinjar. I told people that I will suspend going to Wunlit; I will go back to Panyinjar to deal with that incident. The people said, “No, when you go back to Panyinjar because of that incident without attending the Wunlit conference, the Dinka will have some doubt, they will not believe that we are for peace”. When we arrived, our flight landed in Wunlit. When the conference started, it was started with a man called Malual Wun, he was the chair that time. And Malual delegated Nyuong Danhier to talk on his behalf.

The flight from Ler to Wunlit was the first time many chiefs had flown in an airplane, according to Chief Muon Machak, and many did not like the experience at all.

It was for sure a bad experience indeed, the journey was long and some of us could experience feeling of nausea and vomiting while others had the feel of uneasiness, which was because we never went by an aeroplane so many times. When we reached to Wunlit there was a lot of speculation, we thought those Dinkas who came to welcome were running to us as if running to fight us. Little did we know they came for our welcoming.

Others, such as catechist Simon Thak Both had a more reassuring experience.

We went by plane. We were transported from Ler to the place of the meeting and the planes were big ones. Each cargo plane took sixty people. When I went in the plane I started the rosary prayer. It took us about thirty minutes and we landed in Wunlit while I was still saying the prayers of the rosary. That is how we were transported.

The NSCC took a leading role in organizing transportation, and their presence did much to reassure the nervous Nuer chiefs, as Chief George Mawic Dual recalled.

When it happened that we were to go we were in Ler and went to Wunlit in a plane. That plane was brought by the New Sudan Council of Churches. We were told that we would go next tomorrow and Magok told me my name had appeared in the list that contained the names of those who are going to attend a meeting in Wunlit. It was said that the venue of the meeting was in the Dinka land. I asked them, “how about Dinka? Will they not kill us?” I was told that the Dinka will not kill us because we are going with the New Sudan Council of Churches and there are also white people there. Elders like Kong Mobil, Phar Chany Kutiew, Kuol Kai and Madol Kiir are all going. Even those of Kong Kulang, Magei Reat, Gai Jal Ruey Kong, Malual Wun, Liep Jok Bur, and many others. When the day came we went to the air strip and at 2:30 pm we departed. So that was my first time to travel by plane. The plane was a big one and it took 45 passengers. I sat in the middle. First it went high and came down as if it is falling down. We arrived in Wunlit at 5:00 pm. We sat under the trees a bit far from the air strip. We were put into cars and taken to the Wunlit. We found it is a big place. We were taken into readymade houses and shown our places. The only difficult thing was the issue of the water. There was only one water point. Usually we were given water first.

Not everyone was happy with their reception at the meeting place. Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac from Jagei was particularly annoyed, suspecting some discrimination between his group and the other chiefs.

We went by a plane...When we arrived Wunlit we landed in the airport in Ngapagok near the trees, and waited for the vehicles that would transport us to the meeting area. The committee that was on duty first transported the other chiefs and left us behind. I was angry and told a man from the committee called Thoat Jany “We the Nuer are we not coming to participate in the meeting?” There was a Dinka man who moved with him and was a member of the committee. I asked, “Is this meeting not needing the like of Magei and Kong Kuol or what? Did they come by themselves?” I told him all the other chiefs had been transported and these chiefs had been sitting here since. Mr Thoat Jany was annoyed with me. This Thoat Jany and I were marked on the forehead together (ie they were age-mates in the scarification ritual marking coming-of-age). Then we were taken—we the people of Kong Kuol—and were given four rooms connected together. They removed people of the church and gave us their place. He said this room belongs to Youc Choul, this one belongs to Kong Jombil and so on. The hand pump was near us like that house. The water was fetched in two basins, one for taking a shower and the other one for drinking. Anytime we wanted to take a shower we would do so.

The people coming from Khartoum had a more complicated journey, having to overcome dissension in their ranks before setting off, as Teresa Deng Kuany related.

I was selected by Sam Simon Mayen Tut the chairman of BNFA who was entrusted by Gatmachar (Riek Machar) to lead Nuer Community in Khartoum...through my comments in meetings I was admired and chosen in leadership, nevertheless I was approached by Luang Mayen who is now in Juba and raised complaint to my attention tabled to him by one politician regarding my criticism as serious and fearing what he sees as harsh disapproval to their speeches as politicians specially turning against their comrades in the bush. Biel Lel Ngundeng (ex-parliamentarian from Eastern Jikany and grandson of the Lou Nuer prophet Ngundeng) came to me and supported me

and told Luang to focus on our internal affairs and leave criticising others....

Our coming from Khartoum we used cars rented to us and reached Bentiu, in Bentiu as BNFA we selected and added to the delegation those of Nyadier Chatiem, Nyajaak Tap and appointed them leaders, on that process we didn't last long and again instructions came from Gatmachar for us to stop everything in Bentiu leave immediately to Adok, our question was how many of us should be sent ahead and it seem of selecting 20 plus men from 51 people and myself with Josephine Yei Manguet, we boarded a car and taken through Western side till we arrived Koch and well received by Commander Gatluak Domai and slaughtered an ox for us, the following day we took permission and proceeded ahead, the car couldn't make it because the small bridge at Baang was broken and we just made it on footing, on arrival in Ler they put us in the school as assembly point and the whole process of gathering took us 10 good days and transported later by aeroplane to Wunlit.

When I started my journey from Khartoum and proceeded to Wunlit and indeed I am very delighted for this honour and especially when it comes from young people like you, since I heard that you are on the way coming for Wunlit particularly, I felt good and I don't have anything much rather than to say welcome.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek needed some reassurance before she was ready to board the plane.

When I was told I was afraid but when I saw some chiefs were going with their children and wives I was convinced. I was afraid before we flew but when we entered in the plane I was sitting in the middle of Yac Chuol and another man and I was tied onto the plane with rope. I was counselled not to fear and when we were already in the air I was not afraid again. We spent an

hour and when we arrived I found that the area was really very beautiful with new houses covered with grass. That is how we travelled to Wunlit.

When we arrived there as visitors they comforted us and advised us not to fear. They told us nothing bad will happen to us. They told us you wish to have come with all your people. We listen and no one talked.

Teresa Deng Kuany was impressed with their reception at the conference site.

Our reception was very good and we were above fifty in number because the plane is big and it landed in airport bit far from residential area and taken by vehicles to a camp and found huts been constructed and foreigners and local people from Dinka were there and placed in our compound meant for us alone and transportation continued till all arrived, daily they slaughtered 3 cows.

Those Dinka living closest to the Luac at Wunlit used more low-tech means of transport than the Nuer, 'footing' being the most common. Before the call to Wunlit walking overland could still be dangerous as the Ciec Dinka chief Reechdit Anyieth Reech explained

It was difficult moving. It was very difficult for people who had intermarried. If that happened you move at night. You go straight to your in-laws and then you will move with your in-laws where you wanted to move. That is the same to Nuer, he would move here with in-laws. People don't move freely.

The Luac Dinka chiefs such as Madut Aguer Adel had the least difficulty.

I heard the Wunlit peace meeting from Dr. John Garang and a man called Bol Madut who was the commander by then, they told us that there is a meeting which is going to be done in a place called Wunlit and you are needed there. We were footing from my place called Makuac to Wunlit for that meeting because

we are just neighbors there, so I went to Wunlit with my other chiefs while footing.

Another Luac Dinka chief Malok Wol Madhieu had the fortune to own a bicycle.

I heard the Wunlit Peace Meeting from our Governor by then Nhial Deng Nhial who called us and told us there will be a peace meeting between Dinka and Nuer which will be conducted at Wunlit, so all the chiefs are needed to attend it. For my case I used my bicycle to ride up to Wunlit but majority of the people were footing up to Wunlit.

Some chiefs who lived further away, such as Jacob Madhel Lang from Warrap County, were fortunate to be able to combine travel on foot with transportation provided by an NGO.

The message came through the office of SPLM Secretary as he was called by that time. The SPLM Secretary was the commissioner of the county. I was delegated with Chief Garang Nyuol and other leaders and we walked on foot up to Luonyaker, where we got an NGO vehicle to take us to Wunlit. There were no roads at that time; the only road used to pass by Gogrial and the enemy (Sudan Armed Forces) was there.

Not all Dinka chiefs were disadvantaged. Most chiefs, such as the Gok Dinka chief Matur Wanybek from Cueibet, were able to combine some form of overland travel with an airlift from a convenient location.

We were invited by the chiefs of this area and all the people from Agar, Yirol and Rek plus the Nuer who are in the border here came by plane to Wunlit. So I can say that we were invited to come for the meeting and that's why we footed to come to Wunlit for that meeting. That was how I heard of it. For us those who are bordering Wunlit we footed up to here, but those who were far away from Wunlit were all taken to Rumbek and used the plane to come to Wunlit. The same thing with Nuer: most of them were brought by plane.

Awut Deng and Mario Muor Muor were responsible for coordinating much of this transportation, as Chief Malok Akot Wut recalled.

The Wunlit meeting was attended by all the chiefs from Bahr El Ghazal and all the chiefs from Nuer side, and we all spoke during the meeting and I heard it from Awut Deng Acuil and all the people were brought by planes and gathered them in Wunlit for the meeting and it ended successfully. The time we went to Wunlit, we were using lorry sent to us by Awut (Deng) and Mario Muor Muor to transport us to Wunlit and we reached safely without difficulties on the way. Also people from Yirol, Rumbek, Twic and all the Nuer were brought by plane to Wunlit.

Chief Reechdit Anyieth Reech of the Dinka Ciec was lucky to hitch a ride on a plane on his way back home.

It was a good journey because distant people were transported back by plane. It was a good experience to see Wunlit though our going there was very bad. The roads were very thorny and bushy. Our clothes were torn. We were very tired when we arrived. The road was very bad as I said before. We went there half-naked. After the meeting, we complained to the organisers and we were sent back by plane. It was very good coming back on the plane.

5. During Wunlit

Getting people to Wunlit turned out to be one of the least of the organizers' problems. Maintaining security for the participants, dealing with unexpected visitors from Khartoum, feeding them, and creating an atmosphere conducive to robust debate without reigniting conflict, became the main concerns once people were assembled and serious discussions began.

The security question

Security was foremost in the minds of both the organizers and the participants at Wunlit. Commander Salva Kiir promised to provide security through a nearby SPLA garrison. This reassured the Ciec Dinka Chief Reechedit Anyieth Reech from Yirol.

The reason why Wunlit was chosen is that it is the heart of Bahr el-Ghazal region. It was also close to military garrison of Yethkue. This was because of security reasons. If it was now when everything can move easily, we could have been here in Yirol.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth remembered that the soldiers formed a cordon around the meeting site.

Wunlit was surrounded with soldiers, and only a path was opened for people to move in and out. You could not just walk anyhow, all of us were given gate passes. A person with no gate pass was not allowed in.

Head Catechist Simon Thak Both approved of the tight security around the conference site.

When we arrived at Wunlit we found that a lot of tents had been erected. And the security was very tight because it was surrounded with soldiers. Anyone who wants to come in was

thoroughly checked and then allowed in. We did not fear till we came back.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth was further reassured by the fact that Telar Deng, who was known to many of the Nuer, was present as one of the organizers.

When I arrived the airport I was welcomed because the airport was a bit far from the place where the meeting took place. I was afraid when they took our bags and put them into the car, and they told us to go into the car. When we went it was OK because there was a man called Telar Deng who was once a leader in our area.

Some of the Nuer were naturally nervous. Cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top claimed he was not one of them.

I don't know those who felt afraid. For me I don't fear. I used to go to worse places on footing and I don't fear. If there were people fear was up to them. Maybe during our landing, people might have thought that, Dinka are going to kill us, but it was normal. When I came out from the flight, I was received very well, and one of the Dinka sang a song. He was someone who we had been together with for several years.

In fact, the reception committee at Wunlit was far from threatening. Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Kuong was surprised:

We were welcomed by huge crowds of people. We could not see where they ended. Among the people you could see young children, elderly people, women and—surprisingly—some of the military personnel.

David Bany Lam found the detachment of soldiers guarding the site were both effective and accommodating.

The security protecting us were South Sudanese. The people we got in the meeting were government (SPLA). The government

was the one overseeing peace between civilians. They did not come from a different place, the government protected us all those days of the meeting throughout. They surrounded us because in this world there are people who are evil wishers who can surprise people with something bad. They protected us well all those days and nothing happened to us. That is it, when we stayed for a while, when they saw that if someone wanted to go to a certain place like the place Ngobogo, where we used to go and drink water, they would take you using a military vehicle.

Head Chief John Toang Chang of the Nyuong attributed the success of the security to Salva Kirr.

No one feared in Wunlit because Kiir was with us. We stood as Nuer.

The Participants

Simon Kuol Beliew, a Nuer local government officer and trader, described how he participated in the role of a chief.

When I was selected I was a local government officer. The plan was that I would go as chief. Because if it was known I was a government official, something bad might happen.

Many of the Nuer delegates were pleasantly surprised by their positive reception. James Riek Luak Teny noted:

When we arrived there we spent three days before the meeting could start. We got that all the people were very happy because people were tired of dying. There was a woman who came and danced before the people, a Dinka woman. She said, "These are the Nuer, I used to tie my skirt on the left side and I will stop doing that from now onward" (she would now feel free to have more children). All the people liked it because the civilians were given a place that is almost the distance of Ler. About three big trees had benches put under them for the people to sit on. All the people would come to listen to what was discussed, no one was

left home. We would hear the way they were clapping their hands because they all like it.

Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac was surprised to be told that he would be taking a leading role representing the Jagei:

We arrived in Wunlit at 5 pm. We were shown our houses. Each chief was taken with his people and was shown his houses. There were wooden benches made under the trees we were sitting under. The trees had big branches and leaves that covered the whole surface and there was no sunshine that disturbed us. The tea was brought and we all took tea, only a person with no mouth did not take tea. Any Dinka with no ID card was not allowed to visit us. Only those who were registered to attend the meeting were allowed to visit us. We were like people going to be sacrificed when we went to Wunlit. But for those who were educated, they knew that we will not be killed. Magei, who was the paramount chief, and those of Kong Kuol were brought to Nhoor. Magei told Kong Youch that Youc Chuol will be the one to take us because he is tough-headed. He knows how to speak and will never disappoint us. He came and slept in my home with his wife. When I was told I wondered whether Magei would be putting me into trouble. But I then realized that he was the one who showed me how to be a leader. So I said if we are to be killed then we will be killed together.

The Dinka Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak said he came to understand that bringing the Nuer chiefs to Wunlit was only the first stage in a reciprocal exchange with Dinka chiefs.

Let me say it. The Dinka chiefs were told that now that the Nuer chiefs have come you will too go to their areas. The Dinka chiefs said they will not go the Nuer. I told them that I will remain here so that when you go to the Nuer if something bad happens to you your people will get me here. But when it happened it was a real peace. It became “male” (Nuer word of greeting) as the Nuer use to say. All their clothing were changed for the new ones.

Aliza David Dobuol could see that if successful, peace between the west bank Nuer and Dinka could be the first step in solving broader issues in South Sudan.

We felt happy because there was another big issue: the ‘problem’ of the South. I said we must first finish our problem. We felt very happy and we went at once. Some people said we will be killed by the Dinka. We asked ourselves whether what Riek (Machar) has accepted can lead us to death. Let us first go to see. That death is nothing. We were many when we went. When we arrived we were welcomed warmly. We went to solve the problem between the people, and there was nothing to fear. We went together with young girls and women.

The Non-Participants

Aliza David Dobuol, the women’s leader from the Jagei Nuer, was surprised to find representatives from such variety of communities brought as witnesses to the peace negotiations.

When we went to Wunlit we found that there were people from many other communities. We were there to discuss the issue of the borders.

Chief James Riek Luak was surprised to find ‘short’ (ie non-Nilotic) people at the conference.

People from the other side of the Nile were invited. There were seven chiefs. They wore black garments like flags. The Jur people had a man called Tap Yaah. And a man called Buong Bar. From Equatoria they brought two short people. From the side of Nyala (in Darfur) they brought three other short people. There was white man with a very long beard. He would tie it when he wanted to sit. It was like the tail of a cow. There was a delegation of around 60 people from Khartoum. Among them were Samuel Aru Bol (a prominent Dinka politician) and women representatives.

The presence of representatives from groups beyond the Dinka and Nuer and Atuot areas on the West Bank was an indication that should the conference be successful it might be replicated elsewhere. John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong, the Nyuong Nuer cattle camp leader, noted the wide scope of the gathering.

We were taken including Gaajak, Murle, Ngok Dinka Deng Kuol, and those of Dinka Panaru. All Dinka came. The only people who were very few among us were Bul (Nuer). Bul were three people only. Those from Greater Bentiu all went. Lak and Gaawar (Nuer sections) all went. All the chiefs went. Peace was so important. God acted and blessed it. When we were there, if it had happened that Kiir said no, we would not have been able to deny him. It was only Kiir who make the peace. A bull was brought and killed by Guk Mading. His son said to him, should this bull be killed please, old man? He responded: it will be killed, my son. He said, these are Nuer, he said my grandfather in the past was cut off on the Nuer side and he was protected by the Nuer. I will protect these Nuer people. It was a very wonderful bull which not yet at the mating stage. Its horns were sharpened by us that day; we sharpened them when it was about to be killed.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth was impressed by the perspective of the cattle-less Jurchol from Bahr el-Ghazal at the meeting.

We needed nothing from the Jur because he has no cows. It has been said that the issue of cattle is a cause of death. So the Jur were invited because if people are dying it becomes a national issue and we want to solve it together. When the Jur representative was given a chance he asked, "Why are you killing yourselves? We are searching for our government and we need to get it from the Arabs. Let us finish on that. When the guns were brought you turned them against your own selves. They were bought with cows. Now why are you inviting me? Are you fighting me because of the issue of the cow? You are dying. I will eat this government". He advised us well. He said if you want to

live long leave the cows. If you do not leave the cows I will eat this government.

Not every group with a stake in peace was represented. As John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong also mentioned, Deborah Yier Jany noticed the absence of Khartoum's main Nuer ally, the Bul section.

The reason why some Nuer groups did not attend was because they stood on two legs (ie one supporting the SPLA; the other the Khartoum Government). The Leek Nuer were in between the two. The Bul Nuer made it clear that they supported the Arabs. That is what prevented them from coming. I think the chiefs from Leek were afraid.

Madit Maker Gum was surprised that certain South Sudanese members of the National Congress Party were also present.

What surprised me was seeing members of National Congress Party (the ruling party in Khartoum). And these were the people fighting SPLA/M. It was a surprise to me. I realised that SPLA/M was powerful. Why were people coming to see the bush government? We were fighting for our rights. We had no problem killing a person. When they came, we realised it was good. It meant we were winning the war.

Regarding the delegates from the communities on the east bank of the Nile, Teresa Deng Kuany observed that they brought a new, critical perspective to the problems of the west bank.

In that case one man from Nasir talked and criticized both Dinka and Nuer for slaughtering themselves like animals. He said 'You Dinka, when you kill your brother Nuer do you eat them? You Nuer, when slaughtering your brother Dinka do you eat them? Then why are we finishing ourselves? Let us stop doing that to ourselves'.

Reunions

Old friends separated by the hostilities imposed from above were at last able to meet. James Riek Luak, impoverished by the war, was reunited with an old friend among the Dinka who had become a chief.

There was no money at that time. When we met we slapped each other on the chest and back and asked each other, “how are your children?” That is how we welcomed each other. Later in the evening, though, Dhor Ariik brought me five Sudanese pounds. We had known each other before he became a chief among the Dinka. When I was still young I would take some milk to him in the town. It was as though we were related. When you give someone food how can you not be friends? (And yes, I know the Dinka language, too).

A greater freedom of movement was opened up after Wunlit, something the border Chief Muon Machak appreciated.

When people returned from Wunlit peace conference, anyone who was restricted was now free to go back to his people and everybody went back home. Even in that day when we were coming from Wunlit, many Dinka boarded the plane with us. So they were coming to see the Nuer land. Those people who lived at the border were free to move here and there to attend to their businesses.

Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak put the new mobility into practice when he briefly settled among the Dinka after Wunlit.

We have stopped the killings and abduction of the children. Even myself I migrated to the Dinka area with my people as I told you before. We spent two years there.

One of the first orders of business after the conclusion of the conference was to reunite with their families those persons who had been abducted by one side or the other (mostly children). Abraham Geng Top, a Nyuong cattle camp leader, was one of those delegated to begin this.

People started with word of prayer. Bill Lowrey was like the leader of the church people. When I asked other people, I was told that Bill Lowrey was a pastor over there. People started to pray. And the conference took eight days. The days that we spent in Wunlit were ten altogether... When we came to an agreement, the children who were taken by Dinka during the crisis along the border line (were returned). I was told to handle that job. What Dinka didn't put in place were the cattle that were raided while people were on peace negotiations. During the conference we were told that the cows would be returned, but this was not put into action after the conference. We collected some children and brought some with us on the plane, and the rest came back on foot, because the plane was not big enough to accommodate us all on board. Some of the children are here in Nyal. After Wunlit, I was told to go to Dinka Agar with the border chiefs, to deliver the peace messages to the people in the cattle camps along the border corridors.

Another Nuer cattle camp leader, John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong, also was assigned the task with discovering the fate of abducted children.

When I left, I went to bring back some children from Dinka areas. We went and brought back some children from this side of Dinka Yirol. A lot of children were taken from Nuer, and a lot of children were unfortunately lost completely. Dinka children who were here were returned back, including the children abducted by us. They were returned, but some Nuer children were lost completely (in the conflict before the Wunlit meeting). Manyon Gai's daughters were there among the Dinka Luac, two girls, married and their dowries given. And Puok Gatluak's daughter, and Dual Machar's daughter. These four girls are here. As well as four of Mawieh Tay's daughters in Rumbek. Their father and mother were killed. Girl children were left, but the boys were killed.

Many who were abducted had not survived, as Chief Simon Kuol Beliew discovered.

Someone found alive was brought back, someone who died for their elder were killed, because it was as if they killed the elders in that time. They were only small whom they possessed as their children. Someone took a child as his own, those were the ones found alive. As for the case of these small boys, they were taken far away separately by them, yet, they said there were some individual relatives as well there. Who related with them in Dinka area there, they were the one who made them survive.

The Wunlit meeting was supposed to be the first of many meetings where Nuer and Dinka chiefs exchanged visits. Executive Chief Yoal Dabun Dhoar was particularly disappointed that this did not happen so that he was unable to reciprocate the hospitality the Dinka had shown him in Wunlit.

I can now not lie. Not all the things discussed were put into effect. We did not like that because we had a meeting in their land but this did not happen in our area. We have many places here in Nuer, we have Dok, Jagei, and Nyuong plus many other places. They could have come so that we also do to them the good thing they did to us. Bill Lowrey took us to Dinka but did not bring the Dinka to our land so that we could kill for them some cattle as they did for us. I just heard that there was a meeting taking place in Kuchuok and it was for the politicians only. So it is like God was pleased from one side only.

6. The Covenant

By the time the main conference convened in Wunlit two weeks later, the momentum remained strong, but the omens were mixed. The white bull sacrificed at the opening feast – a massive, ornery ox – did not want to die. He snorted. He bel-lowed. He charged the men dancing around him with spears. It took five minutes to bring him down, and the roar he let out before the blade tore his throat was terrible. To cultures that value symbolism, the message was clear.

Karl Vick, Washington Post, 7 July 1999¹⁵

Opening of the meeting in Wunlit

Once all the delegates were assembled and settled, the meeting was formally opened by the chief of Wunlit, Gum Mading Akuecbeny. Apuk Chief Anei Dhal Wol recalled the moment.

When the meeting was opened, there was a man who came in front and called the owner (chief) of Wunlit, Gum Mading. And Gum called all the people who were in the meeting to stand up. There was very big conference hall which was built to host the meeting and all the people were in the hall, and then there was a very strong spiritual leader from Cirong's family called Mangic Kiir Cirong and he told the people to come where the white bull was tied down. That white bull was very strong and aggressive and it had very sharp horns which people feared to touch. From there, all the spiritual leaders from Nuer side and the Dinka side, came up together and they all started calling on their ancestors and then the white bull was killed. So that's how the meeting was opened. There were many microphones being tied everywhere around the conference hall so the people who could not make it to sit in the conference hall because of the huge number which came at that time, who were sitting outside, could listen via

15 Karl Vick, 'Sudanese Tribes Confront Modern War', *Washington Post*, 7 July, 1999. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/july99/sudan7.htm?>)

microphone to all the words being said inside the hall by the speakers at that time.

There were secular hosts of the meeting, and both Salva Kiir Mayardit, then deputy chairman of the SPLM and chief of staff of the SPLA, and Nhial Deng Nhial, the SPLM governor of Bahr el-Ghazal, spoke. Chief Malok Akot Wut regarded this as the official opening of the conference.

After all the people came and gathered inside the meeting hall, then deputy chairman at that time Salva Kiir came up with the then-governor Nhial Deng Nhial to open the meeting officially and then people of the church prayed and the spiritual leaders also called on their ancestors. Then people continued with the meeting.

The presence of the military from one faction of the SPLA was reassuring rather than threatening, according to the Nyong border chief Muon Machak.

During the opening ceremony the then General Salva Kiir came with his men and gave his vote of thanks and the message to the conference. We concluded that if these big men came for the conference for sure it could mean peace and stability.

The secular and spiritual authorities having had their say, the credit for the smooth running of the conference, according to Chief Madut Aguer Adel, was due to Bill Lowrey, the the American pastor who acted as facilitator.

The meeting was conducted well because there was a white man called Bill Lowrey who was there really organized the meeting and each and every one who went there liked the meeting and then they became united and worked together as one.

The conference organizers made space for all belief systems and forms of worship, according to Luac Dinka Chief Malok Wol Madhieu.

When the meeting was opened, people of the church first prayed and went behind and then the spiritual leaders from both sides came and then they called their ancestors and started killing the white bull while people of the church were just watching from far distance behind.

The White Bull

It has been the custom throughout the two Sudans, whether north or south, Muslim, Christian, or pagan, to welcome prominent visitors and open formal meetings with the slaughter of livestock. Throughout the conference several animals were so sacrificed at different points in the meeting.

Head Chief John Toang Chang of the Nyuong noticed how Nuer and Dinka representatives each played an equal role in the slaughtering of animals and the division of meat.

When we went there they brought a white ox and when we were getting off the plane they slaughtered it and we all jumped over it. We the people of Panyijar were the first to arrive in Wunlit. We spent a night there and in the next morning they brought another white bull and they killed it for us to eat it. The white bull was divided into two equal parts, the Nuer took one part and the other part was taken by the Dinka. The first person who made the traditional prayers was Ruei Kong Chuol followed by Gai Jal Dool. They were the first elders who prayed. When it was killed we sat like the way we are sitting now. That is how Wunlit was.

As the host of the meeting Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny was responsible for providing a bull to be sacrificed at the opening ceremony.

At that time when all Dinka and Nuer came together and the meeting was about to be start, I had to arrange for the white bull to be killed so that we could call on God and tell him that we are now for peace and we are going to open our meeting officially.

All the Nuer came and stood at on one side and the Dinka too came and stood the other side. Our powerful spiritual leader called Mangic Kiir called his ancestors and said this big meeting between Dinka and Nuer must go ahead and nothing bad will happen, and this meeting will end successfully and all the people will be having peace among themselves. And then the white bull was killed.

The Nuer were impressed by Gum Mading's offering, as John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong recalled.

It is peace. The white bull was killed for peace. He said this white bull will be killed for peace, because when our grandfathers were cut off in the Nuer area a white bull was sacrificed by Nuer for Dinka. That was Guk Mading himself. For him, he did not sit on a chair, he sat on plastic mat that chief. He has many children. The goats from his homes were milked with buckets. And it was a village without flies. There were no cattle flies.

David Bany Lam gave a vivid account of the opening sacrifice.

As I told you we left Ler on 26 February and went and slept in Wunlit. On 27 February, in the morning at around eight o'clock, we blessed the meeting with a bull. The Dinka brought a white bull. That white bull was blessed by elders including our elders like Gai Jal Dol from us the people of Bentiu. He was the among the elders with Gatwun and Malual. They blessed that bull with the elders of Dinka together or the elders of South Sudan, who were there during the meeting. The bull was blessed in presence of the white men, they used a spear to kill it. The bull was so wild so they had to use rope to peg it and the peg was tall and dug down deep. We even felt that it should not be killed. It was so wild and would hurt people. And its horn was so sharp and steep. The Dinka had to catch it and slaughter it using a spear. It was slaughtered in the morning at around nine to ten. At around two o'clock, we went to the meeting hall and the meeting was opened. That is it the governor and the vice

chairman Kiir they went to the meeting, we opened the meeting on that day, the meeting was opened on the 27 February. So, that is what happened. And at the end of the meeting, another cow was slaughtered.

In fact, two bulls were produced to bless the meeting, one provided by the Dinka and one by the Nuer, as Deborah Yier Jany recalled.

When people were arriving, there were two white oxen pegged down, to be slaughtered for the arriving guests. Tut bior in Nuer, or thon Mabor in Jieng, the Dinka language. The spiritual leaders were physically separate from the church people. There was bull given by a Nuer chief called Gai Jany and one from Dinka chief Called Gum Mading. When the spiritual leaders came, it rained (a blessing and a sign of peace). It was the middle of dry season and nobody was expecting rain.

The sacrifice was accompanied by prayers. According to the Dinka raan nhialic Ariath Mayar Mareng Christian prayers were said separately from traditional prayers.

The way the white bull was killed, people of the church came and had prayers first and then they stepped aside. Then the spiritual leaders from both Nuer and Dinka came in and called all their ancestors and then they killed the white bull. The people of the church were just watching from afar. In this way, peace came between Dinka and Nuer.

Numerous divinities were invoked through prayer by spiritual leaders. Jagei Nuer chief George Mawic Dual enumerated both Nuer and Dinka divinities.

The bull was brought and tethered near the place. People who had divine spirits like Gai Jal, Kong Kuol, Rwei Kuong, Malual Wun and many from Kuer, and some powerful Dinka who were possessed by strong spirits were present. At dawn the the bull was prayed over. Each of them prayed and the bull was killed

with spears. The reason why a white bull was killed and not any other colour was that the white represented peace. That is why a white bull was killed.

Abraham Geng Top compared the Dinka technique of sacrifice to that of the Nuer.

They killed the white bull and we were there just standing. Because the Dinka when they kill the cow, they tie it down to slaughter it. They struggled with the bull until they managed to wrestle it down and slaughter it. After that we went for the meeting. After the conference they killed another bull.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth was remarked that a bull was sacrificed, rather than an ox, which is the Nuer custom.

The white bull means that all the spiritual leaders were united. It was killed by the father of Gum Mading under whose auspice the conference was held in Wunlit. Because according to the Dinka it is a bull that is to be killed, while according to us the Nuer it is an ox that is to be killed. The white bull was killed so as our hearts could be as white as the color of the white bull. The Dinka called it *dhoor*, meaning peace. They said let it make our hearts *dhoor*, or peaceful.

Executive Chief Yoal Dabun Dhoar also noticed that the sacrificial animal was intact and not castrated.

The white bull had testicles, and it was killed so that whoever will do anything wrong will have his blood pour out like the blood of this white bull. The Dinka had to be in their places and the Nuer to be in their places so that we leave the whole issue to the government. (The sacrifice) was done on one side only. If it had been done anywhere in the Nuer area I would have heard of it. When we were taken we were many chiefs from different places in South Sudan. There were chiefs from the Nuer, Jur, Dinka and many other places in our country. I doubt God is happy because it was done in one side only.

As the conference was begun with a sacrifice, so it was ended with another sacrifice. Jikany Nuer chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil explained that the sacrifice was not just for the Dinka and Nuer, but for all South Sudanese.

When we finished, we all killed a white bull that was very violent. We prayed earnestly until it got tired and fall down alone. We dug a hole and it bled into it. We said the problem we Janubiyiin (Southerners) had is over. Anyone who starts it again will have his blood bleed like the blood of this white bull. We also agreed to cook the bull in one place and that it would be first tasted by (Salva) Kiir himself. We said our problem is over. We said let the spear masters and the leopard skin masters and all who are possessed by spirits pray over the bull. We prayed over the bull and moved around it until it fell down alone. We said: tell Kerubino (Kwanyin) and (Paulino) Matip (leaders of Dinka and Nuer militias in conflict with the SPLA) that we are united—we the Southerners. We are left with our common enemy, the Arab. Whoever will create any trouble will have his blood bleed like the blood of this white bull. We agreed to kill a white bull so as to cleanse our hearts. So that no one would have any grievance, that let all our hearts be as white as the colour of this white bull.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek described how Chief Gum Mading emphasized the meaning of the closing sacrifice, so that no one was left in any doubt as to what it meant.

The white bull was killed because the conflict has tired people. There was a man called Gum Mading and another whose name I have forgotten they said, “Now that our meeting is over we will kill a bull, did you hear that?” They would ask, we would respond ‘Yes’. They said “Now that we have killed this bull let no Dinka or a Nuer violate the rules we have set. Let the Nuer stop singing the song that says “I will follow the Dinka”.

There is disagreement over what was done with the carcass of the slaughtered animal. According to James Riek Luak:

The white bull was wrestled down and was slaughtered. We divided it in the middle: the Dinka took one side and we took the other side. (Salva) Kiir said “you must eat it all and let no one refuse it, because this bull is for peace that will unite us as brothers”.

According to the Ciec Dinka chief Dhieu Mangar Chep the meat of sacrificed animals was distributed evenly to each community.

These were spiritual people. We were people of the meeting. The white bull was brought, a very wild white bull. The family of Akuebeny (the grandfather of Gum Mading) offered their bull. One horn was sharpened. The bull was very wild. The spear masters came and said few words and it was slaughtered. The meat was divided; one portion for Nuer, one for Agar (Dinka), one for Rek (Dinka), one for Luac (Dinka) until the bull was finished. The head was left with people of Wunlit.

Teresa Deng Kuany, a city-dweller, had never seen a bull slaughtered before and was disturbed by the animal’s struggle and cries.

We sacrificed a white bull with red horns which was tied to a tree. The traditional leaders from both communities said prayers. One thing which caught my attention was the crying of the bull while it was being sacrificed to the extent that I asked my colleague Josephine what is happening. People were surprised I asked. But I went earlier had been living in Khartoum and got my meat from butcher and never saw such thing. It was horrible seeing bull crying with tears! The slaughtering was not by stabbing. They they wrestled with the bull and slaughtered it like a goat. And more than twenty people were wrestling with it. After slaughtering the body of the bull was covered with white cloth.

Why only a white bull was chosen

Among both Nuer and Dinka white is associated with peace and wisdom. A wise person is said to have a white head. (No racial overtones are

attached to the color white. In both languages Europeans and other light-skinned foreigners are described as red). The Dinka participants offered a number of reasons for choosing a white bull for the sacrifice. Chief Gum Mading Akuechbeny himself explained.

Anything which has different colour apart from white always hides the truth, but with white, everything will be pure and people will also have white hearts like the color of the bull and white always for God and it helps people to stay with challenges or something bad happened.

Ariath Mayar Mareng gave a more spiritual reason for choosing a white bull.

The reason why white bull was chosen was because white is always for God and people were asking God to bring peace between Dinka and Nuer.

Chief Anei Dhal Wol explained that the participants had to have a corresponding colour in their own hearts for peace to succeed.

It was because everyone was needed to have the white hearts like the color of that bull and no one again should hate or fight one another and everyone to accept peace and no more fighting and if it was to be a red color or black colour, then they were to be for war, because we kill bulls with those colours when we are preparing for the war.

Chief Morris Ngor Ater also associated white with figurative cleanliness.

The white colour was chosen so that whatever that was to be discussed was going to be clean, and the agreement was to be clean also.

What was agreed

Wunlit focused on the main causes of conflict among the two peoples, according to the Nyuong border chief Muon Machak.

What we were talking about inside the hall was about the law and the principles by which both communities should be held to account if they break promises. We inquired if still any one among us would love war. They all answered nobody loves war. We said, 'Ok let us make a promise that we shall not break, if anyone shall break, that person shall die like the bull which is about to be killed. If any Dinka or Nuer would dare, that promise will follow them'. Eventually God granted the request for peace. Issues to do with cattle rustling and killing were the contentious areas.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek from Jagei understood the Wunlit agreement to have created the institutions to enforce the law.

Now we have set the laws and whoever breaks them will face the consequences of the outcomes. We have come including the *kuar muon* (Nuer earth chiefs) and the *beny bith* [spear masters]. After we are done with the meeting we are going to kill some cows concerning those who used to move between us. So that is what I heard.

Aliza David Dobuol gave an optimistic account of Wunlit's success.

Yes, we ironed out all those things in 1999. There were no more killings, no more abductions and there was no more raiding of cattle. The children abducted and some of the cows raided were returned. A committee was elected and Telar Deng was one of them. He was the one who was very serious about it.

I know him because we were once together in Ler. I do not know the names of the other people.

James Riek Luak Teny reported that some Nuer had been trapped among the Dinka when fighting broke out after 1991, but they were now free to return home or stay with the Dinka.

Those who wanted to remain with the Dinka remained. We came back with a man called Mading Wuar Kuer who had married our

daughter. He got caught up there and his cattle were confiscated. We brought him back. There is a man called Bithong Keah who is here now was also there and we said he will not remain here because he is from Gaankaal. Those who wanted to remain with the Dinka did so, like the clan *cieng* Puot Yai which is still there. He did not come with us. When he heard that the Nuer have come he brought us two billy goats, saying that we were people from his father's land. He was originally from Nyuong. All these were good activities.

With an agreement to end fighting people were free to settle wherever they wished, but according to Jalok Nuer chief Isaac Magok Gatluak there remained some resentment for past provocations.

Laws were made. We said let us stop fighting. Let us stop all the bad things we used to do. If there is a Nuer who wants to migrate to the Dinka let him go and if there is a Dinka who want to migrate to the Nuer let him go. Nuer are good people, but the Dinka sometimes are not good. I can remember one of the Dinka who came to our area by the name Makot Teny from Luach. He is the one who had a song that began "I have fallen in love with the daughter of Kulang". Another Dinka is called Mayuol used to sing 'I will bring out your anus like a vulture, and beat you with a stick and your waste will follow like cow's waste'.

With freedom of movement now confirmed many individuals sealed their personal commitment to peace through intermarriage, according to Chief Morris Ngor Ater of the Apuk Dinka.

In that meeting also people married from there as a sign of commitment to the agreement. Both of them married from each other. I could have married too but my cows were far away in Gogrial.

At least one participant saw Wunlit as the first step towards resolving the wider civil war in Sudan. Chief Simon Kuol Beliew drew a direct line from Wunlit to the CPA.

All things which affected communities come to an end. Because if you had your cow that you sold, you would buy what even suited your need. That was it, people moved freely together, people walked together up to the time when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by higher government, then peace prevailed.

Deborah Yier Jany, a Nuer residing among the Dinka in Yirol, had a clear perspective on the factors that brought peace and those that threatened it.

What brings peace is that when the thief steals, he should be arrested by government and brought to justice. And intermarriage between Nuer and Jieng (Dinka) brings peace too – because you cannot kill your maternal uncles and in-laws. What spoils peace? Cattle rustlers. And moving into someone's pastures and water points without prior notice. Moving to someone's toch. Who created toch? God created toch for cattle to graze. Nobody should control it for himself.

The Role of Women

There were a few women in the delegations that each community sent to the conference, and two were chosen to address the public forum. Awut Deng Achuil, who had relatives among both the Rek and Agar Dinka, spoke representing Dinka women, and Deborah Yier Jany spoke on behalf of the Nuer women. But it was more common for women to be silent at meetings, as Nyalel Lony Gatjiek explained.

Before we went to Wunlit, whenever there is any meeting we would go to attend it but we would not talk. Anyone who wanted to go and listen was allowed to. Only those whose names were written would be allowed to talk.

Deborah Yier Jany said of her own address:

At the meeting I said “I want to send this message to Jieng from Nuer women, is there a man who has experienced pregnancy, or labour or still birth? The children who died in the conflict between Nuer and Jieng are many. I want you men to answer me, because we are killing our sons.” I’d repeat that today, more strongly than before. When we were fighting Arabs that was a sacrifice for the good of country. The son who is going to die defending South Sudan is the child we want. But the child who will die because A or B wants to become a leader of the movement, that is what we don’t want. SPLA/M didn’t liberate this country to kill. This is what I said at Wunlit. I remember some men were very emotional. The room went silent. After the meeting everybody was mentioning my names “Deborah... Deborah”. I could hear them.

Ariath Mayar Mareng saw the women as performing four tasks.

The women who were in the meeting, some of them were just listeners, some spoke during the meeting, and others were the ones who prepared food for the people who were in the meeting, They would ululate during the meeting so it was known that the women were in the meeting also.

As far as Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny was concerned the women were mainly in a support role.

The women who went to the meeting were having two things, there were those women who communicated during the meeting, there were those women who were responsible for bringing water to the people in the meeting and there were some young ladies who were selected to be cooking food for the people, and these were all the roles of the women during the meeting at that time.

Some men recognized only the support role. Chief Malok Akot Wut said

The women went to the meeting and some of them would prepare the food. Some of them used to give water to the visitors, some of them spoke during the meeting and there were some

women who washed clothes for the visitors. Those were their duties during the meeting.

But the women were able to make the men listen. According to Chief Madut Aguer Adel:

Their common role was to prepare food for the people and to bring water for drinking and for bathing to all the people who came for the meeting at that time, also there were some women who communicated and they said you men, stop fighting, the children whom we give birth to are going to be finished because of you, so we women are asking you to stop fighting and have peace among yourselves so no more people will die because of the war.

Chief Malok Wol Madhieu was struck by their account of losing their children to war.

The role of women during the meeting was that they spoke and they said that for us we are the mothers, you men don't know how painful it is for you to produce your child and take good care of it until he grows up and then later, be killed by someone, so we are begging you to stop fighting so that our children will not die any more. Those were the words from women on both sides during the meeting. All the women from Dinka and Nuer side were crying because of the death of their children during the wars.

Chief Morris Ngor Ater was appreciative both of women's support role and their contribution to the public debate.

The women talked during the meeting about killing innocent children,. They emphasized how painful it is to carry a baby for nine months who is later killed in few seconds. They asked both sides why were children and old people killed, and nobody gave them an answer. Other women were there to prepare and provide food and other services to the participants of the conference. It was a very difficult role and they did it very well.

Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth was only a girl when she attended Wunlit with her elderly father. She was there to provide Malual Wun Kuoth with milk to drink as he would not drink the milk that adult women milked.

No, I don't associate myself to hear what the elders are discussing. If you are a child, why do you bother to associate yourself with what elders are discussing? The elders used to discuss the issue of peace, and the ways South Sudan should attain permanent peace. They discussed this for almost twenty days at Wunlit.

Relationship of both Nuer and Dinka women during the meeting

Some men saw only the domestic side of the women's presence. Chief Anei Dhal Wol was not alone among the chiefs to be relieved at the absence of quarrelling between Dinka and Nuer women.

At that time, all the Nuer with their women were accommodated differently and also the Dinka with their women were accommodated differently too but we used to visit one another and all the women mingled. And I never saw any woman quarrelling with another woman at that time.

But women spoke with each other outside the formal meetings, as Chief Malok Wol Madhieu noted, and they presented a united front in condemning the violence perpetrated by men.

The relationship of both Dinka and Nuer women was good during the meeting; they could mix, interact and eat together with one another after meeting. They also sat in groups to solve problems and discussed things together without any problem.

Key Figures

Many persons were involved in the organizing of events and running the meetings. A few names were mentioned more prominently than others. Dr William O. Lowrey, a Presbyterian minister is frequently mentioned as a facilitator in the recollection of the chiefs, and Bahon Mabor Deng remembered him particularly for his calls for unity among the Nuer and Dinka.

There was a person called Bill Lowrey who said if you are united, you will liberate your country. You are very strong people.

Whatever assistance was offered by foreign experts and well-wishers, Wunlit was a South Sudanese event and would not have taken place without the active support and involvement of leading South Sudanese. John Garang and Riek Machar are perhaps given more credit than they are due in the recollections of the participants, but the support of each, if grudging, was necessary for the meeting to take place at all. The lack of support from the leaders of the SPLA was one reason why the east bank conference at Lir Lir, which was supposed to follow on from Wunlit, never took place.

More critical to the success of the conference were the efforts of Salva Kiir Mayardit, then deputy chairman of the SPLM and chief of the general staff of the SPLA. Awut Deng Achuil, as remembered here, was also critical in mobilizing civilian participation in the conference, of chiefs as well as women.

Deborah Yier Jany recognized the contribution of two other men.

I will not forget the individual contribution of late Mario Muor Muor. He worked very hard behind scenes. He mobilized foreign support—people who helped with money, transport and political lobbying between the two wings of the Movement. And Achol Marial who was our medical doctor at the Wunlit meeting. Telar (Deng) did great work. He was translating for three days. His

ability to speak four languages of the function made him popular. He could speak Arabic, Nuer, English and Jieng (Dinka).

But people needed examples to persuade them to attend. Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth recorded the example set by her father, Malual Wun Kuorth, known as Gatwun, who was the most senior Nuer chief in South Sudan at the time.

During that time, people said, there would be conference to be conducted in Wunlit, and Gatwun would attend it. If Gatwun didn't go there, there would be nobody to go there. Gatwun was on the first flight that landed in Wunlit.

The Role of Spiritual Leaders

Religious leaders were at the forefront of organizing the Wunlit conference, especially those of the NSCC with their connections to and support from foreign churches. While many of the participants at Wunlit were practicing Christians, the everyday spiritual life of villages and cattle camps in Dinka and Nuer areas was—and often still is—largely maintained by traditional spiritual leaders: the spear-masters (*beny bith*) of the Dinka, the earth masters or leopard-skin chiefs (*kuar muon*) of the Nuer, the Nuer man of cattle (*wut ghok*), and, finally, the prophets (*raan nhialic* among the Dinka, *gaan kuoth* among the Nuer), men and women directly inspired by a divinity. Some foreign Pentecostal churches in South Sudan have taken aim at the practitioners of traditional religion as their main rivals, while more established South Sudanese churches have been willing to seek an accommodation with their spiritual cousins. Nuer Christians and traditional spiritual leaders both took leading roles in brokering peace between the Lou and Eastern Jikany Nuer in 1994. And Christian southerners recognized the symbolic value of the cattle sacrifice that initiates and concludes inter-tribal peace meetings. They adapted Christian terminology to describe these 'covenantal sacrifices', and these were understood and accepted by Christians and non-Christians alike.

This lesson was carried over to Wunlit. As Deborah Yier Jany, a long-term Nuer resident in Yirol explained it, their participation also led to the blessing of rain:

Though it was organised by the New Sudan Council of Churches, the council acknowledged the importance of traditional spiritual leaders in the peace process. Up to now, the spiritual leaders have a hand in the ongoing violence, inspiring young people to steal cattle, telling them they could take revenge without fear. We involved them because we knew their contribution both to peace and to violence. When the bulls were slaughtered there was rain...

The language question

Wunlit was a multi-lingual meeting. Not all participants were bilingual in Dinka and Nuer (though many were). And for the foreign observers it was necessary that the speeches were translated into English. In fact, it is English translations that make up the official report (Wunlit 1999).

There were interpreters for the three main groups of vernacular speakers, as Chief Muon Machak, explained.

We had three translators, for Arabic, Nuer and Dinka languages. If one spoke in Arabic, then it was translated in English, then into Dinka and Nuer, if one spoke in Dinka then it was translated into Arabic, Nuer and English. That is how we communicated.

David Bany Lam noted there were at least four languages in play throughout the conference.

Someone who knew English was selected, and someone who knew Nuer was selected, and someone who knew Arabic and Dinka was selected too. So if a Nuer spoke in Nuer, when he finished a Nuer who knows Dinka language would translate it to Dinka and tell the Dinka using Dinka language. When he finished a Nuer or a Dinka who knows Arabic would translate it into Arabic. When he finished any Dinka or Nuer or other

tribe who knows English would translate it into English to those who hear English. This is how the meeting was conducted. Four languages were used as a means of communication. It was translated from language to another until all of us understood what was said.

People naturally conversed in their own languages outside the formal meetings, Simon Kuok Biliu remarked.

In fact, when we arrived Wunlit, in our separate place, we used our language, the Nuer language among ourselves. But if people went to the conference hall, it was translated in the meeting in Dinka language and English. We had our one person who worked on translation called Kong Yar. He was the one who translated our speeches from Nuer to Dinka language, and translated into Nuer language. That was one person. Another person was James Nguany who translated it into English. People were talking in English, Nuer and Dinka languages. They were those languages. When you reach your site of residence, you speak and converse in your language.

Abraham Geng Top could recall three interpreters.

Where we were in the meeting, there was a man called, Nyak Dak, was our translator. There was another translator from Dinka side that I forgot. And there was also a translator into English. We had three translators in the conference. There was one for English translation, for Bill Lowrey to hear, and there was one for Dinka language for Dinka to hear, and there was one for Nuer Language for Nuer to hear.

Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac noted that the Nuer brought along their own interpreters for Dinka and English.

We the Nuer had our own translators. Kong Diw from Haak clan knew the Dinka language very well. The one who translated for the white people was Rev Mathew Mathiang Deng. When Mathew Mathiang was tired Mr Both Yoal Badeng would pick it

up. When Both Yoal was tired Mr Telar Deng would take it over. Telar Deng was once a leader in Nuer and he knew the Nuer language. That is how the meeting was. Our hearts were very cool, and there was a durable peace, except for the recent events.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth remembered one more language was in the mix.

We had a translator called Kong Yar who spoke Nuer, Dinka and the Jur language. That is why we understood ourselves.

Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth noted that informal translations took place outside the formal meetings, and this is how women communicated with each other across the language barrier.

I don't speak the Dinka language, but there were some women who spoke Dinka with them. They used to tell the women that they would marry a certain girl. Then the women responded that her father will arrest them. That was our conversation with them; there was nothing bad in our conversations.

But Deborah Yier Jany wished she had spoken out more.

I was one of the three people who spoke both Nuer and Jieng. I was young and shy. If I had been as I am now I could have spoken more freely.

On the language question Teresa Deng Kuany concluded.

It was Dinka, Nuer, English, and Arabic till we finalized our peace. But before doing anything it began with prayers and exchanging greeting among ourselves in the first day without doing other business. There was traditional sacrifice at the end of peace conference and the chiefs and delegates were called for putting their signature.

Songs

Among both Dinka and Nuer songs have many uses. They can be a record of events as well as propaganda, they can broadcast injustices and announce reconciliation.

Songs at Wunlit, according to Chief Malok Akot Wut had a cathartic value.

The reason why songs were so important during the meeting was to eliminate all the bad things that were committed during the war and put them aside

For Chief Malok Wol Madhieu songs were both inspirational and motivational.

The reason why songs were sung was to motivate the people in order for them to become fresh when they are going to speak and make them think again and come up with good words for peace. That was why they were all sung during the meeting in Wunlit.

Chief Morris Ngor Ater viewed the songs as offering the promise of life and peace.

They were songs of peace, and songs of life. We sang them so that we could have life and peace.

Ariath Mayar Mareng, on the other hand, hoped that war songs would be sung once and then forever forgotten.

The reason why they were sung was that to make people happy and then make sure they should not be sung again after the peace since they were all used to be sung during the war time.

The opposite was true of Chief Matur Wanybeek, who noted that putting words to music helped people remember them better.

Songs were very important in a way that they can motivate someone to speak fluently when you are given a chance to speak,

and also they made people remember what was done during the war time and avoid those things

Chief Thiik Riiny Giir, of Dinka Apuk quoted one song sung by the Dinka at Wunlit:

*wek aba dor, dor he,
wek aba dor, dor he,
we aba dor, dor he,
we aba dor, dor he,
cok angek ke manhman dor he,
cok angek ke manhwun dor he*

*I am going to make you to have peace among yourselves,
I am going to make you have peace among yourselves,
even though you're the brothers,
I can make you to have peace among yourselves,
even though you are the cousins,
I am going to make you to have peace among yourselves.*

Chief Anei Dhal Wol, also from Dinka Apuk said that the reason why songs were sung during the meeting was that during the fighting people used to compose songs against each other. At Wunlit, he said they were all sung and then people put them aside and sang a song for peace:

*I am a person who doesn't like envy and I am not there completely,
so please don't keep this envy of yours for me,
I am a person who doesn't like envy and I am not there completely,
and let this envy of yours not keep me up because I don't want it,
I am the person refusing to have this envy of yours
and have nothing completely there,
and finally you something bad don't follow me again.*

The meaning of this song was that if you like envy, then it will destroy you.
Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny of Dinka Luac:

The common songs which were sung were the songs of praising God so that God will listen to us and bless our meeting to finish successfully and give the peace among ourselves and they were all sung during the time when they were killing the white bull. Also there was one song which was sung and it goes like this:

*God knows all the people of long time ago who used to worship him,
God of Garang, God of Eve and we are now adoring you,
God knows all the people of long time ago who used to adore him x2.*

Chief Madut Aguer Adel, Dinka Luac:

People became happy because the peace had come among themselves, and then the bad songs which were sung during the wartime stopped. I can still remember a song which was sung at Wunlit. It goes like this:

*I took care of Nuer, I took care of Nuer,
I gave him all my food items like my pumpkin leaves to eat,
I gave him the simsim to eat and still he turned against me,
Now we are meeting to fight, now we are meeting to fight,
we will meet in the cattle camp called Banek,
and I will chase up to cattle camps called Lang and Abyei,
I went with all my equipment like shields which I grabbed from Gatluak,
Until all the women from the Nuer cry that the whole of Luac
came all to the Nuer land.*

How the delegates were fed

The responsibility for feeding those at the conference fell to the host community. There was no problem with the quantity of food, as Deborah Yier Jany observed, but those preparing the food were overworked.

People were many. There was food, but there were not enough cooks. The people of Chief Gum Mading's village brought white beer (sorghum or millet beer) in pots and gourds daily. Gum Mading's people were generous.

Chief Anei Dhal Wol observed that the need to feed such a large number of people meant that the participation of women from the host community was limited.

Most of the women cooked food for the people. Some of them spoke during the meeting, but the majority of the women stayed in the places where people were accommodated so that they could organize food and prepare water for drinking and showering for those who were in the conference.

Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac saw no problem with the catering and commended the Dinka for their generosity.

The food was made by a committee formed by the Dinka themselves. Any time you wanted to eat you got food. When you needed meat there was enough. We all became fat. Even our dogs were very fat. Those are the things we did in Wunlit.

Not all women were required to cook. Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth was one.

We were received very nicely, we didn't have any problems. People organised things for us. We were just sitting. They killed the cows for our catering services, until the day we left Wunlit.

Cattle and conflict

As central as cattle are to economic and social relations among both Dinka and Nuer, the example of the cattle-less Jurchol people impressed them, as Deborah Yier Jany related.

All the chiefs spoke well. There was one who stood out: Mataba Yora (Jurchol). He challenged the cattle-keeping communities. He said that the enmity created by cows was the reason his people did not have cattle. "The leopard-skinned cow is my cow," he said. People were confused, but he explained that he meant bees and honey. "Those complicated stories of cows are the reason why we don't have cows," said Chief Mataba.

“You Jieng and Nuer are killing each other over cattle. But if bees sting me I’ll blame no one. Cows are the reason Jieng and Dinka will not find peace.”

Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil recorded that the conference resolved to be more like the Jurchol and not be led into war by cattle.

When finished we agreed that we are united. The Dinka and the Nuer will work together as brothers. Nothing bad will happen again and we will fight the Arabs together. The ground rules we have put down were: let us stop the issue of cattle raiding. As the Jurchol have said, they only need honey and chickens. We do not need the cows. Our independence cannot be prevented by the issue of the cows. Whoever will be involved in the issue of the cows will not be forgiven.

7. After Wunlit

There is still a minority among us whose interests are being served by the perpetuation of the suffering of our people (Nuer chanting rises up; song starts and is carried on briefly). They want to exploit the tragic events of 1991 and call our peoples to take revenge. But what they want is not really revenge, but rather to perpetuate the raids for property and cattle to increase their own wealth. You know that the official policy of the Movement is to pursue peace & reconciliation diligently, so when these incidents occur, you must understand that these are not people instituting the policy of the Movement. We would not be sincere if we said that we have everything under control. We have to be honest and tell you the situation as it actually is. However, let me assure you all that we will work hard to stop these cross-border raids, even though we may not be able to eliminate them altogether. We will do our best for peaceful coexistence. You are working very hard at your level to achieve piece. We hope that ultimately your initiatives will lead to the point where the political leadership are also going to find unity of purpose. And in this regard I am happy to tell you that, even at the level of political leadership, we are having a fruitful dialogue, it is more hopeful with each passing day. And as evidence of this, shortly before I came here, that I met with Dr Riak Machar in a foreign country, and I was pleased to find that he had given his full support to this very meeting in which we are now gathered. The armed struggle of the people of Sudan and other marginalised areas has grown and become very big, but we should not forget that when it began in 1983, it was Nuer and Jieng who sowed the seeds of the struggle. I am refraining deliberately from using the word Dinka, and am using the word Jieng, to affirm that the Nuer are one of the very few nationalities in the world that call us by our correct name. And that shows that there is a degree of affinity between ourselves and you. Because that plant (or tree) of the struggle was planted together by Nuer and Jieng, the fruit of that tree will not be harvested but by Nuer and Jieng doing that together.

Nhial Deng Nhial, SPLA Governor of Bahr el-Ghazal¹⁶

With the conference concluded the most important task that remained was getting the news of what had been agreed out, not just to the communities at home, but to the rest of South Sudan and to the armed factions responsible for the spreading conflict and preying on civilian communities. Implementation of the agreement was going to need a long term commitment from all participants.

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The Return Home

People were eager for a report when the chiefs returned from the conference. Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil found that he had to say something to the crowd awaiting him before he could leave the Ler landing field.

When we finished the meeting we did some ritual activities, we informed them that tomorrow we will go back. Our planes will come to take us. Those whose destinations were near were transported by the cars, until we all departed. Even Kiir did not leave until we were all transported. All of us including our soldiers were together. Those of the late Parjiek, Mr Gabriel Par Yoal, and so many other military officials were with us. When we came back we landed in Ler. When we landed we were welcomed and many cows were killed. They said it is good that God has protected you, and it is important we killed some cows and we thank Him. A lot of food was already prepared because they knew we would come the next day. What we told them when we came back from the peace conference is that people are now united. We told them that we are united and there is no more problem between the Nuer and the Dinka. They killed a white bull for us. And we must now only focus on the Arabs. Our enemy is the Arab. Never look back to the Dinka as your enemy. If you have your friend from the Dinka you can go to him, and he can come to you here. That is what we told them.

Chief George Mawic Dual had a similar experience.

We spent 12 days there. When we finished we came back in the same plane. We landed in the same air strip where we were taken from. When we arrived we were welcomed warmly, each of us would be surrounded by almost seven people and they would ask us did you really see the Dinka eye to eye? We would tell them yes, we have seen them eye to eye. Did they not kill you? We would tell them that if they had killed us you would not be able to see us now. Are we going to move between our borders? We would tell them that beginning from tomorrow when you

go no one will harm you. You will see the Dinka coming here. Will the Dinka come here in this sphere of Ler? So people were really happy.

Aliza David Dobuol and her travelling companions were all eager to start passing the message.

When we came back we landed in Ler. We were welcomed, after the welcoming we were given vehicles to transport us to Bentiu. Some of the people who came from Khartoum went with us to Bentiu. And some of them came with Juach Kuon. So people welcomed us because they knew we had gone to do a good work. The commissioner welcomed us very well and we had no problem. We told them what we were told from there. Because we were told to pass the message to the people when we arrived there. The commissioner called the meeting before we could go to our different places. When the meeting was over we went to our different destinations.

Teresa Deng Kuany observed that the Ler commissioner Joseph Juach Kon had a busy time meeting the returning delegations and arranging transport to their home areas.

They brought us to Ler and we stayed there, because we were with the then commissioner Joseph Juach Kon. And also, we were with Peter Par Jiek Dhongdong. Farouk and other politicians were lifted directly and they didn't stay too long... When we returned back we all assembled in Ler under hospitality of Ler commissioner Joseph Juach Kon. So on our arrival the airport was full of people and they were so excited and happy because of peace we have brought with us.

Simon Kuol Beliew passed on the same message as other chiefs: fighting has ended and will be punished in the future.

Well, when we returned from Wunlit, we met with civilians here, and we told them that we have peace. Fighting has ceased, there is no conflict except peace prevails between us and Dinka.

If your brother was captured by Dinka, you will go and bring him back. He will be handed over to you because it was settled during the meeting. All our places we had abandoned because of violence, we will return to them. Each will go and live where they lived before, in the land that is their home.

Some chiefs weren't allowed to stay long before setting off to spread the news. The Nyuong Nuer border chiefs John Gatkeel Rwei Kuong and Mun Machak were sent on a tour of neighboring Dinka areas.

I could tell the truth because, during the peace which was made in Wunlit, I was there. That is what I can say. People came to me at my home here in Pakam. It was important to speak about it because we were the ones who participated—me and Mun Machak. This Mun Machak is a border chief. I was a border chief when we went there. After coming back, we proceed for peace to this Dinka area. We took the cattle to the grazing areas, we interacted with Dinka, just like that.

Executive Chief Yoal Dabun Dhoar returned home together with Malual Wun Kuoth.

When we came back we were with Malual, we spent five days with him and after that we told him we will go to our homes and he allowed us to go. He lived some more years before he died, he just died recently.

Even though she had not participated in the discussion Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth helped to spread the news to other women and girls.

When we came back here in Ganyliel from Wunlit, I spent seven days at home with my women friends, told them the histories I heard in Wunlit, and what Wunlit looked like. I told them—my sisters—what I have seen in Wunlit, that we were surrounded by many people in Wunlit, even, I was surprised. I thought they are going to kill us, but nothing happened to us.

Atuot chief Madit Maker Gum toured Yirol county along with other returning Dinka chiefs, spreading the same message.

We arrived back in Rumbek, people of Cueibet and us. We had meeting in Rumbek then we went our ways. As a chief, you need a meeting with your community and local administrator and you say what was discussed at the meeting...we chiefs of Yirol came together and had meetings. Bahon Mabor, Makeny Kamic were chairing our meetings. We started from land of Kuep and Rorkec, to Aluakluak, to Yirol, Aliab Malek, Adior, Pagarau, Nyang and Wunthou... we came to Yirol town and slaughtered our cows for our celebration for peace. They heard we had a meeting and that meeting was successful.

Chief Majok Chep Kuer urged the Dinka Ciec to rely on local administration to keep the peace with the Nuer.

I told them the meeting did take place and that the peace has been signed. If you see Nuer on the way, don't attack him. The Nuer are our people. Stay well. If Nuer comes to your house, eat together. If you see Nuer fighting your persons, don't join in the fight, call for the government. The peace has come. Don't be against Nuer.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth was among those who attended other follow-up meetings to Wunlit.

I attended peace conferences three times. I attended Wunlit peace conference. This was really very fruitful. All the people were there including the Equatorians, White people and all the other South Sudanese. There were elders from both sides, even women were there. We spent many years without anything bad. We again went to Yirol after the Wunlit peace. We went and negotiate the Wunlit peace accord again. We did it with a man called Bill Lowrey. Again we went to Kampala for the same peace process. All these meetings we did them with our brother the Dinka. I did these things in my leadership.

Reparations

After the Wunlit meeting was over the implementation of the agreement remained. Restitution rather than reparation was the rule in tracing and returning captured children, women and cattle. If they could not be returned there was some sort of compensation, as for those who had been killed. Aliza David Doboal listed her priorities among the issues that the meeting had set out to solve.

The burning issues were the abduction of children, cattle raiding, and killing. We all said if possible we will stop these things. If there are people killed the relatives must be compensated, all the cattle raided will be returned from both sides. So all these were the burning issues discussed.

Chief George Mawic Dual had a slightly different set of priorities that were linked to ensuring safe passage in the territories of different groups of pastoralists.

The first thing that they talked about was that all the cows and the people that were taken by the Dinka be returned to the Nuer. The second one was that all the people must be allowed to move between themselves. People to go from Nuer land to the Dinka land and the Dinka to go to the Nuer land. So there was peace.

According to Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth the agreements made at Wunlit contributed to stabilising the borders and reducing the death rate.

Those were the things that were made straight when the meeting was coming to an end. It was agreed that all the children abducted would be returned. The cattle raided would also be returned. The border was stable, the Dinka would come and the Nuer would go. That is why there was no more death.

The Ciec Dinka Chief Reechdit Anyieth Reech saw the swapping of captives as one of the main achievements of the conference.

After that meeting, children who were abducted and abducted women on both side of Nuer and Dinka were swapped. The peace was achieved. That's why we went to Wunlit.

Executive Chief Yoal Dabun Dhoar was relieved that people were no longer being killed by fighting, but were now dying only from natural causes.

The good thing was that people should not fight again. Those who were present in the meeting were told not to engage in war again. If you tell people to go to war again God will see you. Let no one tell his children to go to fight. We prayed earnestly, anyone who has died now like Malual Wun died because of his age. Malual just died recently, about two years ago. According to what his children told me he was 90 years. When they relate it to a certain event I would relate it to his age.

The return of captives and abducted persons began at Wunlit itself. Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth attributed this to the actions of her father, Malual Wun Kuoth.

He told the Dinka to return the abducted children, and it was a success, we came back with many abducted children including the man called Mading Wuorkuei who is here in the village outside Ganyliel. We got him there in Wunlit. He told the Dinka, if you mean really the peace, you collect all the children you abducted during the war and I will take them back to Nuer. Gatwun said it and it was approved.

John Gatkeel Rwei Kuong managed to arrange the return of abducted children on both sides.

When I left, I went to bring back some children from Dinka areas. We went and brought back some children from this side of Dinka Yirol. A lot of children had been acquired from Nuer, and a lot of children were unfortunately lost completely from us Nuer. Dinka children who were here were returned back, including the children abducted by us.

David Bany Lam found that after Wunlit people could rely on assistance from the local administration to recover lost relatives.

People went to Dinka and Dinka came to us here. Which shows that it was peace. Because we brought back people who were kidnapped, even me I brought back two boys to Nyal. They are here today. We got them they have spent almost ten years there in Dinka land. Even their relatives didn't know that they were alive. The government said to us that if someone can recognize anyone, the government would give them to us.

The Dinka Gok chief Machar Maper Cinkou explained how the government and local communities collaborated in locating and repatriating abducted persons.

It was the role of government to collect all the abducted children, women from different places and return them to their families in Nuer land. The government moved with the document signed in Wunlit to look for Nuer; the community took on the responsibility of showing them where Nuer people stayed, if any. The wife of person called Majuec Chol was returned with three children after Wunlit peace meeting. Those children and their mother are staying in Nuer up to now.

Inevitably, as Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil from Jikany explained, the work of repatriation was monitored by committees.

Those who were assigned to look into that were those of Magok and some of the Dinka chiefs. They were told that those who were abducted, especially between the Bul (Nuer) and their neighbours, must be returned. So we formed a committee.

The chiefs were also able to rely on some of the personnel from Wunlit and the bureaucratic procedures established at the conference to help them recover former captives and stolen cattle, as Simon Kuok Biliu explained.

When such matter was discussed, I took four names of people from the area I had found there. A guy called Gai Dalbee who is in Nyal now, a guy called Bithony Geah who is in Nyal now, and a guy called Chuol Kuenywar who is here now, and another person whose name I forget. I took the names of those four people and gave them to Both Yoal. When I gave them to Both, Both wrote them and took them to a gentleman called Rin Tueny (SPLA Commander in charge of security at Wunlit). That Rin Tueny wrote them again and released them, saying that those people must go to Nuer area with you. I took again their names to a man called Bill Lowrey and he put them among those people who come with us, and sent them to Lokichokio, then he puts them on a manifest. We come along together with those people. When people arrived here in Nyuong Panyijar, Chief Peter Nyuong and Kerbino Nyuon left to search for cattle in Luach Dinka areas, they stayed there for a long time. They brought with them the few cattle they had found. Others were compensated for those they did not get.

Not all restitutions proceeded smoothly. The Nyuon cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top found that the previous cooperative attitude of the ‘Two Maluals’ was not continued by their sons.

Malang Lual (an Agar) said something, there was a Nuer woman that was taken during the conflict, by one of the Dinka men. He produced for her some children. Malang Lual said, if you wanted to return this woman with her kids, you have to pay a cow to the one who took care of her. That was what Malong Lual said. We were annoyed by that statement. Kulang repeated the same scenarios, he supported Malang Lual's statement.

And Marial (Marial Malual Arop) was annoyed because of the distributions of the cattle camps. He said all the camps had been given to Nuer. One of the Dinka Chiefs asked him a question, he said, “The Nuer that his wife and his children have been taken away from him, and yet he could be the one to pay the cow to the man who take care of the wife the kids? The one that committed

adultery was he not the one to pay the dowery?” That question was asked by one of the Dinka chief.

There was also one of the Dinka Chiefs called Majok Malual Arop, he said, “Was this Malual that was been my grandfather, and also my father, and now I also got him alive. Was he the one or another Malual?”

I said, “Why has this Dinka invoked this old man?” Malual (Wun Kuoth) stretched out his hand and told me sit down.

“Their fathers didn’t manage to kill me, could it be this small boy to kill me?” That person went and passed away after the conference. Those are the thing that annoyed me during the conference, plus others that might have something they dislike from the conference, that I didn’t know.

James Riek Luak had some early success in retrieving stolen cattle.

Myself and Chief Nyuong (Danhier) recovered sixty cattle from the Dinka. We went up to Rumbek and collected them. The chief there collected them for us. This made us believe that what we had discussed in Wunlit was bearing fruit.

Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak reported that they had more success in retrieving women and children than in returning cattle.

All the children abducted were brought back. Even the women that were abducted were brought back, including the children they had produced there with the Dinka. Only the cattle were not returned.

Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac reported that restored movement between cattle camps revived the livestock trade between the communities.

The Dinka and the Nuer shared the cattle camps again. A Nuer who had no ox would go and exchange what he has with an ox from his friend on the Dinka side. Even I had four friends from the Dinka side.

Among both Dinka and Nuer a widow was often married to a male relative of her dead husband. Confirming deaths during the fighting before Wunlit was difficult. Teresa Deng Kuany related the story of one surprise discovery.

Another man who was thought to be killed and his wife given to his nephew on assumption that he might have been killed and when he (the nephew) saw his brother and uncle he was almost losing his mind and he returned back with us...

Changing roles of chiefs and elders

Many of the Nuer participants described the work of the various chiefs in idealised terms. Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth, for instance, described her late father as an exemplar of what a chief should be.

My father was very good and humble man in the society at large. He knew everything in the world, including the ways people used to survive. He was trustworthy, and he used to be invited from various locations if there were some cases tough to be solved. He has to be invited to go and solve the case amicably. There were times the eastern Nuer were having serious fighting among themselves. He was invited to go and settle the case that many traditional chiefs failed to solve.

Executive Chief Yoal Dawuon Dhoar described his role in paternalistic terms.

I used to tell my people not to kill others. I don't support those who wrong others. And when food is distributed I would give to the needy. No one was able to take my leadership because I was doing the right thing. That is why I am still in the leadership now. I called all the children my children and no one was happy alone. One hand cannot clap itself, and now that you have come here you are preaching peace. The one you found alive will continue living. We used to have meetings with Nyachany for like four or five days. It is called workshop. The one you are

interviewing me for is the last meeting. It is called Wunlit. I knew all the things discussed. I still call my people my people. When I become old like I am now I will ask the people “who will take this leadership?” You are my children and I cannot do something that will be bad for you in the future. When I will die I will die during the day because someone who dies during the day is a righteous person.

Authority within a Nuer cattle camp according to Abraham Geng Top was appreciated by the youth.

My role in the cattle camp, if there was quarrel that occurred between the youth themselves, with minor injuries, I don't take it to the local authority in the town, I deal with it. I can fine the culprits from both sides, with something little that could be afforded by the youth. After that, I file my report with all the fines, and report them to local authority in the county, and tell them that I have already managed to stop the clashes that happened in the cattle camp. Nothing will happen again from both sides. Here are the fines for the culprits. The youth in the cattle camp are happy for that. And even the local authorities in the county are also happy for that work, because I don't like the resources for this county to go to the authority without proper reasons.

Chief George Mawic Dual, speaking from inside the Bentiu POC where he was interviewed, enumerated the duties of the executive chief as if these roles were unaffected by the current situation that led to his internal exile.

In fact in those days we were under the SPLM control. In those days the chiefs used to settle communal disputes. All the local problems were settled by the chiefs, that is one. Number two, when the government ordered the children be taken to school, they are the one implementing the order and collect the children. When there was food distribution, Mr Magok Galuak would give us we the chiefs. He would give to each and tell him to distribute them to the local. He would give some crops to go distribute to the sub-chiefs. That was one task. Again when there was

a problem that emerged, like when a girl is impregnated, the sub-chiefs would first handled it and when there is a doubt, the head chiefs would sit and review it. When there is again another doubt, it would be forwarded to Chief Magok Gatluak. Until it continues ahead like that. Those were the roles of the chiefs. Another role is when there is request from the government, whether for food or oxen, the chiefs would take that task of collecting them.

Women's role in local administration does seem to have increased under the SPLA and since Wunlit, as Mrs. Aliza David Dobuol explained:

I was appointed in Koch in 1999. It was in the month of June 1999. I was responsible for all the women activities and I had a deputy in Panyijar and all the other nine counties. I would go for a meeting in Pagak, Panyigur and go with John Garang to all the places for meetings. We were in the bush by then. Whenever there was something needed to be done I would be called and told that you should do this and that. When there was a meeting I would be chosen to attend it. We would sometimes go to attend meetings with Dr John and Dr Riek Machar.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek indicated that women had become more vocal.

Whenever there is a meeting you would go and attend it to contribute in words. Even now that the situation is ruined we would go to say our opinions.

The Dinka chiefs were more willing to acknowledge changes in their status and their role. Chief Madol Mathok Agolder of the Agar acknowledged the increase of people engaged in justice shopping, bringing the same case to the different types of courts in South Sudan in search of favourable decisions,¹⁷ and a decline in respect given to chiefs.

The role of chiefs as community leaders was to pay taxes. When Dr Garang left for the bush, the role of chiefs was to pay taxes

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17 See Leonardi et al., *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*.

in form of cows, sorghum, and human resources. We collected taxes for the government and also our role as chief was to control the community in the court cases such as, blood compensation of the deceased, adultery with someone's wife, divorce and impregnation of girls. These were the role of chief. Garang gave chiefs all their responsibilities and powers during the liberation struggle in the bush until we defeated the Arab and we got our land (independence). The traditional courts are not the same like the court of previous time (pre-independence). Many court cases are being taken by judiciary from the community leaders or traditional courts. Many cases are now being handled by the town court, judiciary court, court of appeal but we traditional authorities are left in between them. We were respected in our leadership of those days but now there is no respect for community leaders. Now if we judge the case fairly still the plaintiff can go ahead and open a case in front of judiciary court and summon the defendant although he has no right in the eyes of the law.

Chief Jul Machok Lieny of the Agar attributed the decline in the chief's authority to the proliferation of firearms among the youth.

We the chiefs have lost our powers now because of availability of guns in the hand of civilians. Now in Amongpiny County (Rumbek East), my duty is only to speak with Gelweng youths (members of local cattle defence militia) while remained seated and to make matters worse, it's up to Gelweng youth to respect me and listen to words or refuse to accept my words. The youth are now armed with guns and should chief try to tell them the truth. They feel powerful enough to threaten the chief with a gun ready to shoot.

Chief Marial Dhieu Malual of the Ciec attributed a general decline in respect for law and authority to maladministration at the very heart of government.

The chiefs had many roles. There was judge, there was executive chief (red-sash chief), and there was sub chief and headman. This was the hierarchy and if the government needs something, taxes or workers, there was a person to call.

Now, the reason why the country is in mess, there are two things: these are the government is not the government and the village is not village for us. Civilians were cattle keepers, civilians were farmers. Doesn't steal from another civilian....

What was my fear? In the past times, when there was a need for chiefs in the meeting and there were big people of the government in the meeting, you don't fear. We used cars including chiefs of Rumbek... there was no fear. Government was respected. The country was respecting itself. There was respect for the law. If there was a new law, the leaders respected it. Breaking law starts from the top, now.

Anther Ciec Dinka chief, Dhieu Mangar Chep, saw competition from other types of chiefs as interfering in his role as a border chief.

My role (as a border chief), I was told if Nuer's cattle are stolen, you look and drive them back to owners. If the Nuer steals from here, go there and collect them back. I stay in Nuer land up to five months looking for stolen cattle. When I get them, I'm helped to drive them to middle somewhere and I bring them here. That is my job. The work of cattle theft was a work of border chiefs. Now other chiefs are also taking over this role. Now if you tell go to Nuer land I'll refuse. I cannot do anymore. Even if you tell me there is a raid I'll not go...

Chief Madit Maker Gum of the Atuot attributed growing lawlessness to the recent proliferation of counties and states and the burgeoning of local government bureaucracy.

There is a huge difference. The government of old Sudan in the side of local government. Here chiefs were left with their duties. Now, we have many states in our government of South Sudan.

We have many counties. We have many payams and the leaders are many. In 1976 until 1984, there was no change of system. Chiefs were working well. What happened with the government of SPLA/M is the government for sure. I've nothing to say about that. Nothing changed. What has changed is between the commissioner and the local administrator at the payam and country levels. There is a difference. Local administrators should preside over cases. Even if in Nyang, Shambe and Awerial; commissioner don't preside over cases. There are many jobs and people don't know how to do it. Commissioner solves cases. Local administrator also solves cases. We chiefs are there. There is a small difference.

Problems are piling up. Now a son of Madit can steal a cow of another son of Madit. If you run after him, he will shoot at you. This is born of lawlessness. Lawlessness is giving birth to problems. Theft is lawlessness. Theft is the killer of people. We are going to talk, we will start from Wunlit. If it's going to be good, then we will bring in the new things to Wunlit...

Ciec Dinka chief Long Ngolow Jok illustrated what he saw as the current condition of the country by a fable about the lion, the monkey, and the fox.

The work of chiefs in the past, they didn't like bad things to happen. They didn't like robbery of innocent people. They would stand in the middle. Chiefs in the past didn't like fighting. Chiefs in the past don't like all communities of problems. That is why the chief was elected.

There was a workshop in Nyang. I told them a story, a story of lion... It got trapped in the hole. It spent seven days. The monkey came passing. The monkey asked, "What is happened mister lion?" "I'm dead already. Look at me how dreadful. I'm breathing" The lion said. The monkey said "What is this uncle?" the lion said "I fell in the trap. Come and take me out." The monkey said "No, your decisions are bad. If I bring you out uncle, your decisions are very inconsistent. You be there and

think yourself out.” The lion was desperate begging for help. The monkey agreed and started removing the trap ropes. After the monkey finished removing the trap ropes and took a step away. The lion grabbed the tail. The monkey said “What happened again?” The lion said “How do you look at me, I cannot reach hunting ground. I want to eat you to reach the hunting ground” The monkey was crying. The fox came. “What are you arguing about uncles?” The story was narrated to the fox. The fox instead started praising the lion for his brave decisions. “How come the great king of the forest call lion fall into trap for seven days without food. Why are you crying? Say your final words before he swallows you,” the fox said. The fox told the lion “Before you swallow the monkey come and show me the ropes of the traps. I know all the traps in the forest and the owners. The person who trapped the king of the forest has to pay for his wrong-doing. Come and show me the trap and how it happened. Come my uncle! Try and I see how it happened. Put your hands here. Put your leg there”, and lion was putting everything in the trap. When the lion was fully in the trap, he told the monkey “Step back a bit. I want to see what happened” The monkey stepped back. The fox pulled the trap trigger and the lion was back into the full trap. He told the monkey “Are you the one untying the ropes of hunters in the forest? This is a lesson for you, let your maternal uncle remain here to untie himself”, and they all left... We chiefs in communities, we are like monkeys. We say this country is not going well and we need to help you. Someone will grab your tail. If these young people are going to steal cattle, we say don't do that, they turned their guns and want to kill us.

8. Wunlit today

There is a general nostalgia for the time immediately after Wunlit, when there was a general agreement between the communities, an implementation of the main provisions of the Agreement, and a sense of looking towards the future. Many participants drew a contrast with the present day with the present day, where there is little accountability, agreements remain unimplemented, and leadership at the top of government has failed. Here are assessments by some of the participants of what has gone wrong and the current situation of South Sudan and its people.

Chief Jacob Madhel Lang Juk, Dinka Twic:

The peace negotiated in Wunlit really brought stability. The people abducted were returned and even all the cattle that were raided were also returned to their owners. Only those that were difficult to find. It is also the one that brought our independence. There was nothing bad that happened again until when the issue of money came. So that meeting brought us stability.

Chief Reechedit Anyieth Reech, Dinka Ciec:

When we come to Wunlit, it was a very successful meeting. We got life after Wunlit. Today if you're coming here to rekindle the spirit of that meeting, you are welcome. At the meeting, the Nuer got settled and Jieng (Dinka) got settled. Grudges were discussed and thrown aside. We were reconciled. We are brothers and after that we had peace—until recently. We need a peace meeting like that now. In the conflict between us and the Nuer currently, we have no one who has revisited the spirit of Wunlit. That is why we are fighting. That is why we would like to have another meeting—to have peace.

Chief John Toang Chan, Nuer Nyuong:

The Dinka would go to search for their things in the Nuer area and the Nuer would go to look for theirs in the Dinka area. So people returned to the normal way where they used to travel among themselves.

In this they were assisted by the church, according to Head Catechist Simon Thak Both:

Whenever there was a problem on the border we would work on it. When someone's cow was stolen it would be returned, whether he is a Dinka or a Nuer. Even the small disputes in the cattle camps we would solve them, because that was the duty of a border chief.

Not only were stolen cattle and abducted women and children returned, but according to Chief Long Ngolow of the Dinka Ciec customary payments of bloodwealth were enforced.

Cattle that were raided were returned. We returned their cows and they returned our cows. It was said if you kill again, you will be arrested and pay blood compensation. It stopped completely. The abducted children were returned. The women were returned. They were return to Pagarau here. The wife of Cief Amac Kucnin was returned. We did the same to Nuer also.

An additional benefit, according to Chief George Mawic Dual of the Nuer Jagei, was that Wunlet set a pattern for wider peace within South Sudan.

Yes, what I learned in Wunlit is that peace started in Wunlit. The way Wunlit peace was conducted is the same as the way things are done now. When the peace between the two parties was negotiated Dr Machar went to Juba, there was a big celebration and people move between themselves again.

I think it is the same?

With safety in movement trade between the peoples resumed, as Ciec Dinka Chief Dhieu Mangar Chep explained, and more meetings between peoples widened the circle of peace.

We had peace in our land and Nuer had peace in their land. If the Nuer had a cow to sell, he would come here and if there was a person going to Nuer land, he would go. It was a good time. There was a big peace meeting in Yirol including Atuot. It was a big meeting. Everybody was waiting people from Wunlit to hear what had happened. There was a party in Yirol. Many people talked and what we got from Wunlit was presented to our government (local) and it was presented to people. When we arrived in the village, we said, nobody should attack Nuer. The meeting we did, nobody should attack Nuer. You're putting us at risk.

Jalok Nuer Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak claimed that people at Wunlit had to overcome greater difficulties than South Sudanese face today:

Now you have come here and if we want to bring peace we can do it. Wunlit peace was started by Bill Lowrey and those in the church. Whenever peace is started even if we are only five it can succeed. Those days we were fighting ourselves as well as fighting the Arabs, and all these were solved by the Wunlit meeting. Now it is only between us South Sudanese. If we start to make peace now it can be like the Wunlit peace.

Wunlit peace was done very well. What was stressed much was that the killing between the Nuer and the Dinka must stop. It was agreed that we should only focus on the Arabs. We said let the Dinka fight with the Arabs and we the Nuer will fight the Arabs. If it is difficult for us to unite let the Dinka fight the Arabs from their areas and we will fight our Arabs from our areas.

Let us not fight among ourselves. You need to start another initiative like the Wunlit peace agreement.

Despite the benefits of peace, Chief Dhuor Machar Kuer of the Ciec Dinka observed, the period of peace was finite.

After the meeting we parted our ways with Nuer. The meeting in Wunlit had many achievements (benefits). We enjoyed a period

of peace. What is happening between us and Nuer is a new thing. There was no fighting again. We had more than 15 years without fighting each other.

One of the causes of the breakdown of the Wunlit peace, Chief Morris Ngor Ater of the Apuk claimed, was the proliferation of guns.

We were invited to Wunlit peace conference with our commissioner by then, Achuil Manoli, erand we went and met, and we resolved our issues and we became peaceful to each other until CPA was signed. This relationship was later spoilt by spread of guns and stealing. Our problem has always been caused by the issues of cattle, of recent, they have raided us six times, and I don't know if it was militias or government who is behind that. The same has been happening in the border of Lou until now, only the flood that will stop them now. We went by two lorries and they were given to us by our commissioner by then Achuil Manoli and they took us to Wunlit for the meeting.

Chief Machar Maper Cinkou of the Gok agreed.

The children that were born after Wunlit peace meeting are now young people and those who were young are now becoming old. The current generation are a generation that doesn't listen and they have guns in their hands. The cause of instability is availability of the gun in the hands of civilians whereby it has made young people not to listen to their fathers and elders. What I would like to tell my children is hand over your gun to the government.

Nyalel Lony Gatjiek from Jagei offered some advice to the younger generation concerning Wunlit.

If people are brought together for a meeting it can be good. People need to have another meeting like the one of Wunlit. We who went to Wunlit we are saying if another peace initiative like that one of Wunlit is convene it can help.

This conflict has affected us seriously. We have been in small area without going to any other place. Now if the people chose to understand this peace like we did with Wunlit peace we can realise peace.

What I want to tell the youth is that even though I did not have a speech in Wunlit meeting there were a lot of good things said. Now that we are in the POC I would like to encourage you to be strong and maybe things will be ok. I would also like to encourage you the researchers that continue with the good spirit and God will help you. Thanks.

Aliza David Dobuol from the Jagei also had a message to women and the current generation concerning Wunlit.

What I can remember best and still thinking about is if a meeting like Wunlit meeting is convened it can be very good. Whenever I sleep I would dream of Wunlit meeting because it is a meeting that was peaceful.

Like I told you before that Wunlit meeting brought small tarmac road. So it is the one that brought our independence I would like to advise us to go back to Wunlit meeting. I think Wunlit meeting is stronger than the current peace process.

There were a lot of wars by then. It is the same like today's situation. But these wars are worse than those wars because South Sudan is entirely destroyed. If our leaders could listen we could returned to peace. Now we are suffering, women and children are dying and there are no medicines to cure diseases.

I would like to start with the youth. My dear boys, please go to school and the problems will reduce. My dear girls, please go to school as well and it is not far to get the position of Salva and Riek Machar. To all the women please let us continue to support our families and provide the family needs. You know all the men are not doing their jobs as expected, so we must continue to work hard.

Reechdit Anyieth Reech, the prominent Ciec Dinka chief felt that even some of the people who had been at Wunlit, such as President Salva Kiir Mayardit, had forgotten what Wunlit was about and what it had accomplished.

When we come to Wunlit meeting, it was a very successful meeting. We got life after Wunlit. Today if you're coming here to regenerate that meeting, you are welcome. That meeting, the Nuer got settled and Jieng also got settled. The grudges were discussed and thrown aside. We were reconciled. We are brothers. We had peace after until recently. Like that meeting, we need peace meeting to be done like that. Like that the down and up between us and Nuer currently, we have no one who revisited the spirit of Wunlit. That is why we are fighting. That is why we like to have another meeting—to have peace. That is itself a good.

Now, it is 20 years. We had peace after that meeting. They have started raiding again recently. They are abducting children now. The daughter and son of Machuol Marial were abducted last year. If there is another chance of similar peace meeting, I would ask them a question of “what happened to our peace accords?” I'll ask also president Kiir “what happened?” Nuer had raided everything in Adior. They are raiding in Wunthou, Pagarau, and Aluakluak. We will ask “what do you want?” I've many questions to ask Nuer. We had peace after Wunlit. There was free movement of people. There were intermarriages. We don't know what people do know about these good things and people show violence. They have to tell us if they want separation

One important thing... I don't remember. But one thing I can remember is that the Wunlit peace meeting marks no matter how our relations become bad. We'll come together to negotiate and sit together as Jieng and Nuer. We will always sit together. If you go to Nyang now, you'll see Nuer youth selling cows and buying goods here. We remember Wunlit in difficult times.

Muon Machak, a Nyuong Nuer border chief longed for a rebirth of patriotism in South Sudan to end the current fighting, but implicitly acknowledged that South Sudanese might not be able to do this on their own but might once again need the help of the international community, the Khawajat.

What I just wanted to say is this conflict of South Sudan. I don't want South Sudan to have another war. So that there would be freedom of movement, if you got somebody on the road, you treated him as like your brother. South Sudan will be only one. And we left aside the fights among ourselves. If you treated well one child, tomorrow that one child would be the best among the ten children that were not given good care. One child it represented 10 people. That message is going to all South Sudanese and the world at large, that let's have patriotism about our country South Sudan. Let's leave this fight between Nuer and Dinka.

Am also asking the world to put to an end the issue of South Sudan, between the two leaders. So that Nuer and Dinka will go back to their normal life as one body. Not discriminated, by called Nuer or Dinka. Let the Nuer and the Dinka be one People. My message goes to Khawajat, wherever they are tell them. You finish the problem of South Sudan, so that we become one body again.

James Riek Luak of the Nyuong deplored what the country had become in his old age.

All things belong to God. Now we have become old we would like to sit in peace. We cannot eat while running. There is really something very bad. We are given our independence and now we do not like each other. In Dok all the elders have been killed and no one is left. Everyone is thinking about his cows that were taken. I am an old man and there is nothing to eat. How can this be happening?

The Nyuong executive chief Yoal Dawuon Dhoar longed for a strong military force to control the borders between peoples, but seemed to have some faith in the next generation.

I would like to say that let what happens should be done like Wunlit conference. Let us not continue this war. Now our cows are dying because there is no grass for them to feed on. Those our cows and those one of the Dinka used to graze together. If the war is too big then let there be a military put along the borders to stop random raiding. This force will be able to recognize if a Nuer comes and raid the Dinka or when a Dinka comes to raid the Nuer. Now I have become an old man and if I tell a young person that he/she will live long it can happen. He will too advise the next generation after him.

Chief Bahon Mabor Deng of the Atuot was philosophical about the mutability of the world but urged perseverance in the pursuit of peace.

Don't quit what you started. This is a good start. If you think Wunlit worked, I agree too. Tell the people ahead that it should happen. It will help. Peace is the work. You cannot follow anything without peace. If this happened when we are still alive, we will welcome it....

What I can say is an old Jieng saying. The world is inhabited, deserted and changing. The meaning of it: people stay, get old and they keep changing. The young people now will be old and leave this world. The place was worse and it was better after Wunlit. We have our country now.

Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil of the Jikany Nuer suggested that the starting point for a second Wunlit and peace would be to make a thorough analysis of Wunlit itself to see what it did well and where it went wrong.

What you should do is to go through the Wunlit peace documents and try to analyse what went wrong and what went right. Whether what had just happened (current war), is from the Wunlit's meeting or it is from a different source. If you revise the

Wunlit documents you will know whether those things discussed entered deep in the hearts of the people, and whether what the elders needed was it really unity between the Nuer from all the four corners and the Dinka, and what would happened from it? Tell the organization we can do what will be good for us. What you would tell them is our request is that let them bring us together and all these things will finish. We shall discuss the issue of Jieng Council of Elders,¹⁸ whether it is true that they will be the only one ruling this nation alone, whether this is agreed on by all the Dinka or it is made up by only a few Dinka? And where will the other South Sudanese go? Is this really agreed by all the Dinka that they will be the only people to rule others? So all these things need to be ironed out when we come together.

In fact what happened in Wunlit could be compared to what happened in J1 (the Presidential palace in Juba) when people came together and said that what will take us ahead is only peace. It will not be Riek neither Kiir. They are not the only one with testicles. This cannot ruin the whole country because what was done is completely wrong and it cannot take us ahead. Let us close this door and open new door for what can take us forward. So what can be compared to Wunlit incident is actually the J1 incident, and peace came. What happened is really not good.

Simon Kuok Biliu, a Nuer member of the Wunlit secretariat had this advice for the nation's 'big leaders':

What I would like to say that the big leaders should accept the peace and understand those who don't like peace. They should understand all peace initiatives. Even if you have chance these people, you should go and meet them and let you work free. That

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18 The Jieng Council of Elders (JCE) was formed by a group of mainly retired politicians from a variety of parties in response to what they claimed was a rising tide of anti-Dinka sentiment in South Sudan, especially among the Nuer. Widely believed to be an informal power base behind the government of President Salva Kiir Mayardit in early 2021 they released a statement calling on both Salva Kiir and Riek Machar to stand down in the forthcoming presidential election.

peace should be discussed, so that the South should have peace. If Kiir would like it, South Sudan should have comprehensive peace in it. All people should be in peace. The youth should understand peace, arms should behave well in peace and understand that peace. The higher leaders as well should understand this peace.

9. Lessons Learned

Among the participants in the Wunlit meeting interviewed there is a common desire expressed to reassess the outcome of the meeting, to see what they got right and what they got wrong, to build the peace process anew in the same way that shrines in the Nilotic culture area such as Jiath Liech—the mythical spot where the ancestors of the Nuer came down to earth—are periodically rebuilt. There is a desire to return to civilian control, to take back the peace process from the politicians and the soldiers, to build peace up from below, as at Wunlit, rather than impose it from above. Here are some reflections by participants on the present and the future in the light of their experiences at Wunlit.

There is a general feeling among the surviving participants of Wunlit, like Nyalel Lony Gatjiek of the Jagei, that the country needs to return to the first principles of Wunlit.

What we can take from it (Wunlit peace agreement) is that when we finished the meeting our situation returned to normal. We need to negotiate like we did in Wunlit. If we understand this peace agreement like we did with Wunlit peace, we will have peace. We can return to our homes.

Another former participant, Teresa Deng Kuany was also convinced that the country had to ‘re-do’ Wunlit.

Many good things can be drawn from Wunlit. Because if people didn’t conduct the peace conference in Wunlit maybe God wouldn’t have touched our hearts and made a future for South Sudan together and we might have had different hearts and understanding of belonging to our communities. Instead of us all belonging to South Sudan. This black soil is ours all and no others would come from outside and solve our problem but we alone, we should re-do Wunlit style because it is the one raised South Sudan flag and taking our flag from Omer el-Bashir. I spent much time in the city and have been watching movies,

films and many other things and I have never seen colonizer first giving you your flag but Omer el-Bashir did it.

According to Chief Long Ngolow Jok of the Ciec Dinka the Wunlit peace agreement did not fail:

The biggest achievement of Wunlit, people stayed in peace after. No people died after Wunlit until we got independence without another bad thing again. The bad things happened after the country split. We knew after signing the meeting and the country got independence, we should have the breath of life. We are still running. We look into it; we could say it was better in the past when people were fighting. The death has increased very much. We do say, if the same heart we signed Wunlit comes back, we will be great.

Nyuong Executive Chief Yoal Dawuon Dhoar agrees that external factors, rather than internal weaknesses, undermined the peace agreed at Wunlit.

Our government became one and the situation got normal. All these things are happening because Garang is dead. When Garang died Riek said the leadership still belong to the Dinka because Garang died in the power. That is why Salva got it. There is nothing bad with us those who went to Wunlit. Now you have come here and travelled many places and you will go back and leave us here. Now this war is not for the elders it is for you. Because the young are the ones who do not hear.

Chief Jacob Madhel Lang Juk of the Dinka Twic was more skeptical of the formula of subsequent peace conferences building on the reputation of Wunlit, and succinctly identified their weaknesses.

If you sign a peace agreement, it does not end there...it requires a lot of commitment to implement it. You have to watch out for the issues that will likely destroy the agreement. And you need to have forgiving heart. How many peace conferences and meetings have we convened? Many of course, but the documents are thrown away without implementation of the resolutions. We

lack accountability, and this is the problem. If you make law and nobody follows you have opened the way to corruption.

James Riek Luak advised that Wunlit's success lay in the way it was negotiated and suggested a revival of that strategy, making an analogy with the periodic renewal of an important Nuer shrine.

What can be learned from the Wunlit conference? The way it was negotiated. If it was respected by all there could be no problem now. If we who attended it are called again and have a chance to talk I would ask them what went wrong? What brings the problem again? It is the Dinka that bring this problem and they cannot deny it.

There is a tree called Jiath Liech. This Jiath Liech is where people are believed to have originated. People say there is a house there that—whenever it is old—they repair it.¹⁹ So if the government could bring all those who participated in Wunlit together to discuss what went wrong again and find a solution it would be good.

Deborah Yier Jany, a Nuer living among the Dinka, pointed out that South Sudanese were in an impoverished state when they succeeded to make peace at Wunlit and were in a better position now to do the same thing.

When we started the Wunlit Peace initiative, it was very hard. There was insecurity and fear in every corner of the country. We had to hire planes and cars then. Now we have everything with us. I've been working with AMA for two years and all communities know what I'm doing. There were no roads at the

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19 The tree Jieth Liech figures in Nuer mythology as the route through which the ancestors of the Nuer lineages descended to earth from heaven. The tree was destroyed by fire in the 1920s but the site is still considered sacred, and a shrine in the form of a luak (cattle byre) is built there and is routinely dismantled and rebuilt with new materials brought by different Nuer communities.

time of Wunlit. Now even if a plane is not there, there is a car, there is a motorbike, or bicycle.

Chief Manyiel Lieny Wuol of the Agar longed for the unity of South Sudanese to be restored through their chiefs.

If it's the unity of South Sudanese then it is important to call all chief to sit down and share the meeting and decide what to do. The Chiefs from Yirol, Cueibet, and Rumbek and other places in South Sudan should be assembled in one place to ask themselves and come up with decisions (solutions) but now it seems like a political game and one chief cannot come up with one solution.

Simon Kuok Biliu, a Nyuong Nuer member of the Wunlit secretariat, appealed to all South Sudan's tribes to unite in order to make peace.

What I am going to say, I would like to say to all sixty-four tribes of South Sudan, that peace should prevail in South Sudan. In the same way I would like to request our leaders that please, bring peace to your citizen. All citizens of South Sudan need to live as free and comfortable people under your leadership. I am trying to say that, peace similar to Wunlit peace should be made. It would be conducted wherever acceptable to chiefs, because community should unite and understand each other. Just like that.

The Gok Dinka Chief Machar Maper Cinkou illustrated how such unity could bring not only on the national level, but at the level of local conflicts as well.

When I was taken to resolve different case in different places, I was selected by different people but I accepted to go and resolve conflict in different communities. If government accepts and organizes the conflict of other state or communities to resolve by other chiefs from different communities or state, then it will be very good. For example: the conflict between Ruup and Pakam. Conflict of Ruup and Kuei, and Athoi fighting themselves here in Rumbek. If all Gok community accept and

select me to go and resolve those conflicts in the court, I can go and resolve those differences even though I am old like now.

Chief Marial (Sawat) Malual Arop, son of the famous Agar Malual counterpart to the Nyuong Malual Wun Kuoth, pointed out that there was just so much chiefs could do on their own. It was government's duty to enforce the law and provide security. A first step would be to remove guns from pastoralist communities.

The rule of law needs to be strengthened like the law we formulated in Wunlit, if there is government, the guns should be collected from the hands of civilians so that civilians should go back to their farms. The civil population have become too proud because of the gun, for example, if you try to find someone now, all your materials have to be taken and spoil them. The gun has spoiled our nation; let us collect it from the hands of cattle keepers.

There is a feeling among some Wunlit veterans, such as the Jikany Nuer Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil that the younger generation are ignoring the lessons of Wunlit and need to be re-educated.

For real Wunlit conference is now 20 years old. From the agreement we had signed in Wunlit, I would love to say that it gave birth to the independence of our country. There could have been no more problems between the Dinka and the Nuer. That agreement needs to be continued if there is no more problem with the government.

Well, my message is very brief. I would like to tell the South Sudanese if you like it, let us listen to the voices of the elders, let us arrange a meeting that will bring together all the Nuer and the Dinka, so that we discuss what is destroying our country. So that we will not be divided. This is my message that I would tell the South Sudanese.

Another such veteran, Aliza David Doboal of the Jagei, was ready to take part in that re-education.

The generation of today is different from that time. I would tell them about peace that let them love peace because when there is peace there will be schools, hospitals and death will reduce. You know when the Wunlit peace came there was a small tarmac road. We need peace for the situation to change. It is only peace that they can learn. Because peace is better than anything. You will love your neighbour and everyone

Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun Kuoth, Chief Wun Kuoth's daughter, was also ready to bear witness.

What I can just tell my sisters about peace, would be an advice that stick to the truth. If you got a chance in any meeting, just put right words in places, like what have been done in Wunlit. Don't support someone that was wrong.

For the Jagei Nuer Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac Wunlit was an act of civilians taking back control from the politicians.

What you can learn is that the politicians said the war is not for the civilians. They were fighting to gain control over us. But when we implemented it, we the civilians it worked.

That is right, I would not advise him on Wunlit, but on my own way. Because now I do not take other peoples' properties, I only have my own. Because I was brought up well by my father. I used to tell my child that if I find you in the street I will not be with you. When a child is absent from school I will advise him so as to have knowledge. Do not think to go and break into other people houses.

The great thing about Wunlit, according to the Nyuong Head Chief John Toang Chang, was that it put civilians back in charge of their own lives.

It was good for the civilians. A Dinka who had something from the Nuer side was able to come and take it. And a Nuer who had his thing in the Dinka land he/she was able to get it. The situation was back to normal and there was no more killing or

raiding of cattle. What we want now is that we want this peace to be like the Wunlit peace. When the Wunlit peace came we migrated to Wiah. Now that we are talking there are Nuer going to Yirol and there are Dinka coming to our area to buy cattle.

You are now educated, I would only tell the civilians not to take what belong to others, whether for a Nuer or Dinka. Let us live as before. Let the people go back to their normal way of living before. Now we are moving between ourselves and it is the government that does not move between themselves. Now they have places they cannot travel among themselves why? So let the people go back to the normal way of living.

Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth, however, recognized that chiefs alone could not make peace, it did need the collaboration of the political leaders.

If the politicians decide now that they will give it to the chiefs we can get the solution. We cannot decide it by our own when the top leadership is there. When it will be with us then we shall have a serious meeting. Because if the nation calls for a meeting God will bless it. What we know is that the politicians have failed in the attempt of bringing peace. Because now there are people who are benefiting out of our suffering. When we have a dialogue among ourselves us the South Sudanese it can be good

His fellow chief Muon Machak nevertheless emphasized that the Wunlit's success rested on civilians leading the discussions free from military control.

The way I look at it was good, as seen during the conference they let us discuss all the matters regarding the reconciliations and all went well. So the military leadership didn't control the discussion.

Perhaps it is fitting to conclude with the observations of two soldiers. Ayen Rak Koc attended Wunlit with her husband who was an Agar delegate.

She is now a midwife in the South Sudan People's Defence Force, the successor to the SPLA, and has learned the value of collective action.

South Sudan became independent through collective work and relationship. We normally said that without our collective work for peace both Nuer and Dinka, South Sudan couldn't have achieved peace and independence. (But) what is going on now in South Sudan and what I had observed in Wunlit is that the successful peace in Wunlit is different from what is going on now in South Sudan. If South Sudan breaks it that it is a failure of Wunlit. If South Sudan breaks it, then it is its own personal problem apart from Wunlit. We have liberated South Sudan and if people develop hatred again, then it is a personal problem.

General Rin Tueny Mabor, a member of the security committee at Wunlit is very clear that any success Wunlit had come from starting at the local level.

We still need that spirit of Wunlit because when chiefs talked to themselves, it resolves many things. It exists among them. The spirit of togetherness and I think it's time to go back again to local people at the grassroots and reconcile them.... Everything starts from the local level and then comes up, and that way you will keep politicians out of their way. You better start from the local level and later on you will reach them, and (if) you start from the top, you will not reach.

Appendix 1: List of interviews

Ler interviews (interviewed by James Gatkuoth Mut Gai & John Khalid Mamun Margan)

- Chief Stephen Kuong Mabil, 16 September, 2019.
- Chief James Mabor Kuajien, 22 September, 2019.
- Chief Kong Yar Diu, 23 September, 2019.
- Chief Paul Kuong Dang Yut, 19 September, 2019.
- Chief Peter Gatkuoth Chuol, 14 September, 2019.
- Chief Peter Thoan Nyak Joak, 19 September, 2019.
- Chief William Matiek Chath, 18 September, 2019.
- Head Chief Yoanes Kuol Kach, 16 September, 2019.

Bentiu interviews (interviewed by Jedeit Jal Riak & Mawal Marko Gatkuoth)

- Chief George Mawic Dual, 18 September, 2019.
- Chief Isaac Magok Gatluak, 16 September, 2019.
- Chief Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil, 1 October, 2019.
- Chief Yuac Chuol Yuac, 18 September, 2019.
- Mrs Aliza David Dobuol, 17 September, 2019.
- Nyalel Lony Gatjiek, 17 September, 2019.
- Mrs Teresa Deng Kuany, 21 September, 2019.

Yirol interviews (interviewed by Machot Amuom & Malek Henry)

- Chief Bahun Mabor Deng, 8 September, 2019.
- Chief Dhieu Mangar Chep, 12 September, 2019.
- Chief Long Ngolow Jok, 10 September, 2019.
- Chief Madit Maker Gum, 6 September, 2019.
- Chief Majok Chep Kuer, 6 September, 2019.
- Chief Marial Dhieu Malual, 7 September, 2019.
- Chief Marial Nyibol Kuer, 23 August, 2019
(interviewed by Machot Amuom & John Ryle).

Chief Dhuor Machar, 23 August, 2019
 (interviewed by Machot Amuom & John Ryle).
 Chief Reech Anyieth Reech, 14 October, 2019.
 Mrs. Deborah Yier Jany, 6 October, 2019.
 Mrs. Yar Malek Malual, 7 September, 2019.
 Spiritual Leader Bol Maluel Ayelel, 10 September, 2019.

Warrap interviews (interviewed by Chirrilo Madut & Malek Henry)

Chief Anei Dhal Wol, 30 September, 2019.
 Spiritual Leader Ariath Mayar Mareng, 29 September, 2019.
 Chief Gum Mading Akuecbeny Cirong, 2 October, 2019.
 Chief Madut Aguer Adel, 6 October, 2019.
 Chief Malok Akot Wut, 2 October, 2019.
 Chief Malok Wol Madhieu, 5 October, 2019.
 Chief Matur Wanybeek, 5 October, 2019.
 Chief Morris Ngor Ater, 29 September, 2019.
 Chief Thiik Riiny Giir, 30 October, 2019.
 Chief Wek Deng Ariece, 25 September, 2019.
 Governor Chief Jacob Madhel Lang Juk, 27 October, 2019.
 Hon. Adior Deng Kur, 2 October, 2019.
 Hon. Bona Atem Thuc, 25 October, 2019.
 Mr. Angelo Deng Akol, 25 October, 2019.
 Mr. Mading Buom Garwei, 5 October, 2019.
 Mrs. Akok Achuil Deng, 25 October, 2019.
 Spiritual Leader Agoth Mayak, 5 October, 2019.

Panyijar interviews (interviewed by James Gatkuoth Mut Gai & John Khalid Mamun Margan)

Border Chief Muon Machak, 15 October, 2019.
 Cattle camp leader Abraham Geng Top, 21 October, 2019.
 Cattle camp leader John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong, 13 October, 2019.
 Simon Kuok Biliu, 9 October, 2019.

Executive Chief Yoal Dewuon Dhoar, 21 October, 2019.
Executive Chief Gabriel Kuol Duoth, 21 October, 2019.
Head Chief John Toang Chang, 10 October, 2019.
Head Catechist Simon Thak Both Niang, 23 October, 2019.
Mrs. Martha Jualjiok Malual, 10 October, 2019.
Mr. David Bany Lam, 21 October, 2019.
Mr. James Riek Luak Teny, 24 October, 2019.
Mrs. Nyadol Ruei Kuong, 15 October, 2019.

Rumbek interviews (interviewed by Machot Amuom & Alier Makuer)

Chief Chol Maguar Gel, 4 October, 2019.
Chief Jul Machok Lieng, 2 October, 2019.
Chief Machar Maper, 12 October, 2019.
Chief Madol Mathok Agolder, 10 October, 2019.
Chief Maker Warwut Thok, 4 October, 2019.
Chief Manyang Muonydhel Machok, 16 October, 2019.
Chief Manyiel Leny Wol, 2 October, 2019.
Chief Marial Malual Arop (Sawat), 2 October, 2019.
Mrs Atakwei Daikoc, 4 October, 2019.
Mr Mayek Marial Kuendek, 2 October, 2019.
Chief Muorwel Agok Manyiel, 15 October, 2019.

Juba interviews

Mrs. Ayen Rakoc Nhial, 6 March, 2020 (interviewed by John Ryle and Alier Makuer).
Mrs. Elizabeth Agok Anyijong, 20 August, 2019 (interviewed by John Ryle and Alier Makuer).
General Rin Tueny Mabor, 8 March, 2019 (interviewed by John Ryle and Machot Amuom).
Chief George Kuagany Mut, 21 August 2019 (interviewed by John Khalid Mamun Margan and Mawal Marko Gatkuoth).
Hon. Awut Deng Acuil, 6 September, 2019 (interviewed by John Ryle and Elizabeth Nyibol Malou)

John Luk Jok, 6 March, 2020 (interviewed by John Ryle and James Gatkuoth Mut Gai).

Justice Telar Ring Deng, 4 March, 2020 (interviewed by John Ryle and Machot Amuom).

Ambassador William Dawut Riek, 22 August, 2019 (interviewed by John Khalid Mamun Margan and Mawal Marko Gatkuoth).

Appendix 2: List of participants

Nuer participants

NAME	TRIBE	COUNTY in 1999	POSITION in 1999	POSITION in 2019
Stephen Kuong Mabil	Dok	Bentiu	Head chief	Head chief
James Mabor Kuajien	Dok	Bentiu	Head chief	Head Chief
Kong Yar Diu	Hak	Bentiu	Translator	Elder
Paul Kuong Dang Yut	Dok	Bentiu	Elder	Elder
Peter Gatkuoth Chuol	Dok	Bentiu	Spiritual leader/ Executive Chief	Executive Chief/ spiritual leader
Peter Thoan Nyak Joak	Dok	Bentiu	Executive Chief	Court President
William Matiek Chath	Dok	Bentiu	Church rep	Pastor
Yoanes Kuol Kach	Dok	Bentiu	Elder	Head Chief
George Mawic Dual	Jagei	Bentiu	Executive chief	Not chief
Isaac Magok Gatluak	Jalok	Bentiu	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Joseph Koang Yuac Jobil	Jikany	Bentiu	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Yuac Chuol Yuac	Jagei	Bentiu	Border chief	Not chief
Mrs. Aliza David Dobuol	Jagei	Bentiu	Women leader	Not active
Nyalel Lony Gatjiek	Jagei	Bentiu	Women leader	Not active
Mrs. Teresa Deng Kulang	Rub- kona	Bentiu	Women leader	Not active
Muon Machak	Nyuong	Bentiu	Border chief	Border Chief
Abraham Geng Top	Nyuong	Bentiu	Cattle camp leader	Cattle Camp Leader
John Gatkeel Ruei Kuong	Nyuong	Bentiu	Cattle camp leader	Cattle Camp Leader
Simon Kuok Biliu	Nyuong	Bentiu	Trader	Not active

NAME	TRIBE	COUNTY in 1999	POSITION in 1999	POSITION in 2019
Yoal Dewuon Dhoar	Nyuong	Bentiu	Executive Chief	Executive Chief
Gabriel Kuol Duoth	Nyuong	Bentiu	Executive Chief	Executive Chief
John Toang Chang	Nyuong	Bentiu	Head chief	Head Chief
Simon Thak Both Niang	Nyuong	Bentiu	Head Catechist	Head Catechist
Mrs. Martha Jualjiok Malual Wun	Nyuong	Bentiu	Women leader	Women leader
David Bany Lam	Nyuong	Bentiu	Trader	Not active
James Riek Luak Teny	Nyuong	Bentiu	Trader	Not active
Mrs. Nyadol Ruei Kuong	Nyuong	Bentiu	Women leader	Women leader

Dinka participants

NAME	TRIBE	COUNTY in 1999	POSITION in 1999	POSITION in 2019
Bahon Mabor Deng	Atuot	Yirol	Paramount Chief	Paramount Chief
Madit Maker Gum	Atuot	Yirol	Paramount Chief	Paramount Chief
Dhieu Mangar Chep	Ciec	Yirol	Border chief	Border chief
Long Ngolow Jok	Ciec	Yirol	Executive chief	Paramount Chief
Majok Chep Kuer	Ciec	Yirol	Sub chief	Executive Chief
Marial Dhieu Malual	Ciec	Yirol	Paramount Chief	Paramount Chief
Marial Nyibol Kuer	Ciec	Yirol	Executive chief	No longer Chief
Dhuor Machar Kuer	Ciec	Yirol	Sub chief	Executive chief
Reech Anyieth Reech	Ciec	Yirol	Paramount Chief	Paramount Chief
Mrs. Yar Malek Malual	Ciec	Yirol	Women's rep	No longer active
Mrs. Deborah Yier Jany	Nuer	Yirol	Mobilizer (Nuer residing in Yirol)	Activist
Bol Maluel Ayelel	Ciec	Yirol	Spiritual leader	No longer active
Anei Dhal Wol	Apuk	Tonj	Executive chief	Executive Chief
Ariath Mayar Mareng	Abiem	Tonj	Executive chief	Executive Chief
Gum Mading Akuecbeny Cirong	Luac	Tonj	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Madut Agner Adel	Luac	Tonj	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Malok Akot Wut	Muok	Tonj	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Malok Wol Madhieu	Luach	Tonj	Executive chief	Executive Chief
Matur Wanybeek	Gok	Cueibet	Executive chief	Paramount Chief

NAME	TRIBE	COUNTY in 1999	POSITION in 1999	POSITION in 2019
Morris Ngor Ater	Apuk	Gogrial	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Thiik Riiny Giir	Apuk	Gogrial	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Wek Deng Ariece	Kuac	Gogrial	Executive chief	Paramount Chief
Jacob Madhel Lang Juk	Twic	Gogrial	Paramount Chief	Governor
Hon. Adior Deng Kur	Tonj	Tonj	Women leader	Women State MP
Hon. Bona Atem Thuc	Apuk	Gogrial	Local government	State MP
Angelo Deng Akol	Kuac	Gogrial	Local government	Local government
Mading Buom Garwei	Bul (Nuer)	Mayom	Youth leader	No longer active
Mrs. Akok Achuil Deng	Apuk	Gogrial	Women leader	Women leader
Agoth Mayak	Luac	Tonj	Spiritual Leader	Spiritual Leader
Chol Maguar Gel	Agar (Rup)	Rumbek	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Jul Machok Lieng	Agar (Rup)	Rumbek	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Machar Maper Cinkou	Gok	Cueibet	Executive chief	No longer Chief
Madol Mathok Agolder	Agar (Kuei)	Rumbek	Paramount chief	Paramount Chief
Maker Warwut Thok	Agar (Pakam)	Rumbek	Paramount chief	Paramount chief
Manyang Muonydhel Machok	Agar (Aliab toch)	Rumbek	Payam Judge chief	No longer Chief
Manyiel Lieny Wol- Malek	Agar (Pakam)	Rumbek	Executive chief	Executive Chief

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NAME	TRIBE	COUNTY in 1999	POSITION in 1999	POSITION in 2019
Marial Malual Arop	Agar (Aliab <i>toch</i>)	Rumbek	Paramount chief	No longer Chief
Mrs. Atewei Dalkoc	Agar (Pakam)	Rumbek	Women's rep	No longer active
Mayek Marial Kuandek	Agar (Kuei)	Rumbek	Youth rep	Army officer
Ayen Rakoc Nhial	Agar	Rumbek	Wife of del- egate	Army midwife
Rin Tueny Mabor		Yirol	SPLA commander	Army General

Appendix 3: List of researchers

Alier Makuer graduated from Catholic University of South Sudan with a B.A. in Economics and has been a researcher with the Rift Valley Institute since 2019. Languages for this project: Dinka and English.

Chirilo Madut holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Bahr el-Ghazal, and an M.A. in Economic Development and Policy Analysis from the University of Juba. He has worked as a researcher with the Rift Valley Institute since 2017. Languages for this project: Dinka and English.

James Gatkuoth Mut Gai Languages for this project: Nuer and English.

Jedeit Jal Riak Languages for this project: Nuer and English.

John Khalid Mamun Margan holds a BA in Social and Economic Studies from Juba University. He has conducted research with RVI since 2017.. Languages for this project: Nuer and English.

Machot Amuom is a graduate of Business Administration from St. Lawrence University, Uganda, and has worked as a research consultant in South Sudan since 2017. Languages for this project: Dinka and English.

Malek Henry Chuor holds a B.A. in Economics from the Catholic University of South Sudan. He has worked on research projects with the Institute for Justice and Peace Studies at the Catholic University and the Rift Valley Institute. Languages for this project: Dinka and English.

Mawal Marko Gatkuoth holds a B.A. degree in Economics from the Catholic University of South Sudan. Languages for this project: Nuer and English.

Glossary

WORD OR ACRONYM	LANGUAGE AND DIALECT	DEFINITION
Anyanya	-	Name of the Southern rebel movement during the first civil war (1963-1972).
Anyanya 2	-	Southern rebel groups established in the early 1980s, drawn mainly from Nuer communities; some were defeated in conflict with the SPLA; some later allied with the Khartoum government, and some with the Nasir faction of the SPLA (SPLA-United).
BNFA	-	Bentiu, Nasir, Fangak, Akobo.
<i>beny</i>	Dinka	Chief.
<i>beny bith</i>	Dinka	Spearmaster
CPA	-	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005).
<i>gelweng</i>	Dinka	Armed youth guarding the cattle.
<i>kuar muon</i>	Nuer	Earth master, sometimes translated as “leopard skin chief”.
<i>kuar kuac</i>	Nuer	“leopard skin chief”, alternative term for <i>kuar muon</i> .
NSCC	-	New Sudan Council of Churches.
payam	-	Administrative unit. (A variable number of payams constitute a county.)
POC	-	Protection of Civilians camp.
<i>raan nhialic</i>	Dinka	“man of Divinity” (prophet).
SPLA	-	Sudan People’s Liberation Army.
SPLM	-	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (political wing of the SPLA).
<i>toch</i>	Dinka and Nuer	Grazing land, swampy in the rainy season.
<i>wut ghok</i>	Nuer	“man of cattle” (cattle camp chief).

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Wunlit was the most successful peace meeting in the history of the Sudans, a meeting where customary authorities took a leading role. This report is an account of the Wunlit meeting in the words of the original participants, conducted in the light of the continuing state of conflict in South Sudan and the relevance of the history of peace-making to the current political situation.



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