

**Becoming Christian:  
Personhood and Moral Cosmology  
in Acholi South Sudan**

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## DECLARATION

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I, Ryan Joseph O'Byrne, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where material has been derived from other sources I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Ryan Joseph O'Byrne, 21 September 2016

## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines contemporary entanglements between two cosmo-ontological systems within one African community. The first system is the indigenous cosmology of the Acholi community of Pajok, South Sudan; the other is the world religion of evangelical Protestantism. Christianity has been in the region around 100 years, and although the current religious field represents a significant shift from earlier compositions, the continuing effects of colonial and early missionary encounters have had significant impact. This thesis seeks to understand the cosmological transformations involved in all these encounters.

This thesis provides the first in-depth account of South Sudanese Acholi – a group almost entirely absent from the ethnographic record. However, its largest contributions come through wider theoretical and ethnographic insights gained in attending to local Acholi cosmological, ontological, and experiential orientations. These contributions are: firstly, the connection of Melanesian ideas of agency and personhood to Africa, demonstrating not only the relational nature of Acholi personhood but an understanding of agency acknowledging nonhuman actors; secondly, a demonstration of the primarily relational nature of local personhood whereby Acholi and evangelical persons and relations are similarly structured; and thirdly, an argument that, in South Sudan, both systems are ultimately about how people organise the moral fabric of their society.

This thesis comprises three parts. Part One provides a general overview of Pajok and the relevant literature. Part Two introduces the fundamental cosmologies of the two systems, highlighting similarities in issues of morality, personhood and relationality. Part Three provides ethnographic illustrations of morally ambiguous witchcraft-like experiences. The specifics of agency, morality, personhood and power involved highlight my conclusion that, although these systems are based upon different ideas about and orientations toward morality, each addresses complementary aspects of experience: Christianity speaks to moral issues of the global and the infinite while customary cosmologies speak about moral issues of the present and the local.

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Any errors remaining in this work are the fault of the author and no-one else.

*Apwoyo Matek Tutwal, Tima Kica, ki An Amaro Wun Weng.*

## PREFACE: BECOMING CHRISTIAN

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### Becoming Christian in Acholi South Sudan

This thesis examines the contemporary entanglements between two different cosmo-ontological systems within one eastern African community. The first system is what some literature might call an African Traditional Religion (see Morris 2006) – in this case,<sup>1</sup> that of the predominantly Acholi community of Pajok,<sup>2</sup> South Sudan (Maps 1-5) – the other is the world religion of Christianity, particularly the Pajok community's indigenous manifestations of evangelical Protestantism.<sup>3</sup> To state this thesis examines contemporary entanglements between these systems is not to ignore a historical perspective. Although focusing upon contemporary forms and engagements, I recognise that the specific histories of both these systems as well as their ongoing interactions are of significant local, regional, and historical importance.

I should state here at the outset that although in some places my phrasing may seem to imply two separate camps of 'Christian' and 'pre-Christian', 'customary' or 'traditional' orientations and systems, the reality of the situation is much more complex than a simple heuristic dualism allows. Not only are neither of these homogenous categories, but both have been subject to all kinds of reconfigurations over time: not only in their relation to each other but to other historical events and processes also. Indeed, the subject of this thesis, the argument made, and the nature of the original inquiry all at least implicitly acknowledge the complex multiplicity and heterogeneity of lived experience, religious or otherwise. In fact, it is my position that these two cosmo-ontologies are much more likely to be lived orientations within and toward the world rather than systems or structures which orient it. In this way, terms such as Christian and customary serve a heuristic as much as an analytic or descriptive purpose. After all, as Lévi-Strauss (1963: 89) famously noted, such binaries 'are good to think with'.

A primary strand of discussion within the anthropology of Christianity is the nature of personhood and the connections between the pre-Christian and post-conversion person and their cultural past or

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<sup>1</sup> I should note here at the outset that I do not endorse the grand generalisation 'African Traditional Religion' for many reasons, one of which is that all three of the words involved in the term are distinctly problematic. Another is that it is defined in reference to Judeo-Christian norms (see also Shaw [1990: 343]). Therefore, apart from this one instance, I will not repeat this term herein.

<sup>2</sup> Pajok is also sometimes written as 'Parajok' or 'Parjok'. I attempt to follow the local vernacular as closely as possible and therefore use 'Pajok'. Likewise, 'Magwi' is preferred over 'Magwe' and 'Pugee' to 'Pogee'.

<sup>3</sup> I must note here that I refer to these people and churches as 'evangelical' primarily in a heuristic sense: although they would likely fit most standard definitions of evangelical Christianity, most of the comments I make about evangelicals herein are specifically local or regional in focus and thus should not be considered to refer to global actors, institutions or processes unless otherwise explicitly stated.

traditions. In this thesis I articulate the varied dimensions of local debates over precisely these same issues: that is, Acholi South Sudanese also attempt to understand the important ethnographic fact that many community members are or can become evangelical while simultaneously sharing the same fundamental orientations to the world, the cosmos and each other as non-evangelical community members. In other words, I want to know what it is that allows people to be both evangelical and Acholi without the apparent incongruity between these orientations affecting their day to day lives as functioning community members. This is not to say there are no contests or contradictions, nor that these contradictions are never problematic. Instead, it is to make the ethnographic observation that, despite some seemingly difficult tensions or paradoxes between an evangelical and a customary Acholi worldview or orientation, most evangelicals in Pajok simultaneously live out their daily lives being *both* evangelicals *and* Acholi, with all the social and cosmological baggage which both these designations and identifications bring.

I see this as an existential rather than a structural issue, an issue of the day-to-day experiences of evangelical Acholi being-in-the-world which often necessitate an almost prereflective embeddedness in multiple and often contesting contradictory forms of sociality and intersubjectivity (Csordas 1994: 6).<sup>4</sup> This thesis, therefore, attempts to capture ‘precisely the sense of existential immediacy’ many Pajok evangelicals feel, and which the term ‘being-in-the-world’ orients us toward (Csordas 1994: 10). Such processes, I suggest, involve the never complete and always ongoing negotiation – the ‘becomings’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) – of self and other, culture and religion, as well as the past, present and infinite. It is, in other words, a continual process of becoming Christian, within which the prospect and experience of contradictions is ever-present. After all, as Jackson (2005: xiv) has emphasised, although all ‘human existence is relational – a mode of being-in-the-world – it is continually at risk’.

There is something of a dialectical relationship at work here: Christian forms of worship and personhood shape and are shaped by Acholi traditions and subjectivities, but so too what it means to be Acholi is shifting also. Thus, not only are these identifications not mutually exclusive, but the forms in which they play out can actually reinforce each other. In an example relating specifically to the argument presented herein, Acholi ideas and practices about morality can reinforce Christian moral

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<sup>4</sup> Jackson (1998: 3-4) defines intersubjectivity as ‘the domain of inter-est (inter-existence) and inter-corporeity that lies between people: a field of inter-experience, inter-action, and inter-locution. Analytically, inter-existence is given precedence over individual essence. Relation is prior to relata... Intersubjectivity embraces centripetal and centrifugal forces, and constructed and destructive extremes without prejudice’. This is, in other words, ‘experience as inter-experience’ (Jackson 1996: 26)

systems and vice versa whilst, nonetheless, each system of morality can also subtly shift the dimensions within which the other is played out, understood and lived.

The argument presented comes down to the following basic formulation: firstly, that despite the problems associated with any broad generalisation, there are a set of beliefs, orientations, practices, and worldviews shared by enough people of a certain group that one might call them 'Acholi cosmological systems' or 'an Acholi cosmology'. Secondly, there are another set of beliefs, orientations, practices, and worldviews shared by enough people of a certain group that one might call them 'evangelical cosmological systems' or 'an evangelical cosmology'. There is also the basic historical and ethnographic fact that, in this part of the world, the Acholi system predates the evangelical one (although, of course, exactly how much of this system could be said to be entirely pre-Christian is a matter both of argument and conjecture).

Wider global historical processes have meant that the first encounters between Christianity and 'pre'-Christian Acholi cosmologies took place during the very last decades of the nineteenth century at the earliest, and these encounters did not reach the Acholi South Sudanese community of Pajok until probably the first or second decade of the twentieth century. Since this time, two seemingly major institutional cosmological and structural changes have taken place. Firstly, almost the entire community of Pajok has become a self-professing Christian of some denomination.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, a significant portion of these persons – I estimate 20% – have specifically become members of one of the community's seven evangelical churches (see Chapter 1).<sup>6</sup>

Handelman (2012: 70) rightly asks, is this really 'trans-formation, that is, the changing of one form of being into another, or does it more directly move that being from one category to another within a system of classification?' This thesis sets out to engage with exactly this issue as regards cosmological, moral, ontological, and religious change in Acholi South Sudan. The answer, I think, is that although 'trans-formations' may take place along some dimensions, such as in moralities and horizons of experience, other dimensions involving the cosmo-ontological field remain relatively unmodified. Although this answer may seem somewhat surprising, I suggest it has already been prefigured by recent debates on personhood within the anthropology of Christianity (see Chapter 2).

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<sup>5</sup> This is distinctly different to church affiliation noted by Burton (1985: 366) during his fieldwork among the Sudanese Atuat Nilotic people in the 1970s: 'when living in traditional homesteads and cattle camps neither my wife nor I met or befriended a single individual who avowed Christian sentiment'.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, and linked to wider difficulties with population estimates highlighted in Chapter 1, there is no reliable figure for Pajok's current population nor has there been any reliable attempt to estimate the numbers of either Christians or evangelicals within this populace.

The ethnographic encounter with Acholi evangelical Christianity as manifest in Pajok has led to the following answers:<sup>7</sup> Firstly, some primary reasons for the widespread adoption of evangelical Protestantism in Pajok are to do similarities within the specificities of both Acholi and evangelical morality, personhood and relationality. Secondly, although these systems may appear quite different, the underlying nature of sociocultural and cosmo-ontological life are such that variations between the local manifestations of these systems are more cosmetic than substantive. In this I agree with Horton (1971, 1975a, 1975b), who argued the majority of African cosmo-ontological systems have the same dual nature as early forms of Christianity: 'In the first place, [their] gods are theoretical entities, and their rituals a set of practices designed to apply theory to the control of the world. Secondly, [their] gods are people, and their rituals an extension to the field of purely human social relationships' (Horton 1971: 95-96). Specifically, I argue that despite apparent differences, Acholi and evangelical cosmologies in Pajok manifest analogous understandings of basic orienting principles like agency, morality, personhood and relationality. Further, I argue these shared conceptualisations fundamentally underpin each cosmo-ontological system and that, despite any specific changes in content or form, basic existential and structural orientations remain largely similar no matter any single Acholi's alignment, evangelical or otherwise.<sup>8</sup>

Christianity in one form or another has been part of the lifeworlds of the people of Acholi-speaking South Sudan – an area now largely equivalent to the geopolitical boundaries of Magwi County in Eastern Equatoria State (Maps 2-4) – for around 100 years.<sup>9</sup> Although the most recent evangelical denominations comprising Pajok's increasingly competitive religious field represent a significant shift in the religious composition of the area, the continuing effects of both the colonial encounter as well as early Roman Catholic missions in the region means Christianity has had a deep and lasting impact upon the cosmological orientations and lived experiences of almost everyone in the region. This is true even for those who do not profess to be Christians.

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<sup>7</sup> I must note that the religious field in Pajok is significantly different to that among Acholi in northern Uganda, where there has been significant growth in the number of adherents to Pentecostal churches. There are no Pentecostal churches in Pajok: not only are all Pajok Protestant denominations of a strong millennial and Bible Literalist persuasion, but as I show in Chapter 5, Pentecostal forms of worship and practice are seen as bordering on the demonic.

<sup>8</sup> Here, as throughout, when I write about evangelical cosmologies or logics or so on, these are cosmologies or logics as local Pajok evangelicals understand and practice them, rather than how the same Christian forms may be seen or practiced by American or European evangelists and missionaries. Any generalisability thus remains a matter for further empirical investigation.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson (1996: 7-8) defines the lifeworld as 'that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies, which theoretical knowledge addresses but does not determine'.

Nevertheless, there are significant experiential and cosmological differences between these early Catholic churches and missions – a period I call the First Wave of Christianisation – and later Protestant denominations in the area. Depending upon the date of their arrival, I term these later evangelical missions and churches the Second and Third Waves of Christianisation (Chapter 1). Together with ‘traditional’ Acholi belief systems, it are these later Protestant forms of Christianity which comprise the analytical and heuristic dialectic running throughout this thesis. As the specific intricacies of these Second and Third Wave churches dominate much of the following discussion, especially Chapter 5, a short discussion of important local distinctions will suffice here.

These major distinctions can be drawn from emic (or insider, experiential) and etic (or general, external theological) perspectives, with both further differentiated depending upon someone’s affiliation with or sympathy towards either the Roman Catholic church or one of Pajok’s Protestant denominations (Fig. 1). The general theological distinctions between evangelicals and Catholics in Pajok are similar to those elsewhere: for evangelicals there is a definite focus on Bible literalism and an aversion to institutional hierarchies (Crapanzano 2000; Harding 1991, 2000; see Keller [2005] for similar among Seventh Day Adventists; *contra* Coleman 2006). Likewise, emic understandings of denominational difference amount to how the relations between someone’s faith and their culture, tradition, or the past is conceptualised, as is similar elsewhere in Africa (Engelke 2010; Englund 2003; Kirsch 2004; Meyer 1998, 1999; Ranger 2003) and throughout the majority world (Abramson 2013; Andersen 2014; Mosko 2010; Robbins 2004b).<sup>10</sup>

As elsewhere, Catholics in Pajok tend to have a more tolerant attitude to the non-human denizens and dimensions of the pre-Christian cosmological world than most evangelicals do (Cannell 1999; Mosse 2006; Orta 2004, 2006; *contra* Allen & Storm 2012; Behrend 2011). Although by no means applicable to all Pajok Catholics – some of whom are positively ‘Protestant’ in their attitudes toward the usual objects of African evangelical disdain: alcohol, ‘cultural’ or ‘traditional’ rituals, polygamy and non-Christian entities – the majority of Catholics have an easy-going and open relationship with the various meta-persons within the community and environment. By this I mean that most Pajok Catholics not only actively engage in and practice the *tic Acholi* (customary Acholi rituals, literally ‘Acholi work’) connected to the social and historical (re)production of all sociocultural relations between the living, dead and the spirit world in general but, even if they do not, they at least still recognise the value and importance of doing so. Indeed, several Catholics made analogous references

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<sup>10</sup> My use of the term ‘majority world’ is a purposeful ethical and political ploy designed: to counteract the evolutionary assumptions implicit within terms such as ‘modern’, ‘developed’ and so on; to reinforce the fact that so-called ‘development’ is never linear or non-political; and to highlight the history of colonial and neo-colonial violence involved within processes of development and designation both.

between their ancestors and Christian angels, noting that the differences between powers which do good and those which do evil are like those between good and bad people. In fact, one elderly woman explicitly told my research assistant Obwoya and I that the *tipu* (souls, spirits, or more accurately, shadows) of good people ascend into heaven after they die, to become angels that watch over and help out their descendants. On the other hand, those of bad people are forced to stay on earth, becoming the *cen* or other harmful spirits that injure, possess or otherwise disturb the living (see Chapters 3 and 4 for longer discussions of these themes).<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Christians of all denominations are fond of saying that, unlike the ‘Muslim Arabs’ of the north,<sup>12</sup> ‘we [as in Christians] all worship the same God’ (see also Chua 2015). Because of the assumed similarities resulting from such a statement, Pajok Catholics tend to see the growth of evangelical churches as more about local politics of status and wealth rather than theology. Thus, they argue there are no ‘real’ theological differences between various Christian denominations but, rather, that some people – particularly young or middle aged men with above average educations – see church leadership as a means of acquiring social or material benefits.

Evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to have antagonistic attitudes toward all meta-persons not directly connected to the ‘good’ side of the Christian Bible (like angels, prophets or the Holy Spirit). Anything else – whether *jogi* (cosmological power),<sup>13</sup> *kwaro* (ancestors),<sup>14</sup> or things involved in affliction or misfortune (such as *ayweya*,<sup>15</sup> *catani*,<sup>16</sup> or *cen*, for example) – is generally seen as unrepentantly demonic. Furthermore, evangelicals often consider people who practice customary rituals as (at best) ignorant or unknowingly under the sway of demonic influence while, at worst, as knowingly doing evil on behalf of maleficent powers. Most evangelicals take a similar view toward local ritual and knowledge experts like *ajwaki* (diviners or spirit mediums),<sup>17</sup> whose customary

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<sup>11</sup> This is remarkably similar to what Ravalde (2014) found among Catholic Kumam in Eastern Uganda. *Cen* is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4. For present purposes a translation of ‘ghostly vengeance’ (p’Bitek 1971) will suffice.

<sup>12</sup> In the local vernacular, the terms Arab, Muslim and Northerner are virtually synonymous, reflecting local experiences of the region’s wider history of oppression.

<sup>13</sup> *Jok* (singular, *jogi* plural) is a wide-ranging and multitudinous concept that could be demons, force, god, power, spirit and so on. Although explained in great detail in Chapter 4, inspired by Mogensen (2002), I see *jok* as a multi-dimensional yet primarily phenomenological or intersubjective means of explaining the workings of cosmological power.

<sup>14</sup> Explained in Chapter 4, *kwaro* means the living or dead variants of: ancestor(s), elder(s) and/or grandfather(s).

<sup>15</sup> Explained in Chapter 3, *ayweya* are troublesome spirits usually connected to environmental features.

<sup>16</sup> This is an Acholi translation of the Christian ‘Satan’.

<sup>17</sup> The Acholi word ‘*ajwaka*’ (plural ‘*ajwaki*’) is usually poorly and slanderously mistranslated as ‘witchdoctor’ by most contemporary and historical sources, foreign or Acholi. This is probably due to hegemonic discourses promoted by early Christian missionaries and colonial government authorities, the results of which has been the demonization of any customary Acholi socio-cultural practices seeming to disagree with or deviate from normative Christian conceptual definitions surrounding ‘the religious’. For early examples of these hegemonic discourses in Acholiland, see: Baker (1866, 1884); Ingrams (1960); Johnston (1902); Malandra (1947); Menzies

associations with the spiritual dimensions of both morality and power make them especially vilified (Allen & Storm 2012; Baines 2010; Finnström 2001, 2008; Victor & Porter, Forthcoming).

Finally, a note on terminology: throughout this thesis I use the term 'meta-person(s)' to talk about any and all the myriad nonhuman, nonphysical, spiritual, supernatural, or other magical non-everyday persons, living or dead, human or otherwise, which in contemporary Acholi cosmo-ontological worlds are imbued with both power and personhood. This term thus includes witches and *jogi* as well as the Christian meta-persons of God and Jesus Christ. In this I follow the convention laid out in Sahlins' (2016) comparative discussion of nonhuman or spiritual beings. As with Sahlins, I prefer this term because, unlike some other English-language conceptual terms, it does not unnecessarily materialise nor anthropomorphise things not ethnographically requiring it. Moreover, the term prioritises the most significant shared element of those beings and entities it seeks to capture: the definitively social aspect of their personhood.

## Why Pajok?

In many ways, the choice of Pajok as fieldwork site was somewhat arbitrary, perhaps influenced by the serendipity one often hears about in relation to the anthropological endeavour.<sup>18</sup> Certainly there was no reason to choose Pajok over elsewhere in Acholi South Sudan. I chose Acholi South Sudan because, as a research assistant during undergraduate study in New Zealand, I helped interview a refugee-background community leader from this area. In turn, this interview led to my Masters research with the South Sudanese Acholi community in Wellington (O'Byrne 2012, 2014a, 2014b) and, for both intellectual and ethical reasons, I decided to continue this research for my PhD.

I originally intended to focus on evangelical conversion. According to what could be found online,<sup>19</sup> there seemed a recent but significant uptake in evangelical Christianity in Acholi South Sudan. However, on arrival in the field I found much of this information incorrect: evangelical conversion was certainly not as community-wide or intense as suggested. One major reason for this was the conditions under which such information is gathered. For example, three Americans from the Church of Christ

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(1954); and Thomas & Scott (1935). For a similar critique, see Oxford-trained Acholi anthropologist Okot p'Bitek (1970, 1971). I should note that, following Evan-Pritchard's famous distinction between a witch and a sorcerer (1972: 1-3; but see Chapter 6 herein for a sustained critique of this typology), while an *ajwaka* could be both a witch and a doctor, they are also a sorcerer, a diviner, a spirit medium, and what Whitehead (2004, 2013) might call an 'assault sorcerer'. Therefore, as the pejorative associations of the word 'witchdoctor' makes it problematic, I prefer the neutral term 'spirit medium'.

<sup>18</sup> Holbraad (2010: 82) calls this 'the key – but typically arbitrary – decision as to where to do fieldwork'.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of the information available online when I began PhD study in 2012, see the following: PeopleGroups (2013); The Joshua Project (2013b); The Sudan Project (2013); Thompson (2011).

(COC) visited Pajok during fieldwork in mid-2014 (Fig. 2). This denomination is doing important development work in the community, and these men are dedicated and hardworking. Nonetheless, they cannot spend the time in Pajok needed to understand how local processes and politics work, and most of their time is spent with church members who might benefit from overestimating the power of local evangelical efforts. Moreover, these men see a side of Pajok revelling in the exotic: when three *munu* (white people) arrive, so do onlookers, meaning their presence equals increased COC attendance. Thus, despite their best intentions, missionaries' understandings of the everyday dynamics of life and faith in Pajok differ from on-the-ground realities. Because of this, once in the field I redefined my topic to its final focus, one engaging with important questions within the anthropology of Christianity as well as African Studies generally and the anthropological study of Africa more specifically.

## Argument and contributions

This thesis makes its most significant contributions in its specific attention to local Acholi cosmologies and experiential orientations. As I discuss further in Chapter 1, my basic methodological and philosophical position is grounded in an understanding of the importance of intersubjectivity. Therefore, putting a primary focus on the experiential dimensions of Acholi life not only permits in-depth analysis of these important and largely underappreciated dimensions but also allows significant ethnographic and theoretical contributions to Acholi and African scholarship as well as to anthropological analyses of religion and Christianity. These contributions are:

1. The connection of Melanesian ideas of personhood to an African setting, demonstrating not only the relational nature of Acholi personhood but demanding an understanding of agency which acknowledges nonhuman or even non-corporeal agents (Gell 1998). The reason I borrow the conceptualisation of relational personhood from Melanesia is that ethnographies from this region seem to demonstrate basic shared cosmo-ontological similarities with those of some African peoples. Such similarities have also been noted by Strathern and Lambek (1998). In this I build on similar articulations of African communities by Jackson (1989), Niehaus (2002), and Piot (1999).
2. A demonstration that the impulses toward relational personhood among African evangelicals are such that Christian persons and relations should be understood as similarly structured and oriented as Acholi or African ones. Starting out from recent debates within the anthropology of Christianity (Chapter 2), my position toward Christian personhood is neither strongly dividualist nor individualist in orientation, such as those taken by Mosko (2010, 2015a, 2015b) and Robbins (2010b, 2015) respectively. Rather, following Chua (2015), Daswani (2011), Schram (2015) and

Werbner (2011), I understand all forms of personhood as based in the ongoing contestation and negotiation of becoming-persons (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), that is, as (re)produced in and through impulses which *tend* to draw specifically embedded actors *toward* one orientation or the other.

3. Lastly, inspired by the work of Joel Robbins (2004) in New Guinea and Koen Stroeken (2012) in northern Tanzania, I argue for the need to understand *both* systems as primarily oriented towards morality. I therefore argue for the conceptualisation of both systems as competing yet complementary cosmologies of morality or cosmologically-oriented moral power. I do this through the comparative juxtaposition of local(ising) Acholi cosmologies with the universal(ising) cosmology of evangelical Christianity.

A major question structuring the research undertaken here was how and why do people in Pajok (and elsewhere) become (a certain kind of) Christian and what does this mean for their everyday lives and orientations? Perhaps unsurprisingly for those familiar with the anthropology of Christianity, answers depend largely upon the similarities and differences between – and transformations within – concepts central to both Christian and indigenous worldviews. Especially important is how the interlinked aspects of sociocultural life and individual experience connect to and are informed and structured by local and evangelical cosmological logics. To put this another way, there are significant conjunctions between both Acholi and evangelical orientations such that they allow insight into not only Acholi and evangelical cosmologies and persons but also how one may (to some extent) become the other.

One primary argument is that to promote or allow such becomings, these systems must share certain basic and everyday logics, systems or understandings. What I will suggest is that although some structuring logics may undergo significant transformation, certain underlying orientations remain somewhat continuous throughout. This is the continuity within the discontinuity, the stability within the rupture. Thus, it is my argument that the similarities between these basic and largely unconscious underlying orientations are, in Pajok at least, the shared Acholi and Christian understandings of morality and personhood.

Based on the fact that a significant amount of an Acholi person's understanding of themselves is formed through the exchange relations in which they are engaged, I suggest current understandings of Acholi sociality and personhood should be expanded and refined through critical engagement with that definitive element of 'the New Melanesian Ethnography' (Josephides 1991): the dividual, partible or relational person. These exchange relations themselves reflect the wider significance of the social relations within which persons are involved and through which their social, lineal, and thus both individual and relational characteristics and personhoods are comprised.

Finally, it is important to note that this is not an attempt at “explaining away” Christianity by describing its assimilation into local cultural logics’ (Street 2010: 264; see also Barker 1990; Robbins 2003). However, neither should it be the explaining away of local cultural logics by describing their replacement with those of Christianity. Just as Christianity is a fundamental and unmistakably important component of the everyday lifeworld of Acholi society, so too are customary cultural conceptualisations. Rather, as both explanatory manoeuvres posit a rather artificial and uniform interpretation of events and processes on the ground, I instead highlight some basic similarities within the logics underlying each, showing how each system transforms the other in ways widely experienced as a state of always becoming.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 323) define a becoming in the following way: it ‘is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two: it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both’. It is about movement and process rather than stasis and essences; about the human processes of constantly forming and reforming individual and communal notions of the world, its working, and one’s place within it, as well as how these are all defined. In one of his earlier discussions of the works of Heraclitus, Deleuze (1983: 23) notes that ‘there is no being, everything is a becoming’. This is the basis of the Deleuzian argument that ‘there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity’ (Deleuze 1983: 23-24). In other words, there are no essences only relations; no points of stability but rather only continual movements of fluidity and flux (see also: May [2003]; Viveiros de Castro [2004: 484]).

This is an understanding of existence which is one of continual process, as well as continually processual, one which necessitates an understanding of human life and lives as continually constituted in the constant struggle for iteration of self and other, of an ever-present quest for the solidification of meanings that can never quite be determined. It is to demand an emphasis on the processes of reaching for understanding, rather than the attainment of comprehension itself; to highlight the diversity in what might appear as correspondence, and to note the multiplicity – yet never necessarily inconsistent nature – of difference in seeming similarity. In other words, it is a heuristic seeking to complicate the seemingly simple, to return complexity to all elements of analysis and understanding, to trouble easy answers and easy questions both.

My understanding of the term ‘becoming’ and the ways in which I seek to use it seems to almost necessitate the simultaneous mobilisation of another Deleuzian term: ‘line of flight’. Deleuze (1997: 1) defines a ‘line of flight’ as ‘an element... that escapes its own formalization’, an indeterminacy that – Patrice Schuch (2010: 344), commenting upon Biehl and Locke (2010: 344), argues – ‘gives way to multiple possibilities and makes visible crossroads where choices can be made beyond the shadow of

determinism'. Brian Massumi, translator of Deleuze and Guattari's original French text, notes that the term 'line of flight' is his own interpretation of the French '*ligne de fuite*', and that '*fuite* covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance' (Massumi 1987: xvii). Lines of flight, as I understand and use the term, thus reference the fluidity and indeterminacy of human existence, the always partial and chaotic nature of agency, choice, knowledge and action. It highlights, primarily, that not only do intention and effect often never equate, but also that the very act of attempting to equate these complex and disparate realms of human often evades capture, leaking out the sides and disrupting easy analysis or comprehension, whether academic or everyday.

## Outline and structure

This thesis comprises this Preface and then eight chapters divided into three Parts. Part One consists of Chapters 1 and 2, Part Two of Chapters 3 through 5, and Part Three of Chapters 6 through 8. Following a short Conclusion are four Appendices which, as well as providing maps and images, give a wider historical overview of the Pajok community.

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of Pajok and introduces the important demographic, geographic and historical dimensions of the research site. Particular attention is paid to developments within the Pajok religious field. Chapter 1 is where I also lay out my epistemological and methodological strategies and briefly analyse my position within the community. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, within which my research and this thesis in general as well as my argument are positioned. Attention is especially devoted to a synopsis of Acholi ethnographic accounts, the anthropology of Christianity, and literature on African and Christian personhood, as these are the fields to which this thesis making its largest contributions.

In Part Two, which consists of three chapters, I introduce the fundamental cosmological systems upon which this thesis is based. As the main argument consists of an ongoing dialectic between customary Acholi and evangelical Christian cosmologies, moralities and persons, the primary function of Part Two is the description and analysis of the relevant parts of these systems. Chapter 3 provides an overview of Acholi cosmology as a structural and religious system. In this chapter I outline the Acholi social and cosmological universe, demonstrating that the world is fundamentally social in nature, as well as giving a brief account of the migration narrative telling of Pajok's cosmogony or how the people of Pajok became 'The People of *Jok*' (*Pa-Jok*). Finally, I delineate some significant dimensions of Acholi orientations to time, the world and each other, arguing not only that these dimensions provide a

fundamentally important nuance to the larger structural logics just described, but that they are similarly relevant to Acholi notions of morality, personhood and the state of the world.

Chapter 4 expands on the information provided in Chapter Three by delineating the fundamental Acholi meta-concepts of *jok* and *tipu*. These categories of meta-persons are described and defined and the ways in which they act within and upon Acholi lives explained. As will be demonstrated, these two categories are central within Acholi cosmological systems and orientations and it is impossible to appreciate Acholi being-in-the-world without a deeper understanding of them and the everyday and ritualised practices oriented toward them.

In all senses, Chapter 5 is the central chapter of this thesis. It builds upon the evidence provided in the preceding chapters by not only introducing Pajok manifestations of evangelical cosmological systems and orientations, but also evangelical understandings of morality and personhood as well as the centrality which a personal relationship with God has to these. Special attention is devoted to demonstrating points of similarity with customary cosmological logics and systems and the argument is made that each of these systems has manifold impulses of both individualising and relational qualities, many of which similarly manifest around issues of morality, personhood and relationality.

Part Three comprises the last three substantive chapters – on witchcraft, medicine and poison (Chapter 6); the social and sorcerous life of rumours (Chapter 7); and underwater demonic worlds (*te pii*, Chapter 8) – providing various ethnographic illustrations of how different aspects of the moral tensions involved in negotiating these different cosmologies converge or diverge. This part of the thesis thus gives specific examples of the various moralities at play in the systems being examined. Thus, Chapters 6 to 8 all involve the variable (and often simultaneous) negotiation of the morally ambiguous, in varying ways and by differently positioned people. I suggest these chapters all focus upon different aspects of experience which resemble and might be described as witchcraft-like. And, being things analogous to witchcraft, such matters positively drip with issues of morality and the politics of negotiation. This is true both in a demonic-oriented (or Christian) sense as well as for (usually) more ambivalent indigenous understandings which hold that witchcraft can be both evil yet moral simultaneously (see also Stroeken 2012).

Morality is therefore shown to be a sociocultural phenomenon, with its cosmological dimensions negotiated and experienced in the everyday and specifically situated contexts of varying Pajok lifeworlds. The specifics of the negotiations and manipulations involved highlight my conclusion: that although customary and Christian cosmological systems *are* different and based upon different ideas about morality and moral power (Stroeken 2012), the adoption of one system alongside or on top of the other requires little underlying structural transformation; and further, that because these

different systems address different things, in Pajok such transformations do not require a radical ontological repositioning. In other words, this thesis demonstrates that it is relatively easy for Acholi to adopt or become Christian because, despite any everyday or practical differences, underlying ideas about morality and personhood remain largely similar. This is because both systems are roughly analogous moral cosmologies involving moral power intending to act on similar issues at different planes of existence and experience. That is, Christianity speaks about issues of morality and moral power *vis a vis* the global and the infinite while customary cosmo-ontologies speak to the same issues in regards to the present and the local. In other words, in Pajok there are two complementary systems of moral power working at, towards and upon different scales of existence and experience and these scales map onto different cosmological processes.

### Notes on the Sudanese gunfight

One day in May 2014, King George came to visit myself and Marie (Fig. 3). King is a pastor in the African Inland Church or AIC in Lagi *Boma* (see Chapter 2, also Fig. 4). We had become very good friends, and he often took me to other parts of Magwi County for special preaching or cultural events. He came to visit us this day, he said, because he had been hearing good things about us in the community and was thinking of us with a happy heart. 'The people here really think of you as true community members now', he told us. We thanked him for his kind words and asked why people said that. 'There are four reasons, I think', King replied.<sup>20</sup>

First, because you move around the community and get to know the people and greet everyone as your brothers and sisters. Two, you eat the same food the people eat, and you eat it with them, stopping at their compound, sharing. Most *muni* do not do that. Three, you are treating everyone in the community equally, the old men, the women, the children. That is important and the people have seen that. Four, you stayed in the community even with the troubles, like the war and the cholera.<sup>21</sup>

Staying with the people during the war was very important! Because even some people here left, and others who were supposed to return did not.<sup>22</sup> But you and your wife remained. So when they heard a white man and his wife were living in

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<sup>20</sup> Porter (2013: 30) likewise notes three important aspects which Acholi consider to make someone a 'real' Acholi: having children, using the land, and knowing how to greet correctly.

<sup>21</sup> King George means the conflict resulting from the split in the SPLM/A in December 2013 which still divides the country (see Chapters 1 and 7) and the one confirmed case of cholera Pajok experienced in mid-2014, part of a wider epidemic resulting from overcrowding in refugee camps in Juba in early 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Here King means those among the wider refugee diaspora who were planning to return for Christmas 2013.

Pajok at time of the war and refused to leave, that made those others realise Pajok was safe, and it made them and the people who stayed here understand how you wanted to be real, true sons and daughters of Pajok. Because you stayed even when the UN and all the other *muni* had already left! So that showed that you must really feel together as one with the people here, that you must really love us as brothers and sisters. Because you stayed when even the real sons and daughters of Pajok would not come back.

Much like Geertz (1973) famously noted in his essay on the Balinese cockfight, Marie and I share similar ideas about the moment life in Pajok changed for us and, to use Geertz's phrasing, with 'sudden and unusually complete acceptance into... society' (p.416) we became 'real' (p.413). For Geertz it was an impingement of state power and oppression. For us it was the outbreak of war, likewise a manifestation of state power and oppression but, unlike Geertz, not a sudden, momentary thing. Rather, in Pajok, it was a process of becoming manifest through the slow, shared negotiation and negation of that power and oppression. Part of a wider mode of everyday resistance (Scott 1987) to the powers-that-be who would destroy a country and murder thousands for personal gain.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, as Finnström (2015: S224) has argued, such encounters are generally what most anthropological fieldwork is about: 'the entanglement of the fieldworker's positioning of himself or herself with how he or she is positioned by informants'. And King's visit was one of those moments in which Marie and I really felt we 'belonged'. Parts of fieldwork had been hard. I think it probably always is, no matter the location or the way of life: it is difficult to uproot oneself and enter a foreign world, especially if visibly and culturally different. In retrospect, it seems many of those first months of fieldwork were not so much about doing ethnography but about learning to be Acholi; about becoming Acholi. About re-learning how to do intersubjectivity. Looking back, I think some people in Pajok learned as much as we did about this most basic human existential imperative. I just hope that we made it as easy, enjoyable, and ultimately as fulfilling for them as they did for us.

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<sup>23</sup> I think that the similarities between those evil and nefarious persons who started and continue this war and those who commit the most heinous acts of witchcraft and sorcery should not pass without remark.

## PART 1: PAJOK, AN OVERVIEW

## CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO PAJOK

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### The research site: Pajok *Payam*

At the time of fieldwork between August 2013 and November 2014, Pajok was a predominantly agricultural community on the very southern border of South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State (EES). According to McEvoy & Murray (2008: 12), EES was 'a region experiencing chronic and recurring armed conflict' and 'has been considered one of the most conflict-prone regions in the East and Horn of Africa'. EES had an estimated population of 910,000 in 2011, of whom around 86 per cent were agro-pastoralists (National Bureau of Statistics 2011). Located roughly 140 kilometres southeast of Juba, 40 kilometres south of Magwi, and 30 kilometres north of the Ugandan border, Pajok is the southernmost of Magwi County's nine *payams*, itself one of eight counties in EES (see Maps 3-4).<sup>24</sup>

Situated both historically and contemporaneously in the borderlands of an almost-classic African 'frontier region' (Kopytoff 1986a, 1986b), Pajok *Payam* lies on the border with Uganda's Lamwo District, directly north of Ngomoromo. Much as Hopwood (2015) discovered among the Ugandan community of Ngomoromo, this location means Pajok is highly susceptible to ongoing border disputes and other international tensions, and the Kitgum–Ngomoromo–Pajok–Magwi road functions as a minor trade route (Schomerus & Titeca 2012).<sup>25</sup> This road also connects a wider Acholi ethnic group that many residents consider formerly much better integrated than presently, divided in multiple ways as they are by the international border. The border affects the movement of goods and people and, as elsewhere along its length (Leonardi & Santschi 2016), has become something of a flash-point within inter-community relations.

The 2008 Sudanese census put Pajok's population around 21,000 (Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation 2008). However, Pajok residents relate the 2013 population as around 59,000. This is based on a census allegedly conducted as part of the 2011 referendum on independence. This second figure, although widely cited, is also widely critiqued: as it was seemingly conducted by the Sudanese government, it is considered biased, poorly organised, and therefore not accurate. This leads some locals to estimate the population as anything up to 100,000. The disparity between these numbers is significant, but my own estimates repeatedly put the 2013/2014

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<sup>24</sup> In October 2015, there was an increase in the number of states (from nine to twenty eight), part of the SPLM's tactics of dealing with the escalation in ethnic conflict and fissioning resulting from the current war. The result of this process of 'Federalism' was that Pajok and Magwi County became part of the new Imatong state. Magwi is now one of twelve counties in this new state

<sup>25</sup> For more in-depth analyses of similar cross-border routes in the wider region, see Eaton (2008a, 2008b), Leopold (2009), Titeca and De Herdt (2010), and Titeca and Flynn (2014).

population closer to the 2008 census result. Acholi speakers (from both South Sudan and Uganda) are without doubt the dominant ethno-linguistic group, although there are small numbers of Bari and other ethno-linguistic groups and nationalities.<sup>26</sup>

The name 'Pajok' is used locally to refer to several different administrative, geographic or residential distinctions. For the purposes of definitional clarity, I distinguish between Pajok *Payam*, Pajok town, Pajok *Boma* and Pajok village (in descending order of scale, both territorially and demographically): consisting of five *Bomas*, Pajok *Payam* is an official government administrative area within the wider national administrative hierarchy, seemingly based upon the traditional limits of 'tribal' or ethnic boundaries.<sup>27</sup> Pajok centre is a less conceptually distinct unit and may, at its smallest, refer only to the collection of shops around Pajok's main north-south road or, at its largest extent, refer to all four *Bomas* comprising Pajok town in their entirety. This latter denotation is how the term is used here.<sup>28</sup> Pajok *Boma* is the north-eastern most of Pajok *Payam*'s five *Bomas* and Pajok village is the smallest administrative division within this, important for some low-level jural affairs but irrelevant for the argument presented here. Each of these are separate conceptual entities and most residents are consistent in their distinctions: if they are speaking about Pajok *Payam*, *Boma*, or village, they specifically mention the administrative entity they are referring to; when speaking about Pajok centre, they may simply say 'Pajok', 'centre', or 'town'. Therefore, in this work the unqualified term 'Pajok' refers to Pajok town, where I conducted virtually the entirety of my fieldwork. Likewise, the term '*Payam*' will refer to Pajok *Payam* in its entirety (see Map 5).

Pajok centre is divided in two by the Atebi River (Fig. 5), a narrow and swift-flowing perennial river running from the Imatong Ranges about ten kilometres to the east down through Pajok and off westwards to intersect the Nile River north of Nimule. The river is crossed by a one-lane bridge in the middle of Pajok (Fig. 6), apparently once the only bridge along this stretch of the Atebi and thus strategically important during the Sudanese wars. The five *bomas* of Pajok *Payam* seem to be the lowest level of effective state governance and power. These *bomas* are: the *Payam*'s customary hunting area, Pugee *Boma*, in the south, which runs northward from the Ugandan border to just south of Pajok centre, and then the four 'urban' *Bomas* comprising Pajok centre and its immediate environs. The boundaries of the four urban *Bomas* are those created by the rough quartering effects of the river

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<sup>26</sup> Alongside Dinka, Madi and Nuer South Sudanese, there are also Ghanaians, Kenyans, and non-Acholi Ugandans living in Pajok. There are also many Ugandan-born Acholi who are considered 'local' by having a South Sudanese parent or another historical or kinship tie to the area. This Ugandan Acholi population should be expected given longer historical migratory and marital connections between communities across the border and a population that experienced almost total displacement. This mirrors findings in the neighbouring Lamwo District of Uganda (Hopwood 2015).

<sup>27</sup> This hierarchy runs: Country-State-County-*Payam*-*Boma*-Village.

<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of clarification, I sometimes refers to these four *Bomas* as the 'urban' *Bomas*.

running east–west and the road running north–south. Pajok *Boma* lies in the northeast quadrant (north of the river and east of the road), Lagi *Boma* to the northwest, Lawaci *Boma* is the south-eastern-most of Pajok’s urban *Bomas*, and finally Caigon *Boma* is to the southwest (see Map 5).

These five *Bomas* are divided into twenty-one villages. Rather than being customary or historical cultural units, these villages are the smallest units of governmental administration (Leonardi, Moro, Santschi & Isser 2010: 13).<sup>29</sup> All indigenous residents are considered members of the single larger Pajok *kaka* (clan) and are divided between Pajok’s twenty three *dogola* (lineages).<sup>30</sup> The *kaka* is headed by the hereditary chief, the *Rwot Kwaro* (hereditary or ancestral chief) of *Ywaya pa Rwot*, the ‘royal’ *kaka* (Fig 7). While, as administrative units, the villages are distributed more or less evenly among Pajok’s five *Bomas*, lineages all originate from the four ‘urban’ *Bomas*. Pugee *Boma* does not have any original *dogola*. Instead, the people now living in Pugee are members of the lineages of Pajok centre who settled in this previously ‘unused’ area after their return from exile (around 2007 onwards). All Pajok *dogola* have usufructuary rights to the land and animals in Pugee, although final decisions regarding this land belongs to the *Rwot Kwaro* and his advisers, the *Kal Kwaro* (council of elders, see Appendices 3 and 4).

## A brief history of Pajok

### Early colonial incursions

Pajok and the neighbouring community of Obbo first entered European history and consciousness with the publication of Samuel Baker’s diary *The Albert Nyanza, Great Basin of the Nile* (based on his 1861-1865 expedition) in 1866.<sup>31</sup> Bere (1947:7) suggests 1898 is the year in which ‘modern

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<sup>29</sup> Historically, the Acholi term now rendered ‘village’ would signify a collection of spatially and genealogically connected households (Girling 1960). Thus, a distinction should be made between residential and administrative units. However, as I only use this term when quoting the work of other authors, it generally refers only to the residential structure.

<sup>30</sup> Although Atkinson (2010) states that the term ‘*lobong*’ is the Acholi term for sub-clan or lineage, this term was out rightly rejected by most Pajok residents I spoke with, many of whom said it means ‘slave’ (there are interesting historical dimensions to this distinction, discussion of which, unfortunately, is precluded by issues of space. Suffice to say it may be a result of changing patterns of hierarchy *vis a vis* the refugee experience, see Allen [1987: 71-74]). Additionally, in the interests of staying true to the Pajok vernacular, I depart from Atkinson and follow p’Bitek (1971) by calling the larger customary Pajok political unit a *kaka* or clan (Atkinson would term these a ‘chiefdom’) and the smaller sub-clan units a lineage. This mirrors the way the heteroglossic term ‘clan’ is most often used in Pajok as well as the fact that the term ‘chiefdom’ is usually reserved for speaking about lineages of the *Rwot* (this would be Atkinson’s ‘*kal*’).

<sup>31</sup> This was followed first by *Ismailia* (Baker 1874), about Baker’s quest to end slavery in the region, and then a volume combining abridged versions of both books entitled *In the Heart of Africa* (Baker 1884). In these books, the community currently living on the banks of the Atebi and now known as Pajok was called by the name ‘*Farajoke*’. Further, and probably as an attempt to escape the slave traders just mentioned, Baker actually found

administration' came to the greater Acholi region, and notes a colonial collectorate opened in Nimule in 1899, bringing officer Major Delme-Radcliffe to southern Sudan to begin 'the routine pacification of the country'. Pacification came to Pajok the same year, the result of an agreement between Delme-Radcliffe and Obbo, with whom Pajok were at war. The community was ravaged and Onek, the chief of Pajok, taken prisoner. Another war with Obbo took place in 1909, with Obbo again supported by colonial troops. Allen (1991a: 72) states that 'the British came and captured many people from Pajok and took many cattle [as] compensation... It seems to be widely accepted in the area that this British intervention was unjust'. After these early incursions, a boundary rectification trek was undertaken to survey existing 'tribal' boundaries and recommend where the future Sudan/Uganda border should be placed. Despite trek leader Kelly's wishes, Ugandan representatives did not believe Acholi existed north of the current border and Pajok and Obbo became part of Sudan (Kelly 1997).

Even following the apparent 'successes' of these early colonial incursions, the long rainy season and often impassable terrain meant, unlike among Acholi communities in northern Uganda, the real impact of colonial administration remained virtually non-existent years later. With the community maintaining a semi-migratory lifestyle until finally occupying their current position on the Atebi sometime between 1940 and 1942, both the contemporary and historical Pajok communities were surrounded by mountains as well as heavy vegetation, particularly during the March to November wet season. This isolated the community from not only the closest government outposts at Torit to the northeast and Nimule to the west, but even more so from the colonial or government seats in Gulu, Juba or Khartoum (see Map 4). In fact, as it happened so rarely, many of Pajok's oldest persons can not only remember the first *munu* (white person) they saw in Pajok (generally around the 1940s) but also can distinctly recall many early colonial impositions (see Appendices 3 and 4).<sup>32</sup>

Exclusion from the global economy was also a consequence of the lack of colonial penetration in Acholi South Sudan, and another form of historical differentiation between the Acholi of Sudan and those of the Ugandan Protectorate. Unlike the colonial administration of northern Uganda, that of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was much too distant and preoccupied to attempt colonising, taxing, or conscripting the Acholi and other southern peoples until much later in the twentieth century (see also Leonardi 2015). Not only was the area expensive and time consuming to govern, but it was difficult and inefficient to establish cash or market-based economies.

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them living in the Imatong Ranges. Langlands (1968: 10-12; see also Atkinson 2010) notes that such forms of nucleated hilltop settlement were common Nilotic responses to slavery.

<sup>32</sup> Such as demand for labour to clear forests and build roads, in return for being allowed to move to a permanent water source, the site of the community's current position.

It was not until around World War II and the waning years of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1952) that colonial government began effectively intervening in community affairs. At this time, not only was a coherent system of indigenous administration and control instituted (feeding into the wider colonial system and effectively continuing as the *Payam* system with its '*Payam*' or 'government' chiefs), but local soldiers were enlistment within colonial forces. According to several of Pajok's oldest men, it was the wider effects of these twin processes which led to the Sudanese wars.

Community members who remember Pajok's early colonial period point out that during the Condominium there was little sustained contact between Acholi South Sudanese and other groups further north.<sup>33</sup> These same people generally acknowledge that the decades of civil war that effectively divided Sudan from 1955 (even before independence in 1956) until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 resulted from increasing – and increasingly racist and oppressive – contact between Acholi (and similar peoples)<sup>34</sup> and the groups who eventually became the predominantly Islamic-dominated governments of the Sudanese state. These wars led to multiple wholesale displacements and decades spent as refugees in neighbouring countries, the experience of which has significantly shaped the local community in multiple ways.

#### War, exile, return, repeat

Anyanya I,<sup>35</sup> or The First Sudanese War (1955-1972), began as a southern independence movement led by officers within the Sudanese military establishment and ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement (O'Ballance 1977). During this conflict, nearly the entire population of Magwi County fled, most either into the Imatong Mountains or Uganda. After eleven years of relative peace, war reignited in September 1983 with the Sudanese government's decision to impose Sharia law on the self-governing southern states (Hutchinson & Jok 2002; Institute of Security 2004). Along with widespread social, political, and economic discrimination, a combination of global geopolitical, economic, and Cold War interests were other dominant causal factors in both conflicts.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Who, in local terms, are often glossed by one of the ideologically connected terms 'Arab'-'Khartoum'-'Muslim'-'Northerner'.

<sup>34</sup> Who together are often described by the interchangeable terms 'black', 'African', 'black African', or simply 'Sudanese' or 'South Sudanese'.

<sup>35</sup> I follow local vernacular and term the two Sudanese civil wars Anyanya I and Anyanya II. These wars are named after the Anyanya uprising which sparked the First Sudanese War (called in Pajok by the name 'Anyanya I'). By naming the Second Sudanese War 'Anyanya II', Pajok locals note the continuities and similarities between them.

<sup>36</sup> The root causes of these wars stem from a long history of marginalisation, segregation, and a hierarchy of religion, culture, and tradition dating well before the imposition of colonial rule, with the second war largely stemming from the continuing effects of southern Sudan's political and economic marginalisation (Annan & Brier 2010; Hutchinson 2001; Hutchinson & Jok 2002; Johnson 2011; Jok & Hutchinson 1999; Schomerus 2007, 2008a,

It is estimated Anyanya II (1983-2005) killed over two million and caused a further four to five million refugees (Morrison & De Waal 2005: 162; see also Hutchinson & Jok 2002). The second conflict came to Pajok in 1989, when Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) forces launched a surprise attack on the area, leading to the region's first widespread displacement of the war (Fig. 8). Although remaining a government stronghold for several years, the SPLA eventually captured the area in 1991. Further, from 1991 onwards, EES was continually affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) supported by the Sudanese government. When pro-government forces recaptured Magwi County in 1993, Pajok became an LRA training area. This led to Pajok's last major population displacement, after which the area remained virtually deserted. During this period, the LRA attacked towns and refugee camps across the wider region and between 1991-2007 over 85% of Magwi County's population were displaced (Institute of Security 2004). There were numerous LRA attacks throughout Magwi County after Anyanya II ended in 2005, including on Pajok. However, by early 2006 most LRA had left and refugees began returning (Schomerus 2007; 2008b). The majority of displaced persons have returned since mid-2007, with the largest movements being in 2008 (following total LRA withdrawal) and in anticipation of independence in late 2010 (Human Rights Watch 2009; O'Byrne 2012; Schomerus 2008a, 2008b; UNHCR 2007).

Many of the present populace have therefore been refugees for some period of their lives, sometimes up to three times,<sup>37</sup> and almost everyone between the ages of ten to thirty were born in exile. Beyond this, just as among communities in northern Uganda (Annan & Brier 2010; Baines 2005, 2010; Blattman & Annan 2009; Edmondson 2005), several of my closest interlocutors told me of their experiences of abduction at the hands of either one or both of the LRA or the SPLA during the course of Anyanya II, most of which happened to them as children or youth between 1989 and 1993. When inquiring further into these matters, while difficult to quantify, such experiences seem at least widespread enough to be termed commonplace. As can likely be assumed, these experiences were generally described as not only harrowing but life changing. Nonetheless, at least from the perspective of those people to whom I spoke about such matters most frequently, these experiences were also generally considered to be confined to the past and of limited importance in a post-conflict, post-

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2008b). As Schomerus (2008b:18; see also Abdel Salam & de Waal 2001; Burton 1985; Leonardi 2015) notes, 'religious and tribal identities did not cause the war but were exploited by the warring parties'. The popular media misconception of a purely religious basis of the conflicts positing a 'fundamentalist Islamic North' engaging in genocidal violence against Christian or animist southerners desperately fighting for freedom is, I suggest, a variation of the 'Islamophobia' common in much Western discourse (particularly since the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks). See Salomon (2013: 2) for similar criticisms of portrayals of the Sudanese conflicts.

<sup>37</sup> Since initially writing this thesis, the political and economic differences underlying South Sudan's newest and ongoing conflict (December 2013 – present) have also come to Pajok, albeit in an abbreviated and much less violent form than it has been felt elsewhere in the country. Many people have therefore fled across the border to Uganda, again becoming refugees, some now for the fourth time in six decades.

independence and post-return context. To give just one ethnographic example of this – something I was told multiple times throughout fieldwork – one interlocutor said ‘the reason I like talking with you is that you do not ask about the war. In [Kiryandongo refugee camp in] Uganda, all the *muni* (white people) ever wanted to talk about was the war or the sickness (HIV/AIDS)’, as if it was self-evident these were the only things that defined his life. As Porter (2013: 220; see also Finnström 2015) has argued, ‘the war is not the beginning and end of Acholi experience or what is important to them’.

After all, as Theidon (2013: 6) has persuasively argued, ‘wars are [not only] fought. They are also told, and the telling is always steeped in relations of power’. These tellings happen not only at or within local worlds, but, as Allen (2015b) and Finnström (2015) have shown, within humanitarian and academic worlds as well. Therefore, what we write, how we write it, and how we get the data we write about are also steeped in power relations (Whitehead 2013; Whitehead & Finnström 2013a). Because of this, I do not want to focus too heavily on the role of conflict or violence as the dominant existential moment or transformation in either Pajok specifically or South Sudan more generally: when speaking about this research with others, I have noted a distinct tendency for them to focus almost instinctively upon violence as the most important aspect of life in South Sudan, and then to determine all other processes or factors as derivative of this. Such reasoning imputes a common-sense causal relation I am hesitant to promote: while it *may* be true the Sudanese wars and their effects were the most important aspects of life in South Sudan, and while the effects of these *may* lead to processes of religious conversion and a specific set of interrelated cosmological practices, there is no *necessary* reason why this should be so *a priori*. This must always remain a matter of empirical investigation. As with Cannell’s (2005: 350) critique of generalisations linking Christianity and modernity, we should be equally wary of necessarily linking conflict and sociocultural change.

After all, anthropological analyses of war and peace draw attention to the conflict within all social life, with warfare being simply one expression. Indeed, Richards (2005: 5; see also Bajracharya 2015; Lubkemann 2010; Whitehead & Finnström 2013a) warns against over-simplified war/peace dichotomies that analytically neglect peace. Furthermore, peace is not a condition occurring with the officially-recognised end of conflict, as forms of violent social struggle often continue throughout periods officially regarded as peaceful. Therefore, I prefer to view conflict as one of Pajok’s many structuring contexts. On the other hand, it would be naive and disingenuous to suggest there are no continuing effects from South Sudan’s violent past or that it has no bearing on current everyday realities. Therefore, rather than giving violence a central structuring focus, as analysis proceeds I will draw attention to the continuing effects of conflict where appropriate and as I deem relevant, just as I do with any other contributing factor, such as poverty or modernity.

## Christianity in Pajok

One result of these conflicts is that many Pajok residents say the combined effects of almost twenty years as refugees, the introduction of Christianity, and the increasing proliferation of a cash economy are bringing rapid changes to how people think and act, particularly around religion. In this section, I set out Christianity's history in Pajok, discuss the particularities of the different mission initiatives that have taken place, and demonstrate how these have contributed to the bifurcation of the local religious field. I suggest that, for general heuristic purposes, the history of Christianity in Pajok has three distinct phases. Each of these relates to a particularly salient moment in global and regional history, and each has its distinctive driving force and character. These phases are: firstly, the coming of colonial-linked Catholicism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; secondly, the arrival of the African Inland Church (AIC) and Protestantism in the 1970s; and lastly, entanglements with Americanised Fundamentalist Protestantism stemming from refugee camp experiences in Uganda in the 1990s and continuing today.

It is important to note here that the differences between the AIC and the Church of Christ (COC), Evangelical Free Church (EFC), or any other evangelical Protestant denomination in Pajok seem to be mostly theological or philosophical rather than cosmological or ontological in nature. That is, these differences seem to be more about variant interpretations of the same underlying cosmological and ontological structures rather than different orientations toward God, Christ, or the world in general. Certainly, there is more cosmological unity to the various manifestations of Protestantism in Pajok than any of these *outwardly* share with either customary or Catholic cosmological frameworks.

### *Catholicism and the First Wave of Christianisation*

The first wave of missionaries to Acholi were the Verona Brothers (later renamed the Comboni Brothers), who arrived in the first decade of the twentieth century (Langlands 1968: 6; p'Bitek 1971: 44; Russell 1966: 3). Concerned more with mass conversion than social and cultural overhaul, Verona missionaries were remarkably successful in establishing a dominant Catholic majority within Acholi. Certainly, by 1939, up to 90% of the Acholi population had become Catholic or Anglican (Russell 1966: 1) and it is estimated the current Catholic population of Acholi in Uganda and South Sudan is nearly 2 million or around 75% (Quinn 2010: 6).

Despite the exact entry of Christianity into Pajok being uncertain, the first local Catholic chapels were built at Ayaci in 1927 and Palotaka in 1935.<sup>38</sup> Like other early missions among Acholi, this had an

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<sup>38</sup> Although Langlands (1968: 6) and Russell (1966: 3) suggest penetration into northern and eastern Acholi began from 1903.

almost immediate effect: many older people in Pajok directly trace their own or their parents' conversion or baptism to the opening of these two chapels and it is difficult to find someone who does not associate with at least some Christian denomination. This repeats patterns noted among Acholi and surrounding peoples elsewhere (Cisterno 2004; La Salandra 1979; Quinn 2010).

*The arrival of the AIC: the Second Wave of Christianisation*

Arriving in Pajok in 1976, the first Protestant church in the area was the African Inland Mission (AIM), which reached Sudan as part of an idealised coast-to-coast (Congo to Kenya) church planting operation in 1949 with the support of the Church Mission Society and the Anglican Church of England (AIM 2016). Until the early 1990s, the AIC was the only Protestant denomination in Pajok and most of Pajok's contemporary Protestant leadership became members of the AIC under the auspices of a single pastor in the 1970s-1980s. After fifty years converting southern Sudanese to their particular brand of Africanised evangelical Protestantism, in 1999 the mission component of the AIM withdrew, leading to the Sudanese branch of AIM being rebranded as an independent Church (the AIC).

In 1964 the Sudanese government expelled all foreign Christian missions and churches from Sudanese national territory (Burton 1985; Hutchinson 2001) with much of Sudan becoming effectively denuded of Christian influence. As Hutchinson (2001: 316; 1996) notes, except for a 'small, urbanised, educated elite, Christianity... made very little headway into rural regions' further north before the outbreak of Anyanya II in 1983. The effects of evangelisation at this time were considered so small, in fact, that Burton (1985) wrote an entire article trying to 'account for the relative failure of evangelical Christianity in three pastoral, Nilotic-speaking communities of the southern Sudan, the Dinka, Nuer, and Atuot'. However, there has been a significant if unquantifiable uptake of 'mainline' Christianity in southern Sudan since then, demonstrated by the following passage from the website of the Christian developmental organisation, Worldshare: 'In 1984, there were only 10 local [African Independent Churches]<sup>39</sup> churches in one district in a remote part of southern Sudan. Today, there are hundreds of churches across the nation' (Worldshare 2013).<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, while the spread and influence of

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<sup>39</sup> The designation 'African Independent Church' was given its basic formulation by David Barrett: 'The formation and existence...of an organised religious movement with a distinct name and membership that claims the title Christian in that it acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has either separated by secession from a mission church, or has been founded outside the mission as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership' (Barrett 1968: 50, cited in Engelke 2007: 253).

<sup>40</sup> Worldshare are a Christian organisation that 'in the world's neediest places... responds to the vision of local Christians to bring lasting change to their communities' (Worldshare 2013).

Christianity may have suffered further north, it is to this exact period that AIC congregations across Acholi South Sudan trace their development.

*Americanised Bible literalism and the Third Wave of Christianisation*

Pajok's connection to the world of 'Westernised' Protestantism did not cease with either the forced removal of Christianity in the rest of Sudan in 1964 nor with the rebranding and refocus of the AIM/AIC in 1999. Instead, the almost wholesale flight of the Pajok populace during Anyanya II (1983-2005) led to two important entanglements with contemporary global Christianity, both of which are tied into wider processes of Christianisation taking place in contemporary South Sudan. I term this the 'Third Wave of Christianisation': the rapid expansion and promulgation of conservative, Bible literalist, Americanised evangelical Protestantism.

The resettlement of Pajok refugees in countries like Australia, the UK and the USA during the 1990s and early 2000s saw many church leaders leave their previous churches to join others, sometimes with radically different doctrines. Over time, this refugee resettlement has re-focused much of Pajok's spiritual power away from local churches towards international or diasporic congregations with greater resources and training. As these pastors intermittently return to Pajok – especially for the Christmas and funeral festivities which fill much of December – so new doctrinal orientations come with them. As such, due to the influence, prestige, and money of these overseas pastors and their teachings, local branches of the 'Second Wave' AIC and its EFC off-shoot (the Evangelical Free Church) have begun (re)producing forms of charismatic evangelical Christianity similar to those being introduced and spread by 'Third Wave' mission churches.

Secondly, following the signing of the CPA between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A (Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army) in 2005 and a referendum on secession in early 2011, decades of civil war ended with South Sudan's independence in July 2011 (Schomerus 2011). The new state granted Western churches greater access and evangelising became considered relatively 'safe'. Consequently, there has been a growth in the numbers of evangelical churches and converts in the country, with some estimates putting evangelical Christians around 15% of the current population (Joshua Project 2013b).

Alongside the Catholic and AIC majority, Pajok currently contains a mixture of local and foreign (mainly USA funded and influenced) 'Third Wave' churches. The most largest and most obvious of these Third Wave missions is the USA-based and funded non-denominationalist Church of Christ (COC) and their

mission outreach initiative, The Sudan Project.<sup>41</sup> Since beginning work in the area in 2010 they have built a bible school, a church and a medical centre. They have also funded a variety of humanitarian or development initiatives, including two major future commitments: a much-needed maternity centre still in the beginning stages of construction when I completed fieldwork in November 2014, and a planned series of around twenty boreholes and water pumps.<sup>42</sup> The decision to build a maternity centre was made after community consultation but its expected completion date is unknown. The boreholes were due to be constructed in conjunction with Healing Hands International in early 2014, but the outbreak of the current conflict and the unknown security situation has delayed the project. Such initiatives have brought a number of converts to the COC, a pattern of membership some other churches criticise, often suggesting the COC is 'buying' a congregation.

#### *A denominational topography of religion in Pajok*

By the community's own count, the *Payam* is home to eight Christian denominations as well as a small group of Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), a religion most locals do not regard as Christian.<sup>43</sup> Church membership therefore repeats contemporary patterns of church membership found elsewhere in Africa (Engelke 2007; Meyer 2004), as well as parts of Oceania (Barker 2008; Eriksen 2009). In order of estimated size, the eight denominations in Pajok are:

1. the Roman Catholic Church;
2. the Africa Inland Church (AIC);
3. the Church of Christ (COC);
4. the Evangelical Free Church (EFC), who split from the AIC in the mid-1990s;
5. the recently arrived Presbyterian Church;
6. the evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC);
7. the Living Christ Ministry (LCM), a breakaway group of the COC; and
8. Calvary Chapel in Pugee.

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<sup>41</sup> The Sudan Project is a collection of autonomous Church of Christ congregations from across the USA who are associated with one another through common beliefs and practices commonly designated as Bible literalist, non-denominational, and Christian fundamentalist. As mission outreach initiative, they form the humanitarian division of the Church of Christ churches.

<sup>42</sup> The original plan was to deliver fourteen boreholes but, during community consultation, a number 'closer to twenty' was decided upon (Humphreys, pers. comm. 2014).

<sup>43</sup> This is because 'they do not follow the whole Bible' and 'they do not worship on the correct day (i.e. Sunday)', among other reasons.

As well as the SDA mentioned above, there is one widely-disparaged family of Baha'i, disliked because they are 'trying to steal the young people from the True churches'.<sup>44</sup> Further, Pajok has previously had a now-defunct branch of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) and a Baptist Church since 'rebranded' as the ELC.

Breaking down these denominations by location is important in a religious field where the majority of church goers are women and children not only without access to vehicular transport but also expected to complete domestic chores before attending service. This breakdown is:

1. Lawaci *Boma*, four different church compounds:<sup>45</sup> two EFC, one in the centre and the other around five kilometres east into the surrounding settlements; an essentially non-functional ELC; and the large Catholic compound of St Cecilia's at the site of the first church in Pajok on the road south to Pugee;
2. Lagi *Boma*, three denominations: the smaller of Pajok centre's two AIC compounds, built mainly from temporary materials; the main COC facility on the road north to Magwi; and an ELC deep in the surrounding settlements;
3. Pugee *Boma*, three denominations: a small, local AIC; the recently started Calvary Chapel; and an older Catholic compound;
4. Caigon *Boma*, two denominations: the large, concrete structure of St Andrews which dominates the area around the original AIC school and compound; and the tiny LCM, a splinter church from COC, based at Pajok Primary School.
5. Finally, Pajok *Boma* – apparently the *Boma* with the greatest population – has only two churches, both of which only opened toward the end of fieldwork. These are a Catholic congregation worshipping at Iyele Secondary School, which started to try and encourage more people to attend services; and a Presbyterian Church deep in the bush about five kilometres east of Pajok centre which many people consider too far away to attend.

#### On Pajok's contemporary religious field

It is during the expansion of Americanised Protestantism linked to the Third Wave of Christianisation that all non-AIC Protestant denominations arrived in Pajok, beginning with the EFC and COC who came

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<sup>44</sup> In fact, several members of other denominations told me that the *Baha'i* was really a Demonic church involved with deviant sexuality and other practices.

<sup>45</sup> Where relevant throughout this thesis, I distinguish between 'church' and 'denomination', with the term 'denomination' used to refer to entirely different Christian groups while the term 'church' is used to refer to different branches within the same denomination. Thus, there are three distinct churches within the AIC denomination, for example.

with returning refugees in 2007. The other Protestant denominations have arrived later. Indeed, new churches arrive all the time. The small Calvary Chapel began in Pugee in late 2012 and, as mentioned above, the Presbyterian Church was started in early 2014 by South Korean missionaries who were given land to build a school and church in Pajok *Boma*. Following fissioning of the COC over internal doctrinal differences in mid-2014, the LCM joined the community.

The effects of Anyanya II on church composition in contemporary Pajok cannot be discounted, just as wider processes of globalisation and colonialism should not either. Indeed, except for the Presbyterians (who derive from South Korea) and the EFC (resulting from one pastor's experience of the AIC hierarchy during Anyanya II), every other Third Wave denomination is the outcome of English-speaking foreign influence, either refugee resettlement in places like Australia or the USA, or the actions of mostly American missionaries in Ugandan refugee camps like Acholi-Pii, Hoima or Kiryandongo.

But statements of effective correlation (that the majority of Pajok's Protestant churches as well as their membership are associated with refugee experiences) and direct causation are two entirely different entities. The latter is more simple and less multifaceted than the former, empirically difficult to ascertain without resorting to meaningless tautologies (the reason refugee life caused a proliferation of Christianity is because people experienced life as refugees), making assumption-driven psychologisms (people became Christian because they needed hope or fulfilment or so on), or privileging reductionist material determinisms (people joined a denomination because they would gain from it). The first of these overly-easy causal statements conveniently chooses to forget those who did not convert, while the second and third neglect any empirical basis whatsoever, preferring the predetermined results of their own hypotheses. In all cases, messy and complex social and historical realities as well as a multitude of other possible causes and negotiations are forgotten, set aside for easy answers. Let me just say that, in nearly a year and a half of research, many people told me they became evangelical during exile in Uganda.<sup>46</sup> However, *no-one* said that *they themselves* had become evangelical for any one of the myriad or popular psychological or material determinants usually favoured by other, non-evangelical Pajok residents, as well as some academics, missionaries and NGOs. Thus these are all equally empirically unsatisfactory.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Which should not be surprising: as a totalising life experience of two decades duration, this is the context within which all social and individual life took place, and thus meaningless as a determining or explanatory factor. It would be just as true to say that the war – but what war? – was the cause of many people getting married, or of many people getting old.

<sup>47</sup> I must highlight that both evangelicals and non-evangelicals are fond of describing other people's conversion experiences as being due to material concerns, meaning these others 'became' evangelical because they thought they would get food, money, or so on from it. However, as no one ever admitted as much, the empirical veracity

## Epistemology, methodology, positionality

### General methodological principles

As I also discuss further in Chapter 2, my understanding of the cosmological is purposefully broad, incorporating not only cosmologies as principles of thought and meaning about the structure and ordering of the universe, but also bracketing off any ideological position on the ontological veracity of cosmological meta-persons. If such beings are true for local peoples' whose lives they are considered to affect – as they very much are, to a greater or lesser extent, for almost everyone I spoke with in Pajok – then questioning their ontological position is, I argue, analytically and methodologically moot. This is because if the people with whom we conduct research practically organise their lives around the existence of meta-persons, then for the purposes of social science their empirical existence is beside the point.<sup>48</sup>

The first question to ask when interpreting African religions, Horton (1971: 93) suggests, is 'Why spiritual beings?' In an ontological sense, this is an important question: why, indeed, *spiritual* beings? And conversely, what makes them 'spiritual'?<sup>49</sup> Such questions demonstrate a common anthropological failing: an *a priori* presupposition on the 'non-reality' of supernatural meta-persons. After all, Poloma (2001: 173) argues that, beset by the limitations of personal or methodological atheism, social scientists are unable to take 'things as they are' (Jackson 1996): as they assume they 'know' (or should that be 'believe'?) supernatural meta-persons and phenomena are empirically non-existent, such things are relegated to the epiphenomenal (Engelke 2002: 3; Ewing 1994: 571).

Further to this is a point of methodological importance: it is beyond both the scope and the techniques of social science to determine the ontological veracity of meta-persons. Moreover, rather being than an aspect of the data, to attempt such verification may be no more than the researcher imposing their

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of such an ascription is difficult to determine. This does not mean that it did not or does not happen, that people did or do not become evangelical for precisely these (predominantly materialist) reasons. It simply means that for the people who I spoke with, there just happens to be no evidence upon which to make this argument. In this case, it seems answering the question, 'how has it changed' is less reductive than answering 'why has it changed'.

<sup>48</sup> In the argument I develop, I set aside the question of belief. As Asad (1993), Lindquist and Coleman (2008), Needham (1972) and Ruel (1982) have all demonstrated, due to its Eurocentric linguistic and conceptual baggage, analytical use of the term 'belief' is a thorny proposition. Moreover, to me the term connotes a quality of 'less real' to the object(s) of belief which I am not only reticent to impute but which are also largely impossible to determine. Finally, there are important differences in the English meaning of the term 'believe' and what it has come to mean to Acholi Christians. For a brief discussion of 'belief' in Acholi religious practice, see note 66.

<sup>49</sup> As Sahlins (2016) argued, for many of the peoples with whom we work, these meta-persons are very definitely *not* spirits: in many cases, if not necessarily 'material' or 'physical' – although some meta-persons otherwise called 'spirits' definitively are – they often very definitely occupy 'material' or 'physical' worlds. As I demonstrate later, this is certainly true of the Acholi. Further, as Sahlins (2016) also argued, just as with 'belief', the term 'spiritual' has its own Western and Christian conceptual baggage.

own ideologies upon the subject. Methodological atheism therefore has its conceptual and analytical limitations, and epistemological questioning can only say so much about meta-persons and the ways they act in people's lives. As Poloma (2001: 173) argues:

While it is impossible to demonstrate that the divine does in fact communicate directly to humans using the methodological tools of social science, it is equally impossible to prove that the divine does not do so. What is possible to demonstrate using a social scientific perspective is that many people believe that they are in dialogue and interaction with God and that their definition of the situation has real social consequences.<sup>50</sup>

Engelke (2007: 11-12; Meyer 2004: 452-454) further notes that if such things are considered important to the people we work among, then they must be important to the ethnographer, despite any personal misgivings. Such a statement agrees with my basic methodological position and signposts the means through which my argument will proceed: by means of a 'radical empiricism' (Csordas 1994; Jackson 1989; Stoller 1989) presenting the ethnographically important, no matter my own ontological position or existing anthropological dogma. For example, despite apparent orthodoxies demanding the individualism of Christian persons, Acholi evangelicals in Pajok demonstrate, live and embody a distinct relationality to their personhood.

Instead, if we wish to understand the realities of the people we study, we must come to terms with their worlds *in their own terms*. The lives, actions, and understandings of those we study must be taken seriously. This is especially true for ethnographers working with people for whom the 'spiritual' is important or to whom meta-persons unquestioningly exist. Barth (1990: 8) observed 'we must always struggle to get our ontological assumptions right: to ascribe to our object of study only those properties and capabilities that we have reasonable ground to believe it to possess', and Scott (2007: 3) notes this means grounding analyses 'in local histories and social processes so that such analyses arise and reference, not putatively universal logics and their permutations, but empirical events – lived realities, interactions, perceptions, dilemmas, and innovations'. Therefore, I suggest we should gather our ontological assumptions from our interlocutors rather than our own cultural backgrounds.

However, as Biehl and Locke argue, this does not mean:

Giv[ing] up on explanation or the careful discernment of relations of causality and affinity in social...phenomena. The question, rather, lies in our receptivity to others,

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<sup>50</sup> Kant (1983: 102, cited in Schrempf 1992: 16) likewise argued that 'the question [of cosmological speculation] does not concern the objective of validity of metaphysical judgements but [rather] our natural predisposition to them, and therefore does not belong to the system of metaphysics but to anthropology'.

in what kinds of evidence we assemble and use—the voices to which we listen and the experiences we account for—and in how we craft our explanations: whether our analytics remain attuned to the intricacy, openness, and unpredictability of individual and collective lives (2010: 318).

After all, as Englund and Leach (2000: 236, emphasis in original) recall, ‘the gist of... ethnography is to remind us of the *anthropological* insight that the ethnographer can never assume prior knowledge of the contexts of people’s concerns’. Indeed, Fardon (1990: 218) suggests any approach that defines the terms and entities of analysis prior to investigation invariably does so by ‘rendering marginal the most important commentators – the performers themselves’. I therefore see my approach as synchronising well with the philosophies and methods underlying those recursive anthropological engagements seeking to render ethnographic encounters meaningful within indigenous terms.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Ethnography, participant observation and intersubjectivity*

I define my methods as ‘ethnographic’. This includes a wide array of data gathering techniques including participation, observation, interviewing, and narrative analysis (Kawulich 2005). My methodology was grounded in sixteen month participant observation-based fieldwork. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2007: 352), participant observation involves ‘establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting’. This methodology remains the basis of much anthropology because, as Jackson (1996: 9) argues, it ‘brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground’. In other words, participation ‘can tell us things that words... cannot’ (Stroeken 2012: 38).

Following Finnström (2015: S222), I understand the strengths of anthropological methodologies to be inherently based in ‘the intersubjectivity of fieldwork where facts, evidence, and truths are made and realised’. Such an anthropology, Jackson (2005: xxvii) argues, is one ‘whose object is to understand, through empirical means and expedient comparisons, the eventualities, exigencies and experiences of social Being’. As Tilly (1994: 11) has noted, the key issue to grasp in such a methodology ‘is the manner in which people experience and understand the world’. To engage in an intersubjective

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<sup>51</sup> For example, see Abramson (2013), Abramson and Holbraad (2012, 2014), Holbraad (2010, 2012), and Viveiros de Castro (2007, 2009).

methodology is therefore to attempt 'to give an account of the texture and feel of human experience – the experience of experience' (Cassaniti & Luhrmann 2011: 37), something which Desjarlais and Throop (2011: 88) have called 'those unexamined assumptions that organise our prereflective engagement with reality'.

Accordingly, as Csordas (1994: 10) has argued,

The distinction between representation and being-in-the-world is methodologically critical, for it is the difference between understanding culture in terms of objectified abstraction and existential immediacy. Representation is fundamentally nominal, and hence we can speak of "a representation". Being-in-the-world is fundamentally conditional, and hence we must speak of "existence" and "lived experience"<sup>52</sup>.

Paying analytic attention to being-in-the-world, therefore becomes a methodological manoeuvre which actively 'stands against [the] fetishisation of the products of intellectual reflection,... a way of according equal weight to all modalities of human experience... and deconstructing the ideological trappings they take on when they are theorised' (Jackson 1996: 1). Such a position is, I suggest, essential to the anthropological study of personhood. After all, as Riesman argued in his review of personhood in Africa, 'our understanding of the self – whether in general or in any particular culture – is severely limited without the aid of a phenomenological perspective' (1986: 102).

Therefore, as the basis of all human social life is intersubjective – 'Natural man did not precede society, nor is he outside it', as Lévi-Strauss (2012: 392) notes – fully engaged participant observation should also be based in the intersubjective. This implies that the meanings and understandings forming research findings should come directly out of the researcher's relationships and interactions with people with whom they live. It means engaging in the activities these people engage in, living as closely as possible to how they live and, importantly for Acholi, eating the food they eat. It means meeting, greeting, and moving among the community like another fully participating social person. It requires the social and emotional knowledge and maturity to know when to ask questions, when to give answers, when to participate, and when simply to observe. Importantly, it requires taking the time and effort to build actually significant interpersonal relationships, rather than just asking questions.

Consequently, I follow Jackson along a methodological line of flight to intersubjectivity (Jackson 1998) precisely because it is within the intersubjective encounter that I understand the social and the

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<sup>52</sup> Following Jackson (1989: 2, emphasis in original), 'lived experience accommodates our shifting sense of ourselves as subjects and as objects, as acting upon and being acted upon by the world, of living with and without certainty, of belonging and being estranged, *yet resists arresting any one of these modes of experience in order to make it foundational to a theory of knowledge*'.

cultural as well as anthropological knowledge to all be (re)produced and (re)constructed. As Jackson (1996: 26) observed, ‘the task for anthropology is to recover the sense in which experience is situated within relationships and between persons if the lifeworld is to be explored as a field of intersubjectivity and not reduced to objective structures or subjective intentions’. Or again, ‘it is because lived experience is never identical with the concepts we use to grasp and represent it that I want to insist, along with Sartre and Adorno, on its dialectical irreducibility’ (Jackson 1989: 2).

In terms of this research, this included obviously attending the church services, weddings, funerals and other community gatherings that help to structure interpersonal social relations. It also included involvement in aspects of daily and annual life as mundane as planting, weeding and harvesting family fields; or fetching water from a river nearly one kilometre away so as to drink, bathe and wash our clothes. Both ethically and methodologically important for me, my methods also involved things like sitting under the shade of a mango tree to chat and do women’s work like removing kernels from maize or de-shelling groundnuts, even if such actions were often greeted with great amusement and laughter from many of those who might be around (including, at first, my research assistant Obwoya [Fig. 9]).<sup>53</sup> After all, as Finnström (2015: S224) argues, ‘we build our ethnography by way of the relationships that we establish in the process’. In this way, the anthropological endeavour is just as relational – perhaps even just as dividual – as those of the social worlds many of us work in. I hope the qualities of some of my more important relationships come out in the following ethnography.

#### *Research conducted for the Justice and Security Research Programme*

As well as my own PhD research, I twice undertook specific security and justice-related research for the Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP), an interdisciplinary research consortium at the London School of Economics and Political Science. A Mapping Paper was the first of these and between November and December 2013 I investigated local experiences of justice and security in order to produce a context-specific analysis of the ‘structures of authority that define end-users’ access to justice, protection, and security’ in Pajok (O’Byrne 2015e: 1; see also O’Byrne 2014c, 2014d, 2015b, 2015c). In the interests of supporting as much cross-site comparison as possible, this research adapted the survey and interview tools employed across all JSRP research sites.<sup>54</sup> These were specifically

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<sup>53</sup> These are women’s tasks, as is fetching water or firewood for general compound use (a man may fetch water or wood for ritual or political but not domestic purposes). A boy generally looks forward to the day when he will no longer have to help the women of his natal compound with such tasks, as this is an indication of his nearly-adult (youth) status. When I engaged in such activities – I particularly enjoyed fetching water, especially during the dry season, as it also meant a quick swim and welcome relief from the often oppressive dust and heat – it at first prompted a lot of stares, comments and laughter. People soon seemed to get used to it.

<sup>54</sup> These are: Central African Republic; Democratic Republic of Congo; South Sudan; and northern Uganda.

created to establish baseline information for future investigation in similar places. Overall, this research included twenty interviews and four focus groups, with the target groups being: women; younger women; men (not the subject of a focus group); younger men; and local authorities.<sup>55</sup>

The second piece of JSRP research took place during March 2014. This research aimed to ‘contribute a grounded and empirically rigorous analysis of the important but significantly under-researched and under-appreciated [cosmological dimensions] of end-users’ everyday experiences of (in)security and (in)justice’ (O’Byrne 2015a: 4; see also O’Byrne 2014e, 2015d). As well as ethnographic insights, this investigation involved forty semi-structured formal interviews with a total of forty-three community members, including nineteen women over eleven interviews and twenty-five males over thirty-three interviews. Due to the nature of Acholi social organisation, most participants were elderly men (*lodito*, sing. *ladit*), reflecting both the gerontocratic as well as the patrilineal and patriarchal nature of normative social relations. I initially compiled a list of fourteen ‘ideal’ interviewees through recommendation of close interlocutors,<sup>56</sup> with a snowball technique used to find further participants.

Accordingly, this thesis incorporates data from wider ethnographic research as well as the sixty semi-structured interviews and four focus groups conducted for JSRP and many formal and informal conversations over sixteen months of fieldwork. As priority is given to ethnographic and participant observation methodologies and the ethics and epistemologies of intersubjectivity, the argument in particular is especially based upon ongoing observations of and participation within the community.

### Fieldwork and marriage

Except for a period of six weeks in mid-2014, my wife Marie accompanied me on fieldwork. As expected, this impacted community members’ perceptions of us. Perhaps most importantly, Marie’s presence concretised my social position as an adult male. For a society where a person’s social and generational status largely depends upon successfully producing legitimate children (Baines 2005: 23-24; 2010: 423; Porter 2013: 171, 176, 181), this was an important first step. Indeed, when the community’s youth – often not much younger than myself –<sup>57</sup> spoke about our presence in Pajok, they

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<sup>55</sup> Given the on-the-ground realities of Pajok *Payam*, these target groups were difficult to accurately define. People, especially women, marry early, often during their mid-teens. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for some people to attend school well into their twenties, with some continuing even later.

<sup>56</sup> Acknowledgements must go to my research assistant Obwoya for suggesting this idea.

<sup>57</sup> When I speak of youth, I speak in the Pajok vernacular: unmarried males around 18 to 35 years of age. According to Abbink and Van Kessel (2005: 5-6), this definition is nearly universal across Sub-Saharan Africa, reflects multiple customary age and gender related practices, and specifically conceptualises ‘youth’ as those young males who would have historically been the warrior class in their culturally appropriate age grade system. Most females, Abbink and Van Kessel argue, move directly from the category of girl (unmarried female likely without children) to woman (possibly married but almost certainly with a child) without intermediate stages.

frequently mentioned marriage as an important distinction connecting us more to community elders than themselves.<sup>58</sup>

However, just as marriage helps define Acholi adulthood, so too do children. Both genders are expected to perform their gender defined roles as biological and social (re)producers, and a couple should produce many children to bolster the lineage and provide their family with labour. During the liminal period between 'marriage' and reproduction, women can be in a difficult position within Acholi society. As lineal outsiders, they are often not fully considered members of their husband's family until giving birth and those who do not conceive in the first year may be divorced.<sup>59</sup> A barren woman is not only a dangerous conceptual category but an undesirable social one. This may be why there seems to be a tendency for barren women to be *ajwaki* (spirit mediums).<sup>60</sup>

The overwhelming importance of children to both adult status and successful marriage meant Marie and I presented a problem for many in Pajok. Our lack of children led to questions, jokes about my 'performance' or whether I 'knew what to do', and offers of help and prayer. Instructions about needing to 'pray for the reward of a child' oftentimes came with a promise: the person – usually a *mego* (older woman) – would pray for us. Such inquiries became so common that *Abuba* Angela soon began answering for us when she could.<sup>61</sup> *Abuba* (as we always called her) was the delightful and extremely characterful maternal aunt of our host, David (Figs. 10 and 11). Nearly crippled by the effects of age and a long life doing the back breaking work typically demanded of women, she lived in the small and immaculately-kept *ot* (mudbrick hut) beside our own and quickly became like a grandmother. In *Abuba*'s response to our usual interrogation, she insisted the family were praying for

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This pattern is mirrored in Pajok and reflects the gendered division of labour and society. The category *latin/lotino* (child/children) are those still too young to be members of the man, woman, or youth categories.

<sup>58</sup> Perhaps they just meant we were 'old'. For example, at 34 years of age during fieldwork, I was consistently referred to as 'old', 'a big man' or 'a big person' by local youth. This seemed based on the fact I was 'older than 30', 'married', and 'getting the grey hairs'. These reflect Acholi generational norms I have written about elsewhere (O'Byrne 2012), as well as the general use of the Acholi word *ladit* (literally 'the big personified', meaning 'Mr, an old man, a boss, an important man' [Adong & Lakareber 2009: 53]) to refer to elders.

<sup>59</sup> This seems more a potential than a typical occurrence in Pajok: although I know of occasions where this has happened, it is more usual that a man's family suggests the woman seeks (Christian or customary) ritualised help. In the instances I know of where divorce has taken place, it seems the woman's alleged barrenness was more likely a socially-acceptable excuse allowing that woman to leave an otherwise unhappy marriage.

<sup>60</sup> See for example Baines (2010: 418). However, I do not think this tendency is as strong as Baines suggests: in Acholi South Sudan, there are male as well as non-barren female *ajwaki*. Julian Hopwood, a PhD student at Ghent University who has lived in Acholi Uganda for over a decade, tells me the same is true in Gulu (pers. comm.). Therefore, it seems this may simply be a tendency rather than anything resembling a pattern.

<sup>61</sup> *Abuba* is Juba Arabic for grandmother or old woman, which in Acholi would be either *adaa*, grandmother, or *mego*, 'old woman'.

the blessing of a child, before reminding any listeners – which included herself, as well as us, I think – that ‘*Yesu tye*’, Jesus is there, a common refrain in times of personal, communal, or existential crisis.<sup>62</sup>

Marie’s presence proved helpful in other ways. Not only did she allow some access to women’s worlds – greatly important in such a strongly gender differentiated society – but being good with children, she quickly developed rapport with the twenty-plus children we lived with and who clamoured to help her with various tasks.<sup>63</sup> This gave me at least second-hand access to a section of the community that I otherwise had limited access to, and she provided much grounded and humanised insight into a dimension of the Acholi world I was often distant from. Moreover, her sensitive social awareness provided many moments of theoretical inspiration, and her analysis of the complex workings of gender, generational, and kinship relations must be particularly mentioned.

However, although research benefitted from her presence, there were two major methodological problems, both stemming primarily from my own weaknesses as an ethnographer. The first was having the presence of another native English speaker with whom I spent a lot of time. This meant my Acholi language competence developed more slowly than I would have liked. As discussed later, linguistic issues place some methodological limitations on this research. The other problem was how to balance the commitments of research with maintaining a marriage. We quickly developed an understanding I would do fieldwork during the day while setting aside evening hours – and usually the evening meal – to spend together. As we lived a good thirty minute walk from Pajok centre, and although sometimes I needed to stay elsewhere to a later hour, this usually meant ‘leaving’ fieldwork-related activities by 7pm. Unfortunately, this meant missing some community night time activities, which are missing from my research and the analysis I present.

### Dealing with language

As just mentioned, my largest methodological problem was language. Although I learnt the basics of Acholi quickly, I found it difficult to progress far beyond this. I certainly never developed the skills to conduct interviews on abstract topics without a translator.<sup>64</sup> These difficulties were complicated not only by the fact the Ugandan dialect we learnt in Gulu had small but significant differences from that

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<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, between completing fieldwork and writing this thesis, Abuba died. Despite this tragic news, Marie and I were just happy we could give her the good news about the birth of our first child, Okema James Omara – conceived in Pajok, possibly because of her prayers and love – before she passed.

<sup>63</sup> Marie and I stayed at the God’s Tender Mercy (GTM) compound throughout our time in Pajok. GTM was set up as a Christian orphanage to help care for some of the many war orphans in the community. Between 15 and 25 children may reside in the GTM compound at any one time, including those of our hosts. See Chapter 5.

<sup>64</sup> This could have been expected, as a total of six weeks intensive language training could never be enough to develop any significant pre-fieldwork language skills. Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to do more.

in South Sudan, but also that a number of Arabic words formed part of the community's everyday lexicon, an obvious reminder of the continuing effects of Arabic influence in the country's history.

Thankfully, a number of Pajok's populace speak English to a greater or lesser extent. A remnant of two decades as refugees in English-educating Uganda, generally anyone from their late teens to late 50s could speak English well enough to have at least a basic conversation. This was particularly true for men and proved something of a blessing, particularly early on. I always felt English in the community was good enough to mean my own linguistic failings did not completely impede research. Moreover, not only did I work with Obwoya more or less full-time over the entire sixteen months, but many of the interviews and interactions I had took place in English, and, I think, without much detriment to results. Indeed, as virtually all pastors, ministers, and other church leaders were trained by English-speaking missionaries – sometimes even reading the Bible in English during Acholi language church services – English-based conversations with these people were often about quite abstract concepts and involved thoughtful comparison with Acholi cultural or conceptual similarities and differences.

Although the unexpected prevalence of English had benefits, it also brought two problems, one methodological and the other epistemological. Firstly, there was a tendency for confident English speakers to revert to English at the first sign of communication difficulties. Although understandable, over time it set back my Acholi language development, as well as setting patterns for later communication. Thus, English became an interactional standard between myself and some people. Secondly, and more deeply problematic, working in English – either directly or through a translator's mediation – meant for a long time I could not consistently access the key Acholi terms and concepts of our conversations. Nonetheless, I was distinctly aware of and attempted to mitigate this issue. I always tried to get specific Acholi words for important points when spoken in English, as well as conceptual overviews from multiple people, often returning to the same informants at different times to question previous explanations. Further, attempting triangulation, I would ask the same person similar questions using different words or phrasings, again at different stages of fieldwork. In doing so, I hoped to discover areas of inconsistency.

Moreover, Obwoya, Marie, David and I often spoke about my research, about what we were doing, where it was going, and what we wanted to achieve. We discussed what different people said, comparing and contrasting their answers and formulating specific methodological strategies from that. Finally, as with all good anthropological research, everything is contextualised within that great methodological strength of the anthropological endeavour: long term, embedded, and fully socially and intellectually engaged and reflexive, participant observation-based ethnographic fieldwork. In my mind and practice, this is a type of fieldwork I like to think of as both an epistemological and an

existential position, one which Geertz (1998, 2000; Clifford 1997) has called 'deep hanging out', and one similar to that which Finnström (2008: 19), following Arhem (1994), describes as the ongoing process of 'participant reflection',<sup>65</sup> where:

As anthropologists, we do our best to participate in the works, questions, joys, and sorrows of our informants' everyday life. Then we take a few steps back, to be able to reflect upon what we have learnt and experienced, again to step forward and participate. This we do daily in the fieldwork encounter.

*And what church do you belong to?*

I have an important confession to make here: my fieldwork began with a lie. It ended with a lie also, the same lie, and one that continues. The truth behind this lie may have damaged my research if revealed at the start of fieldwork. Certainly, it would have affected my research and how I went about it, from forming relationships to framing questions, from friendships made to events participated in.

The lie is this: Marie and I are atheists. Not fundamentalist atheists (what sort of anthropologist would I be if I were?), but atheists nonetheless. The empirical existence of divine or superhuman meta-persons does not really matter to me: after all, as just argued, they are always at least sociologically real. I am more interested in the sociological and anthropological dimensions of this issue. We did not specifically set out to lie. Leaving London, our position was to 'let the field decide', clearly identifying ourselves as researchers rather than believers from the outset.<sup>66</sup> In retrospect this seems more deceitful than when I told my pre-fieldwork examination committee it was a viable methodological strategy. When asked about our religion we said we were brought up Catholic,<sup>67</sup> thus not out rightly lying: we were, after all, both raised Catholic, Marie in Ireland and myself in New Zealand. In doing this, we thought we could present ourselves *as if* we were Christian without exactly saying we were not, even if this meant aligning ourselves with a church many evangelicals disparage.

However, no matter where we stood on such matters, public atheism in Pajok would not only have been unthinkable but untenable: for the people I worked most closely with, and therefore to whom I lied most consistently, atheism is akin to the demonic; if not exactly Satan worship, then certainly

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<sup>65</sup> See also Porter (2013: 32).

<sup>66</sup> Although, as Crapanzano (2000) and Coleman (2008) also note, this did not preclude people from viewing my research as the demonstrable proof that God had a plan for both us and the development of the community. Part of this plan was, many evangelicals told us, that we would eventually become 'Born Again'.

<sup>67</sup> As it happened, and as Ewing (1994) and Harding (2000) note, the expectation to evangelise non-Christians meant many evangelicals were deeply interested in our beliefs. After all, as Keane (2002:66) argued, 'a focus on proselytization and conversion has played a crucial role in the historical self-definition of Protestantism'.

demonically inspired. For many in Pajok, atheism is almost incomprehensible: even if not attending church regularly or adhering to the required moral and behavioural prescriptions, everyone I spoke with self-identifies with some denomination. Further, any time someone spoke about non-believers it was connected with demonic influence or practices.<sup>68</sup> Several people said it was better to be Muslim than atheist, 'because at least they still believe in God, even if they practice the wrong religion!' This is a strong statement in contemporary South Sudan, especially in a context of the decades of historical injustices and extreme violence which 'southerners' consider 'Islamic Northerners' to have perpetrated against them.

Perhaps, then, this is my justification and only defence: it is not only unthinkable and inexcusable but even satanic to be a non-believer in contemporary Acholi South Sudan. It is certainly not a positive position as a new and obviously different outsider, one with no previous connection to the place and no obvious developmental agenda. It is also not helpful for conducting ethnographic fieldwork into the logics and experiences of becoming Christian.

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<sup>68</sup> Although, I should note most instances of this were related to explicit 'devil worship' practices, where, obviously, there are still understandings of or connections to belief. It should also be noted that people saying these things were evangelicals having strong views on the matter. It is likewise important to note the difficulties brought up by the Acholi word 'Yee', meaning 'agree', being translated as 'believe' (as it is across the region) and what this translation means for Biblical interpretation. Thus, someone can know or believe the Devil is real and exists and yet does not yee or agree with that thing (as doing so would make them Demonic). This leads to sentences like 'I do not believe in/agree with Satan but he is real/exists' in both Acholi and English.

## CHAPTER TWO: AN ENTANGLEMENT WITH THE LITERATURE

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### Cosmologies in the writing

*What do we mean by cosmology? In part we seem to point toward formulations that involve a quest for ultimate principles and/or grounds of the phenomenal world and the human place in it. But cosmology – and this aspect stems perhaps from the Greek notion of kosmos – seems also to carry for us a concern with wholeness and integratedness, as if cosmological principles of are not only ultimate principles, but also principles of order in the broadest sense, that is, principles engendering and supporting a way of being that is cognitively and emotionally integrated and whole. In these two kinds of concerns... there is already... tension (Schrempp 1992: 4).*

As I understand it, the cosmological connotes the all-enveloping realm that encompasses all those cultural logics or structuring principles which are taken for granted, seen as natural or naturalised, and usually locally considered of an *a priori* nature. In this understanding, as Handelman (2014: 96) has put it, ‘cosmos refers to the entirety of the phenomenal lived-space of all entities -- human and other-than-human... the entirety of a world of all dimensions of existence’. Cosmology therefore incorporates both the cultural and the experiential writ large – the maximal frame, if you will. Likewise, Abramson and Holbraad (2014: 20) have argued that such conceptualisations of cosmos ‘cut... against the classical associations of the word’, demanding it ‘be imagined as precisely the opposite of an ordered redaction of the world – an isomorphic, non-representational emanation of cosmos rather than a logical reduction of it: ... generative activity in its own right’. Similarly, Rio and Eriksen (2014a: 56; see also Handelman 2008; Kapferer 2011) ask that ‘analysis... gives priority to cosmology... as a motor for social process, instead of vice versa. This implies attributing agency to cosmos, and submitting to the idea that acts and events are internal to cosmological motivations’. In what follows I embrace the provocations of the preceding authors and, therefore, understand cosmologies as outside, prior to, but definitively yet chaotically and dialectically involved in (re)producing the realms of the social and cultural.

Moreover, rather than being either the religious or the spiritual, cosmologies almost by necessity encompass and define both these dimensions (as well as the gendered, the political, the economic and so on *ad infinitum*), insofar as these dimensions of human existence depend in some way upon such determining logics (as well as insofar as any of these listed realms of human thought and action

can actually *be* independent dimensions of human sociocultural life).<sup>69</sup> Thus, not all political action is cosmological – although much of it is – but rather that within any society some of the cosmological will certainly be political (Abramson & Holbraad 2014). It is very definitely *not* simply the same as religion, although the religious is obviously an important – and perhaps even necessary – component of the cosmological, especially if the religious is taken to mean ‘an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings’ (Morris 2006: 1).

To attempt to delineate the dimensions of any one cosmological system is not necessarily to attempt to find internal systemic coherence, to define the predominant functions, processes or structures through which it is embedded within or alongside other sociocultural systems. Nor is it to construct a typological classificatory schema within which all conceptualisations of the universe, its major actors, and their ordering principles can be placed. This is because, after Viveiros de Castro (2004: 484), I understand that ‘at the heart of the matter, there is no stuff; only form, only relation’.

Therefore, such delineations make three fundamental errors: firstly, they tend to assume a cosmological system *can be* analytically determined in a coherent fashion, that is, that its dimensions are static and unmoving and it is composed of ‘things’ to be determined and, thus understood, defined. Secondly, such analyses tend to find coherence, totalities or wholes where none may exist, with the experiential categories and values of indigenous lifeworlds often taking secondary value to the theoretical assumptions and evaluations of the analyst. The problems inherent in such theorising are one primary reason for the recent ‘ontological turn’ in some anthropology (Holbraad 2010, 2012; Viveiros de Castro 2007, 2009).<sup>70</sup> Giving primacy to the analytical over the experiential leads to the third error, that of the reification and essentialisation of the cosmology so delineated. This results in a cosmological system existing in and of itself, outside the very sociocultural context through which it is constructed and within which it gets its meaning. Taking life from its own abstraction, this negates or ignores the complexity and contestation at the heart of all sociocultural life, effectively removing the human from the analysis. The abstraction then becomes the reality.

These three errors are interlinked and co-constituting. Their central problems are that they ignore social, cultural and historical processes and disregard the essentially embedded, embodied and enacted nature of human life. They forget that all human activity is fundamentally cultural activity and, furthermore, that cultural activity is always lived phenomena. In this regard, instead of sketching

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<sup>69</sup> In this, I follow Kapferer, Eriksen and Telle (2009: 8), who specifically put the religious ‘thoroughly [within] the realm of the ontological, which usually is delineated cosmologically. The cosmological schemes that religions often outline and the ritual practices that are elaborated in cosmological terms establish the horizons of experience, often the space-time coordinates of such experience and its transcendental limits, and the manner in which human beings should live and proceed through such domains’.

<sup>70</sup> See Finnström (2008) and Mogensen (2002) for similar critiques.

‘the Acholi cosmology’, I prefer to provide an overview of those powers and processes I feel are most important to local people in the Pajok area, outlining how these persons, places, processes and things fit within a broad framework helping to structure the rest of sociocultural life and the ongoing and embedded human activity which takes place within it. After all, as Barth (1990: 84) has suggested, ‘we expand our understanding of... cosmology, not by construing more order in it, but by better accounting for its production... reproduction and change’. This is what I attempt to do and, therefore, I follow Barth in focusing on cosmology as ‘a living tradition of knowledge – not as a set of abstract ideas enshrined in collective representations. This allows us to see the events taking place... as incidents of the very processes that shape that tradition’ (Barth 1990: 84).

In this way, my analysis highlights the processual and practiced ways in which people in Pajok interact with the spiritual and cosmological aspects of existence, demonstrating that it is only through socially embedded and engaged practices that the full extent of cosmological meanings can be grasped. If the realm of the cultural was taken to be a coherent and static whole, then there would be no way in which the actions of individuals or groups could come to act upon or enact change within such a system. The system would just *be*. However, rather than *being*, such systems must be understood as always in processes of transformation, of *becoming*, created and destroyed and (re)constructed through the specifically enacted and socio-culturally embedded practices of human agents acting for the purposes of real and defined social goals.

Rather than merely existing, then, cosmologies are made, and they are made through culturally determined means in socially prescribed ways and settings. Any one element must therefore be understood as contextual. As this thesis demonstrates, in the Acholi sociocultural world, and within Pajok in particular, the real life outcomes of such contests invariably include or are determined by recourse to the cosmological, especially when the cosmological is locally understood to order not only the physical, metaphysical and nonphysical but also the social, cultural, economic, and political as well. Indeed, as Abramson and Holbraad (2012: 46; see also Holbraad 2010: 69) remind us, the fact ‘that all social relations are positioned and grounded in cosmos is... incontestable’.

It should be of no surprise that the cosmological dimensions of life are of such primary importance to people who live in places such as Pajok, where, almost by definition, their lives are hard, conditions difficult and their futures unknown. If any meta-person can be thought to help in changing or even surviving such circumstances, it is little wonder they are given so much attention and attributed so much agency and power. Further, in situations where government is fragile or non-existent at best and often dangerous or even deadly, appeals made towards the cosmological hold more salience, are more controllable, and may be much less dangerous than those made toward ‘official’ governmental

or other human sources of power.<sup>71</sup> Such orientations may be even more significant in contexts like Acholi Pajok, in which meta-persons are historically known to have engaged in activities fundamentally changing the nature and ease of human life: giving blessings or curses, ensuring good hunts or providing poor harvest, bringing life giving rains alongside life ending illnesses.

## The anthropology of Christianity

### *Becoming Christian*

Christianity has ‘forced itself upon us’, as Engelke (2005, cited in Garriott & O’Neill 2008: 382) has noted. Despite a global decline in ‘mainline’ Christian adherents,<sup>72</sup> the total number of Christians continues to grow, with the largest increases coming through conversion to Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic forms of Christianity (PECCs). Indeed, the growth of Christianity in Africa has been so noteworthy that Hastings (1990: 208; see also Asamoah-Gyadu 2005) has argued contemporary Africa is ‘totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity’.

For years considered anthropology’s ‘repugnant cultural other’ (Cannell 2006b; Garriott & O’Neill 2008; Harding 1991; Robbins 2003; Tomlinson & Engelke 2006), the discipline must now pay attention to the long neglected and historically significant emergence of contemporary Christianity (Garriott & O’Neill 2008). Writing about ‘the novel forms of planetary integration and compression’ that define and reveal processes of globalisation, the Comaroffs argue that ‘such phenomena...challenge us by representing the most fundamental question of our craft: how do human beings construct their intimate, everyday life-worlds at the shifting intersections of here, there, elsewhere, everywhere?’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 294). As a primary mobiliser as well as key metaphor in contemporary globalisation, this question is especially relevant to evangelical Christianity

Becoming Christian often entails complex and ongoing negotiations of new beliefs, practices, and relations with the pre-Christian contexts in which such transformations take place. Social, cultural, structural, and personal change are intrinsic to these negotiations. According to Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008: 1146), theoretical debate on the similarities and differences in conversion experiences and ‘the balance of continuity and change in convert cultures’ at both the individual and the societal levels have quickly become important areas ‘in which broader anthropological models of cultural

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<sup>71</sup> Kapferer (2011: 9) notes that the inherent existence of the state as apparatus, form or power goes remarkably uncontested in many modernist analyses of cosmology and the state: the state’s ontological position generally remains secure, despite often overwhelming evidence to the contrary – just as in the case of South Sudan.

<sup>72</sup> Mainline Christianity is generally defined as those Catholic and Protestant denominations dating to before the Azusa Street Revival and the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in 1906 (Meyer 2004; Ranger 1986).

change come to be worked out'. Indeed, the anthropological relevance of issues around sociocultural reproduction and transformation have meant PECC conversions provide important data for anthropological theorising. This is especially true within recent anthropological analyses of Christianity.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008: 1139, emphasis added) argue that the anthropology of Christianity:

Has become a space in which anthropology has been able to re-examine issues of social and cultural continuity and discontinuity in light of conversion to Christianity. Specifically, the issue of social change (often thought through or against the issue of 'modernity')... has involved specific ethnographic examinations of... the modes *through which the person is culturally structured, and how that category of the person stands in relation to the social.*

Analytically, conversion is often simultaneously conceptualised as rupture from pre-Christian pasts and a means of orienting converts toward greater participation within global systems (Bialecki, Haynes, & Robbins 2008). Closely linked is an assumption conversion necessarily entails a distinctive change in the composition of personhood. Keane's (2002: 65) position on this could not be clearer: 'The project of religious conversion commonly proposes a more or less dramatic transformation of the person. To the extent that this project succeeds or fails, it may offer more general insights into the practices by which human subjects are constituted'. Thus, the convert necessarily becomes an individuated Christian subject (Cannell 2006b; Robbins 2007). Nonetheless, as discussed in greater detail below, my own ethnography aligns more with those who see ongoing relationalities embedded within Christian manifestations of personhood (Chua 2015; Daswani 2011; Mosko 2010, 2015a, 2105b; Schram 2015; Werbner 2011). Thus, I will argue that the Acholi Christian as manifest in Pajok is just as aligned toward relationality as toward individuality.

However, Horton (1975a, 1975b) asks whether and to what extent religious conversion can be considered 'a conversion' at all, especially, for example, in Catholic 'conversions' to PECCs. After all, Horton notes, both systems share the same basic cosmologies. 'It is this assumption [of shared cosmologies] that leads me to put the term "conversion" between inverted commas' Horton (1975b:

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<sup>73</sup> For example: Barker (1990, 1992, 2008), Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008), Cannell (2005, 2006a, 2006b), Coleman (1998, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2013), Crapanzano (2000), Engelke (2002, 2004, 2007, 2010), Engelke and Tomlinson (2006), Eriksen (2008, 2009), Garriott and O'Neil (2006), Harding (2000), Haynes (2012), Keane (2002, 2006), Kirsch (2004, 2011), Kyriakakis (2012), Meyer (1998, 1999, 2004), Mosse (2012), Robbins (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2014), Tomlinson (2006, 2009), Tomlinson and Engelke (2006).

394) argues, ‘for where there is no radical change in cosmology, its appropriateness is at best doubtful’.

This formulation seems an important (if virtually disregarded) aspect of conversion and should lead analysts to ask whether and to what extent any conversion is radically discontinuous or, rather, merely a change in either the content of indigenous cosmologies or the forms and relationships through which they are understood. In other words, is it a ‘conversion’ or is it something else (syncretism, synthesis, hybridity or so on)? Simply put, this is a debate over the relative merits of theories privileging cultural continuity and reproduction (with conversion incorporating Christian elements within local frameworks, structures, or understandings) – such as the work of Meyer (1998, 1999) or Mosko (2010, 2015a, 2015b) – versus those highlighting discontinuity and rupture (where conversion radically alters or entirely replaces those same frameworks, structures, or understandings), such as the position articulated throughout Robbins’ *oeuvre*.

#### Christianity, continuity and change

In many ways, this research began as an extended conversation with the work of Joel Robbins, seeking to expand Robbins’s theorising to a different ethnographic context. For Robbins, entanglements between local worlds and global processes are not only defining features of non-Western peoples’ engagements with Christianity, but dominant reasons for their conversion. Building on Sahlins’ concept of ‘the structure of the conjuncture’, by which Sahlins (1987: xiv) means ‘the practical realisation of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested actions of the historic agents, including the microsociology of their interaction’, Robbins (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b) argues that in many parts of the majority world, evangelical Protestantism is a local response to crises experienced during globalisation. This is what makes PECC so important to anthropological theorisation. Indeed, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1999: 284) noted, ‘the things of which [anthropology] speak have to do with global processes or, more precisely, with specific intersections, in the here and now, between the global and the local’.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> I should note here that I feel ‘the structure of the conjuncture’ better captures such processes than either ‘syncretism’ or ‘synthesis’, as it does not essentialise such entanglements but rather asks how exactly they join and what the particular logics, structures, practices and processes involved are. In other words, it does not reify such a joining but specifically looks at the processes involved. For some of the literature on the ‘syncretism’ or ‘synthesis’ debate, see: Kirsch (2004); Lindenfeld and Richardson (2012); Mosse (2012); Pye (1994); Shaw and Stewart (1994); Stewart (1999); Stewart and Shaw (1994).

Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008: 1145) argue that, until recently, anthropologists tended to view Christianity outside 'the West' as a form of syncretic religiosity, a blending of indigenous and Christian elements which, although no longer an exact replica of local practices, was also not 'really' or 'authentically' Christian. Indeed, Robbins (2004: 330) notes 'syncretism' is basically a model of cultural hybridity and, as such, a 'theory that...flatter[s] Western common sense'. Garma (2007: 21) terms this form of theorising (in which ethnographers determine what parts of indigenous culture are 'really real' and therefore cannot change), the 'essentialism of the native'.

According to Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins (2008: 1145), anthropologists continual discovery of 'localized readings and re-appropriations of the Christian message...[means they] understand conversion in terms of continuity with pre-existing cultural forms... that radically alter the representations of Christianity as well as of local society'. Conversion for such analysts therefore tends toward syncretic (if not entirely synthetic) understandings privileging the continuity of timeless, almost momentary snapshots of a cultural milieu naturally replicating without problem.<sup>75</sup> This is the 'continuity thinking' Robbins (2007: 13) suggests is the problematic (and functionalist) tendency of much anthropology. Rather, according to Robbins, what follows from becoming evangelical or Pentecostal 'is not hybridity, but a new cultural system with a new total character'. As Eriksen (2007: 132-133) states, 'change for Robbins is not a matter only of individual conversion of beliefs, but rather a social matter in which the cultural system as a whole undergoes a radical transformation'. That is, it is not a blending (within which imported PECC elements are incorporated into existing cultural systems and given local interpretations) but a creation; not synthesis but conception; a process of becoming rather than a state of being (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

For Meyer (1998, 1999, 2004), on the other hand, conversion happens within wider processes of cosmological and religious change associated with the locally-specific appropriation of Christian ideologies and beliefs into already existing cosmologies. This is the indigenous incorporation of Christian cultural elements *qua* Sahlins' (1987: xiv) 'structure of the conjuncture'. Regarding cultural continuity and change in PECC conversions in Ghana, Meyer (1998: 329) argues that the:

Ideology of 'breaking with the past' should not blind us to the fact that, actually, this break is difficult to achieve... As a matter of fact, pentecostals continuously think about 'the past' and keep on breaking all sorts of ties revealed through remembrance... Moreover, it is essential to realize that the alleged break from 'the

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<sup>75</sup> The best distinction and elucidation of the terms 'synthetic' and 'syncretic' is probably Pye (1994: 220).

past' is only made possible through a practice of remembrance in the course of which this 'past' is constructed.

Therefore, so Meyer (1998, 1999) argues, despite PECC discourses surrounding sociocultural rupture and the negation of tradition which accompanies conversion, the need to be aware of what is broken from means no 'real' break is made: instead, this conjuncture includes the continual reiteration of tradition. As he views such movement as being *towards or with* global cultural formations rather than the completely localised attainment of truly globalised cultural forms, Robbins (2005a, 2005b) might also agree with this articulation. For example, Robbins (2015:179 ) notes that such transformations will always retain an indigenous quality to some extent, if only because they are initially approached through pre-Christian cultural logics. Further, despite his later focus on rupture and discontinuity (e.g. Robbins 2004a, 2004b, 2007), Robbins (1998: 300) earlier opined that 'Christianity... significantly altered the indigenous understanding of desire without greatly changing the social structure that depended upon the earlier model for its perpetuation'.

In fact, Maxwell (2007: 26) is inclined to view the process of conversion through a long term historical trajectory: continuity and rupture are therefore dependent upon inter-generational fluctuations or pulses. Indeed, as historians, Maxwell (2007) and Lindenfeld and Richardson (2012) independently suggest anthropology's 'natural tendency' towards the ethnographic present comes with a concurrent tendency toward *either* continuity *or* change and that, when ethnography is viewed through a historical lens, such points are always moments of transition within longer and fluid processes of syncretism on a global scale. This serves notice to my primary epistemological orientation toward the relevant ethnography: what one researcher sees as continuity another may view as rupture. In such cases, importance is found within the local negotiation of these processes.

In a rephrasing of the anthropological truism that 'what people say, what people do, and what people say they do often vary' pertaining directly to this, Engelke (2010: 187) makes the point that 'discontinuity is one thing as presented in a self-consciously constructed story, and another in how it is enacted'. My own response would be that instead of focusing on *either* continuity or rupture, we should explore the ways in which continuity and rupture *interact and combine* within local (re)productions and transformations of everyday relations. Thus I investigate the nature, interrelationship and relative incorporation of local and foreign cosmologies, emphasising how these effect wider social, cultural and personal relations.

### Demonizing traditions

Demonizing indigenous traditions is significant for many PECC churches in contemporary Africa (Engelke 2007, 2010; Englund & Leach 2000; Meyer 2004; Ranger 1986, 2003). For Meyer (1998, 1999), this shows the disjuncture of conversion is less complete than usually assumed. Indeed, pre- and post-conversion cosmologies are likely always entangled: in demonising traditional meta-persons and then demanding their ongoing ritual removal, many evangelical churches actually require that pre-Christian cosmologies continue. Kyriakakis (2012: 142-143) notes three attitudes to indigenous cosmologies within Christianity, differentiated by denomination: Catholics see 'lesser gods, spirits, Jesus Christ and the Christian God' as part of the same cosmological order. Alternatively, Protestants view indigenous entities as 'equally and indiscriminately evil' and 'seek to eliminate them'. This manifests in two distinctive ways, however: 'one an aggressive "spiritual battle" tendency with exorcisms, intense ritual performances, speaking in tongues, and so on. The other... an anti-magical, puritan tendency expressed in the prohibition of singing, dancing, beating the drums, speaking in tongues and spiritual healing'. In Pajok, although personal variation remains, this typology is generally correct for Catholics. On the other hand, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, most evangelicals in Pajok tend to fall somewhere in the middle of Kyriakakis's typology: although tending toward the Puritanical side of Kyriakakis's distinction, singing, dancing and music are generally important while, although rare, exorcisms do take place.<sup>76</sup>

Engelke (2007: 11) makes the point that 'African Christian healers are considered effective because they take seriously what their congregation understand to be the root causes of illness, chiefly witchcraft and the breakdown of social relationships (with both the living and the dead)'. As Meyer (2004: 457) indicates, 'ongoing concern with deliverance shows the very impossibility of break[ing] with what Pentecostals discursively construct as the "forces of the past"'. This position agrees with the Comaroffs, who contend that 'if Satan did not exist, crusading Christianity would have had to invent him' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 291). And what better means of invention than 'a dialectics of appropriation and rejection of "the past"' (Meyer 1998: 332)? For Meyer, such a dialectic reconfirms the extent to which Christian and indigenous cosmologies are irrevocably entangled. She therefore argues research into African Christianities must investigate the 'negative incorporation of the spiritual entities in African religious traditions into the image of the Christian devil'. On the other hand, Newell (2007: 487) has demonstrated that, in Côte d'Ivoire, Protestantism 'is another form of witchcraft discourse, one homologously structured with the local cosmology of witchcraft and yet oriented in direct opposition to it'. Such an interpretation holds true in Pajok as well. Although, Bialecki, Haynes

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<sup>76</sup> The Church of Christ is the one church in Pajok that fits the 'puritanical' dimensions of Kyriakakis' typology.

and Robbins (2008) suggest the self-evidence of such a distinction is somewhat overdrawn, this does not make it any less ethnographically or theoretically important. Indeed, such self-evidence demonstrates the inherent significance of the systemic conjunctures at work, and therefore a matter of some analytical worth, dependent upon ethnographic empirical determination.

### Modernity and globalisation

Cannell (2005, 2006b), Engelke (2007), Englund and Leach (2000), Meyer (2004), and Robbins (2004b, 2007, 2010a) have all critiqued analyses of Christian conversion which are 'organized by the meta-narrative of modernity' (Englund & Leach 2000: 229) and therefore based in Western notions of belief and religion that 'ultimately fail to capture what actually goes on in [non-Western] churches' (Meyer 2004: 462). According to Cannell (2006b) and Robbins (2007), current anthropological theorising is dominated by a position that sees all religion as predominantly local yet paradoxically responding to the processes of global modernity, especially around those changes associated with conversion. While it is probably the case that *some* conversions likely *are* responses to *specific* engagements with processes broadly referred to as modernity, such a determination requires locally specific ethnography. Instead of uncritically re-iterating such meta-narratives, we should attend to the ethnographic particularities of how these processes manifest locally (Englund & Leach 2000; Meyer 2004).

Placing modernity as a necessary causal factor in conversion seems not only too neat, but also decidedly deterministic. As Englund and Leach (2000: 230) note, 'when modernity's meta-narrative comes to organize ethnography, the content...may appear self-evident. It may easily be viewed as reflecting... [people's] anxiety about their place in globalization...The danger is, however, that ethnographic observations other than the narratives themselves become redundant'. The same might also be said for evangelicals' narratives about rupture. However, as Comaroff (1985: 39-40) makes clear, social practice is 'neither the product of global determination alone nor of indigenous cultural structures; ... [but] the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the two in a continuing quest for creative action upon the world'. To artificially highlight either the local or the global is to divorce analysis from ethnographic realities.

As Meyer (2004: 459) notes, all local Christianities involve ongoing processes of interaction with the global, constructing their own interpretations of what it means to be Christian. Moreover, as Cannell (2006b: 39) has argued, 'the use of the term *modernity* itself has become superstitious in the social sciences... Insofar as it implies an irreversible break with the past, after which the world is utterly

transformed in mysterious ways, it is itself modelled on the Christian idea of conversion'. Modernity is thus positioned as a radically disjunctive moment in human history.

Nonetheless, Keane (2002: 68) reminds us that modernity is a 'highly contested and problematic word... [and] a term of self-description. Whatever else one might want to claim about it, modernity exists at least as an idea and a conceptual orientation for actions'. Thus, modernity as Keane proposes its use is not a historical fact but a heuristic device: that is, it helps explanation but is not an explanation in itself. It therefore seems equally important to remember, as the Comaroffs argued, 'that "the local" and "the global" do not describe received empirical realities. They are analytic constructs whose heuristic utility depends entirely on the way in which they are deployed to illuminate historically specific phenomena' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 294).

## Persons and personhood

The 'person' as I discuss the term is very definitely a social entity, one which always involves an element of both relationality and autonomy. The term 'individual' as I use it, however, does not follow the standard anthropological definition. Anthropological accounts have long tended to make a distinction between the individual, the person and the self (La Fontaine 1985: 124–126). Rather, following recent debates within the anthropology of Christianity, I specifically use it to mean a particular variation of personhood, one which is bounded, autonomous and possessive (see below). In this, my position sets out from Comaroff and Comaroff's (2001) seminal discussion of personhood in Africa. Following the Comaroffs (2001: 270), personhood as I understand it is both 'a stereotypic representation and... a set of intersubjective practices'. This makes personhood constructed and meaningful through dialogic social action. According to the Comaroffs, the difference between the individual and the self is that 'the individual refers to a biologically distinct, socially discrete, indivisible being, a unity of body and mind; the person, to an ensemble of social roles and relations; [and] the self, to a unique identity. In analytic practice, however, this distinction is often blurred' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 279). The Comaroffs argue that this blurring is perhaps most obvious in discussions of the 'modern', western subject (see below).

### *The ethnographic basis of relational personhood*

As Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 276) remind us, 'personhood, however it may be culturally formulated, is always a social creation — just as it is always fashioned by the exigencies of history'. As with the Tswana described by the Comaroffs (2001: 273; see also Comaroff & Comaroff 1991;

Comaroff 1985; Niehaus 2002; Piot 1999), personhood in Acholi was historically constructed from ‘a wide spectrum of activities, from cultivation, cooking, and creating a family to pastoralism, politics, and the performance of ritual’. Acholi personhood is thus an active process ‘of the making of self and others in the course of everyday life’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 273). Such a point is repeatedly highlighted throughout the ethnographies of both Finnström (2008) and Porter (2013), as well as in the writings of Baines (2005, 2010) and p’Bitek (1971, 1973b, 1986). As the Comaroffs put it, the daily (re)production of such forms of sociality and personhood is primarily entailed in ‘the unceasing, quotidian business of cultivating relations and fields, of husbanding animals and allies, of raising offspring and avoiding the malign intentions of others, of gradually accumulating cultural capital and cash to invest in the future’ (2001: 271). That is, personhood is (re)produced within those everyday interactions of normal biological, cultural and social life common not only within Tswana society but throughout Africa and, likely, across the globe.

As a social construct and practice, personhood is intimately connected to morality. Howell (2005: 3-4) notes that we must always conceptualise local understandings of moralities in the plural, as doing so opens analysis to both discourses and practices, as well as to how each realm informs, constitutes, and affects the other. Furthermore, following Read (1955), Howell (2005: 7) also argues for the importance of grounding understandings of morality in ‘indigenous perceptions about the human being; about personhood, agency and sociality’. This is because, Howell (2005: 9) suggests, ‘our sense of morality is... what constitutes our sociality, our very basis for relating’. Moreover, and in a comment that succinctly summarises the points made herein, Howell (2005: 10) observes that ‘it is possible for two or more moral discourses to exist within any one society, each predicated upon a specific kind of sociality’. Such is the case as regards the simultaneously competing and complementary moral discourses in Acholi South Sudan: those of Acholi traditions and Christianity in its various manifestations. Thus, in Pajok as much as Barker (2007: 16) has noted in Melaneisa, the negotiations of these two moral systems mean that all ‘morality continues to bear the stamp of local moral conceptions and obsessions’.

Burton (1978: 154) notes that both Nuer and Dinka conceive the human being as having a ‘life’ or ‘breath’ independent of the physical body and with which personhood is most strongly associated. Thus, although physical death may occur, the essential life force which captures local ideas about personhood remains (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Lienhardt 1961). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, the same holds true among Acholi, where there is no absolute ontological distinction between the living and the dead and where the *tipu* or spiritual element of a person continues after their material component

has expired.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, p'Bitek (1986: 19) argues that 'in African belief, even death does not free him... his ghost continues to be revered and fed; and he, in turn is expected to guide and protect the living [all sic]'. The basic interactional nature and relational basis of Acholi life is thereby demonstrated.<sup>78</sup> This concurs with the evaluation of Tswana personhood given by Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 272), who state that 'throughout life (in embodied form) and even after death (as a narrated presence), the person was a subject with the potential to engage in the act of completing and augmenting him- or herself'. Thus, in all these African societies, death does not have the Cartesian definitiveness it is said to take among some Christian or contemporary Euro-American peoples, making the separation of interconnected persons that is said to come with someone's death more difficult to achieve (Chua 2015; Piot 1999; Schram 2015; Stroeken 2012).<sup>79</sup>

Bialecki and Daswani (2015) force us to confront the fact that dividual/individual problematics are not merely experienced by those who have been exposed to Christianity but, rather, in all places which have encountered the transformative processes of modernity. Likewise, as 'questions of personhood are... responses to specific problematics' (Bialecki & Daswani 2015: 273), we should expect variation and complexity not only between but also within different social contexts. The most important context for this debate so far has been the varied island groups of Melanesia, an area also significant in the development of key anthropological theories on the entanglements between tradition and modernity as well as custom and Christianity.

In a now-classic delineation of dividual personhood, Strathern (1988: 13) defines the dividual as persons 'frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them'. Highlighting the significance of the (particularly gendered) body as the site in which relationality is materialised, Strathern notes that in Melanesia, bodies and persons are created from the detachable parts of (similarly dividual) other persons. Their uniqueness is not inherent as it is said to be in the case of the autonomous Western individual but rather in their relational composition. A Melanesian person is therefore 'as different from a sum as it is from an individual part' (Wagner 1991: 166).

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<sup>77</sup> For similar ideas in a wider African comparative perspective, see Zahan (1979)

<sup>78</sup> As p'Bitek often uses his own ethnic group as an exemplar for claims about Africa throughout his writings, a statement about 'Africans' can rather unproblematically be understood as also a claim about Acholi.

<sup>79</sup> For an excellent and brief discussion on the diversity of relational inclinations within understandings of personhood across Africa, including through language, embodiment, cosmologies, illness, death and ancestors, see Piot (1999: 17-19). The same elements and dimensions highlighted by Piot are relevant to Acholi, too, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis.

The Christianity of anthropological persons

The recent Mosko/Robbins debate (Bialecki 2015) over the nature of Christian personhood in Melanesia has set the scene for recent discussions of Christian person. Briefly, the parameters of this debate were fixed with the publication of Mosko's (2010) *Partible penitents: dividual personhood and Christian practice in Melanesia and the West*, a trenchant critique of contemporary depictions of global Christianity as well as Melanesian personhood.<sup>80</sup> Following Strathern (1988), the basis of Mosko's position was all Christian persons are primarily dividual. That is, they are literally composed of detached essential characteristics or parts of other likewise composed persons. Robbins' defence (2010b, 2015) has been to reinforce the argument he made elsewhere:<sup>81</sup> that, for the persons so concerned, Christian conversion forms a moment of total moral and ontological rupture leading to entirely different orientations to one's self, one's society and the world. Following Dumont (1980, 1992), Robbins argues that this rupture is especially manifest through differential orientations to personhood, with the Christian person becoming decidedly individualistic in alignment and direction. As Coleman (2015: 299) has phrased it, Robbins' sees Christianity as providing 'the metaphysical foundation for both a moral consciousness and the sense of a person as indivisible and individual'.

Mosko (2010, 2015a, 2015b) argued proponents of Christian individualism uncritically repeat the theoretical positions constructed by earlier authors of personhood, primarily Burridge (1979), Dumont (1980, 1992), Macpherson (1962) and Weber (1978, 2002). According to Mosko, these theorists have been used to paint a rather caricatured picture of modern and western persons as 'routinely conceived as bounded individuals, specifically as manifestations of *solely* secular, profane, or mundane milieu untainted by religious or sacred qualifications' (Mosko 2015: 365, emphasis in original). Almost paradoxically, Mosko argues, to achieve this pure individuality it is assumed that the western person first had to become and then transcend the freedoms and constraints of Christianity. As theorising moved from the industrialised west to the 'other' societies of anthropology's gaze, somehow the Christian person and the modern person became conflated (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001). As Mosko (2015: 385) argues, 'it seems... indisputable that the sort of "individualism" that has commonly been posited as inherent to Christianity generally and Protestantism specifically has been one supposedly, but mistakenly, shared with post-Enlightenment secular modernity'. Or, as Niehaus (2002: 189-190) has put it, 'the meta-narrative of modernity often posits an inevitable shift from "dividual" to "individual" modalities of personhood... [which] cannot be sustained' (Englund & Leach 2000; LiPuma

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<sup>80</sup> This was reiterated in his *Unbecoming individuals: The partible character of the Christian person* (2015b). See also Mosko (2015a).

<sup>81</sup> Particularly in his *Continuity thinking and the problem of Christian culture: Belief, time and the anthropology of Christianity* (2007).

1998). This is because, the Comaroffs (2001: 267) note, 'African notions of personhood are infinitely more complicated than this tired theoretical antinomy allows'.

To be fair to the authors cited in Mosko's (2010) critique, the positions they articulate are generally more nuanced than Mosko suggests. Robbins especially has consistently expressed a view of Christian and Melanesian persons which is demonstrably open to the importance of relationships within some Christian traditions. Indeed, following Dumont, Robbins openly states that 'the question is not whether relational or holist values are present – ... they will always be present in any social formation – but rather whether they organise the majority of social domains, or at least the most important ones' (Robbins 2015: 189). And, this seems to be the precise question underpinning most recent analyses of Christian personhood, all of which attempt to use ethnographic specificity to add much needed nuance to the Christian dividual/individual personhood binary.<sup>82</sup> With this in mind, this thesis speaks directly to recent directions within this debate, placing itself alongside the just-cited additions in an otherwise overly dualistic understanding of personhood and subjectivity. Thus, like almost all these recent additions, the argument I present here uses the distinctiveness of a particular ethnographic context to caution against overly quick, generalising or simplistic portrayals of either Christianity or personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001), arguing with LiPuma (1998) that the contrast between the dividual/individual extremes should always remain not only first and foremost a heuristic device – as Schram (2015: 321) argues Strathern originally intended – but also a matter of empirical inquiry (Coleman 2015: 297).

However, Lambek (2015) has recently noted a certain confusion or ambiguity within the meanings and uses of the terms dividual and individual. Indeed, this is one major I follow Robbins (2015: 178 note 4; see also Jackson 1989; Piot 1999) who prefers the term 'relational' rather than 'dividual': if anything these terms should only be seen as 'alternatives in an ideal sense' (Schram 2015: 318). Another reason for my preference is what I see as an important distinction between dividuality and relationality. As Mosko (2010: 219-220) citing Dumont (1985) notes, individual means non-divisible while dividual means the opposite, divide-able, whereby persons are formed through splitting parts of their personhood off from others during relational interaction. Quite simply, this is generally not how personhood is primarily or most importantly conceived in Acholi. Therefore, due to the ethnographic particularities of evangelical Christian churches in twenty-first century Acholi South Sudan, I leave aside 'dividuality' for 'relational personhood' or 'relationality' (Jackson 1989; Piot 1999). This is because, as I will demonstrate, although Acholi understandings of personhood privilege the inherent

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<sup>82</sup> For example, see: Bialecki and Daswani (2015); Chua (2015); Coleman (2015); Daswani (2011); Lambek (2015); Schram (2015); Vilaça (2011, 2015); and Werbner (2011). For older, African-based analyses of similar issues, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2001), Jackson (1989), Niehaus (2002), and Piot (1999).

relationality of all persons and social life (thus the emphasis on ‘relational’), this personhood is not one composed from detached pieces other persons (such as has been argued to be the case in Melanesia). In other words, it are the relations themselves rather than the pieces exchanged through them which generally define the Acholi person. Thus, using one of the composite-dividual-fractal-partible alternatives highlights the wrong element of how personhood is locally conceived.<sup>83</sup>

Mayblin (2012: 244) has noted how, for Christians, love, and particularly maternal love, has ‘the capacity to bestow value and thus to create proper persons’. This is because, as an act of creation, maternal love is especially considered to reflect and even reproduce the moment of universal creation, collapsing the ‘doleful abyss’ (Sahlins 1996) between Creator and Creation. Following Dumont, Robbins (2015) has argued that it is precisely within *values* that the primacy of evangelicals’ individualist orientations become apparent. However, as Mayblin (2012: 241) further notes, if ‘Creation partakes of some element of the divine nature, aspects of creation can be ontologically identical to the divine’, allowing the cosmological gulf to be bridged. As I will argue, in Acholi South Sudan the collapsing of the cosmo-ontological divisions between God and human beings has led to an ethnographic situation within which persons are definitely conceived as sometimes sharing parts with the Divine (and other Christian persons and meta-persons).

#### *Relational impulses and becomings-persons*

Therefore, following Chua’s (2015) notion of ‘impulses’, I see movements in and toward personhood’s polar expressions as processes or tendencies rather than forms or essences. That is, like a photograph capturing yet abstracting the continual motion of a long, slow sea swell, I view these as oscillations between different peaks which concretise and momentarily manifest particular persons that are always contained within lines of flight from one (of likely multiple) tendencies toward another (Schram 2015). Therefore, similarly to Chua (2015: 340), I suggest that Acholi persons ‘were and are understood to be shaped by a combination of what we might (analogically) call “dividual” and “individual” impulses... coexist[ing] in shifting permutations within and beyond persons’. As Chua (2015: 339) notes, these impulses ‘derive from the... relations in which persons are enmeshed’. I think it is important to highlight, however – as both Chua (2015) and Robbins (2015) also observe – that the relations involved are usually of an at least implicitly moral character.

Cross-culturally, there are multiple Christianities and multiple personhoods exhibiting tendencies toward either individualistic or dividual/relational forms (as well as many, perhaps most, blending

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<sup>83</sup> For a similar example among the Kabre of northern Togo, see Piot (1999).

these [LiPuma 1998]). Therefore, rather than starting from a position which assumes what form(s) of personhood are relevant, I take it as axiomatic that these are first and foremost a matter of empirical discovery. The argument laid out in this thesis, then, is the specific analysis of this precise discovery in one specific ethnographic area. Christianities as manifest locally can be dividual or individual, some of which spring from their own internal contradictions (Coleman 2015; Vilaça 2015) and some from the indigenous localities within which they take root. As Errington and Gewertz (2010: 251) noted in their own response to Mosko (2010), ‘although Christianity can (perhaps) lend itself to dividualistic thinking, it by no means always does’. The reverse, I think, is equally true. Vilaça (2011, 2015) makes the important point that although indigenous persons and contexts absorb the individualising aspects and tendencies constitutive of the Christian message, Christianity likewise simultaneously incorporates some aspects of indigenous dividuality. Indeed, Vilaça (2015: 213) argues that the very contradiction within Christian teachings ‘undoubtedly comprises an ideal environment for the propagation of the dividualism of... native groups’.

Hence, there is no reason why dividual and individual impulses cannot simultaneously co-reside within the same person, community or social setting. As Schram (2015: 321) argues,

It is not necessary to see dividuals and individuals as incompatible and incommensurate ways of being... It is too often forgotten that dividual and individual are alternative possible ways for actors to see social life... the difference... grounded in an underlying universality: making relationships depends on a reflexive account of social life.

I want to reiterate that I do not see personhood as states or types – such is suggested by some of the phrasing in Daswani (2011), Mosko (2010, 2015a, 2015b) or Werbner (2011) – but rather as relational impulses driving behaviours, discourses and practices unfolding on multiple scales and temporalities (Chua 2015) and which come together in and through local understandings of morality and moral power (Stroeken 2012). These are not essences, after all, but trajectories or lines of flight along which the movement is as important as the direction or the destination. It is as possible to have, therefore, dividually organised and structured individuals as it is to have the opposite, as well as any logical variation in between. As Lambek (2015: 399) notes, ‘there is a difference between saying a group of people are or are not in/dividuals and saying that they live with respect to a dominant ideology that defines them... in a certain way’. I will therefore demonstrate that, in contemporary Acholi, persons cannot exist outside of the ongoing and everyday negotiation of relationality. This is because, as Piot (1999: 18) notes, ‘persons here do not “have” relations; they “are” those relations’. In this, I reflect the Comaroffs, who argue that ‘the first principle of contemporary Tswana personhood [is] it refer[s]

not to a state of being but to a state of becoming' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 271). Such becomings, I will argue, are neither dividual nor individual, but rather relational, grounded within processes which impel persons in all directions. In this way, Acholi in Pajok are becoming Christian just as much as Christianity in Pajok is becoming Acholi.

## African and Acholi ethnography

It is difficult to speak of African studies or African ethnography as a single coherent field, as there is a wide disparity in both the societies and histories under study, on one hand, and research interests and questions on the other. Nevertheless, within those ethnographies which explicitly set out to engage with cosmology, religion or ritual and so on there is a distinct tendency to focus upon the power and salience of either ancestors, landscape spirits or sorcery and witchcraft. This thesis continues these discussions, both as they pertain to African ethnography in general as well as how they have developed within Acholi ethnography specifically. In doing so I extend and critique the ethnographic and theoretical insights of these literature streams. I provide not only the first in-depth account of a people, area, and ethnonational group almost entirely absent from the ethnographic record – that of the Acholi of what is now South Sudan, a community with a history distinct from that of the majority of the Acholi predominantly residing in northern Uganda (Allen 1987, 1991a; Atkinson 2010) – but I also give further and more specifically focused data on indigenous Acholi cosmological and ontological systems, systems only briefly highlighted in the work of most previous scholars.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, historical data on Acholi society is limited and early accounts fragmentary, with Girling's (1960) monograph *The Acholi of Uganda* providing the first reliable ethnographic account (Dyson-Hudson 1962). The early literature falls into three differing (but not mutually exclusive) types. The first two could be described as 'colonial ethnography' (Baker 1866, 1884; Bere 1934, 1939, 1947; Ingrams 1960; Johnston 1902; Menzies 1954; Thomas & Scott 1935; Tucker 1933) and 'missionary ethnography' (Crazzolara 1938, 1950; Malandra 1939, 1947; Russell 1966),<sup>85</sup> while in the third the Acholi are relegated to brief stereotyped generalisations in larger works dedicated to other Nilotics, a footnote to analyses of the 'more important' Sudanic pastoralist peoples (Seligman 1925, 1966; Seligman & Seligman 1932). Outside of the work of Okot p'Bitek (1963, 1971, 1973b, 1986), the Acholi are then conspicuously absent in the literature until the late 1980s, and unfortunately the long conflict

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<sup>84</sup> Okot p'Bitek (1970, 1971) being the major exception.

<sup>85</sup> It must be noted that despite obvious proselytising biases, both Crazzolara's historical (1950) and linguistic (1938) works are without contemporary parallel, and the latter remains the standard text of its type.

in northern Uganda has meant even the best of this more recent research overwhelmingly has this conflict as its focus.<sup>86</sup>

As much prior research among Acholi has perhaps focused too strongly upon the LRA insurgency in northern Uganda, Acholi cosmo-ontological orientations have mainly been considered in relation to this conflict. The cosmological has therefore been primarily understood as either providing a context for or a mechanism for dealing with this protracted violence. Without wanting to minimise the very real trauma and suffering the violence in this area caused, I suggest this conflict has also done violence to ethnographic and theoretical understandings of local cosmological worlds. Therefore, I will argue against the tendency to view violence as the *only* context, as that which ultimately defines the entirety of the lives and lifeworlds of those it effects. Leonardi (2015) has made a similar point about conflict in southern Sudan, perceiving a general analytical tendency to frame scholarship on the region through the lens of civil war. As she notes, 'the history of this period can however be told in ways other than simply as a series of authoritarian regimes and civil wars... War appears as a context for people's life stories, rather than as the focus in itself of their narratives' (Leonardi 2015: 144).

Thus, I incline towards scholarship seeking to highlight the empirical, moral and theoretical problems associated with restricting the term 'conflict' to widespread inter-personal violence or warfare. Such conceptualisations are particularly worrying when related to Africa, as they tend to reify and propagate notions of 'Africa as the Dark Continent', a place in need of saving through the redemptive actions of others, almost always the 'modern' (colonising and colonial) 'West':<sup>87</sup> good, Christian and white. Such notions position the African as both victim and perpetrator, effectively blinding analysis of the *long duree* of systemic, symbolic and structural violence underpinning many of the continent's current conflicts, including that in South Sudan. This is certainly not what I want to do here. I prefer to think of conflict in a broader and less exoticised fashion, as something inherent within all sociocultural systems (Finnström 2001, 2005a, 2006a, 2008; Jackson 2002; Lubkemann 2008; Richards 2005); that is, as a potential becoming within multiple social and interpersonal relations and acts.

Given the conflict-ridden past of South Sudan and the pace of change following the CPA in 2005 and independence in 2011, there is little of relevance written on Pajok specifically or even Magwi County or EES in general. Particularly problematic is delineating anything resembling a comprehensive history of the area. Indeed, as the majority of Acholi live in Uganda, almost everything available is based on

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<sup>86</sup> For example, see: Allen 1991b, 2006; Allen & Vlassenroot 2010; Annan & Brier 2010; Anyeko, Baines, Komakech, Ojok, Owor Ogora & Victor 2012; Baines 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010; Behrend 1999; Blattman & Annan 2009; Dolan 2011; Doom & Vlassenroot 1999; Eastmond 2007; Edmondson 2007; Finnström 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2015; Soto 2009.

<sup>87</sup> But, of course, see Latour (2012).

Acholi in that country. There are five notable exceptions: the early accounts of the Victorian explorer Samuel Baker during his search for Lake Albert (Baker 1866, 1884); the work of colonial officer Captain E.T.N. Grove in the 1919 edition of *Sudan Notes and Records* (Grove 1919); two early papers by Tim Allen on Sudanese Acholi workgroups (Allen 1987) and the political uses of oral history among the cultural elite of Obbo (Allen 1991a) from research conducted during the 1980s; several papers on Sudanese Acholi refugees in Kiryandongo Settlement Camp in Uganda in the 1990s by Tania Kaiser (2000, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010); and the incorporation of Pajok within wider Eastern and Central Equatorial-based research conducted in the mid-2000s by Mareike Schomerus (2007, 2008a, 2008b). However, none of this literature really engages with local cosmo-ontological systems.

As will be seen, Christian Acholi worldviews differ significantly from those among the global north. Despite this, there remain a range of important similarities. Although it seems a redundant truism to note cosmologies and religions spiritual have played significant parts in the historical development of all peoples worldwide, it is perhaps more important than ever to make this history apparent. These other-worldly aspects of human existence continue to play a substantial part in the lives of many throughout the world, whether in the hustle and bustle of large-scale industrialised global megacities or for the small bands of remote hunter-gatherers. For example, academic attention toward Christianity as both local phenomenon and global cultural system has increased significantly this millennium. This mirrors a global explosion in PECC in the late twentieth century, with recent estimates putting church membership between 260 million and 550 million adherents (Anderson 2004),<sup>88</sup> especially but certainly not exclusively located within non-Western nations.<sup>89</sup>

In this way, the people of Pajok are no different than any other community. For them, as for the majority of humankind, the cosmological aspects of existence are as real and important as the physical. However, it has been argued that ‘this spiritual dimension of the Acholi... is little understood by non-Acholi’ (Baines 2005: 10). This thesis is part of an ongoing attempt to correct this deficiency (O’Byrne 2014e, 2015a, 2015c, 2015d). Therefore, the literature on Acholi cosmologies have necessarily been incorporated in this analysis. As well as the work of Baines herself (2005, 2010), this includes the significant recent contributions from Allen (2015c), Finnström (2005a, 2006b, 2008) and Porter (2013). It also includes the relevant older work of Crazzolaro (1950), Girling (1960), Grove

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<sup>88</sup> According to Anderson (2004: 11-13), the exact number depends upon definition, with the inclusion of ‘Independent’ Churches increasing the number significantly. Anderson himself favours a broad definition.

<sup>89</sup> There are also an increasing number of these churches in the global north. For example, the BBC notes Pentecostal churches are the fastest growing Christian group and one of the fastest growing religious denominations in the both the UK and the USA (BBC 2009).

(1919), Malandra (1939), p'Bitek (1963, 1970, 1971), Seligman (1925; Seligman & Seligman 1932),<sup>90</sup> and Wright (1936, 1940). Such a corpus provides a substantial amount of useful and well researched information on the spiritual dimensions of Acholi life. Thus, whether or not Baines' (2005) assessment is still true a decade later,<sup>91</sup> this thesis provides further empirically grounded data on these cosmological dimensions, albeit from a South Sudanese Acholi perspective. Doing so should allow further ethnographic understanding as well as wider comparative analysis.

## Witchcraft, sorcery and magic

As the second half of this thesis investigates the links between witchcraft and both customary and Christian cosmologies in Acholi South Sudan, it is important to engage with the vast anthropological literature on this subject in advance. Witchcraft and sorcery are 'classic' areas of anthropological inquiry, especially in Melanesia (Fortune 1932; Harris 1974; Malinowski 2015; Steadman 1985) and Africa (Bleek 1976; Marwick 1965; 1982; Middleton & Winter 1963; Wilson 1951), and it is now commonplace for scholars of witchcraft to trace the links between witchcraft and modernity, globalisation, or development (Allen 2015a, 2015c; Bonhomme 2012; Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998; Geschiere 1988, 1997; Moore & Sanders 2001a, 2001b; White 2000). This is especially true for those scholars whose arguments take a decidedly 'occult' or 'neo-liberal' economy-focused turn (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1999; Niehaus 1993, 2005; Niehaus, Mohlala & Shokane 2001) or who focus upon the continuing effects of colonialism, colonisation, missionisation or slavery (Argenti 2007; Rio 2010; White 1997). Often, the witch has been classified as a dangerous insider, someone who breaches local binary-based classificatory divisions between inside and outside, good and evil, friend and foe, emblematic of classical structuralist analyses (Douglas 2002, 2008; Leach 1964, 1966; Lévi-Strauss 1955, 1974) as well as Georg Simmels' notion of the stranger (1950: 402-408). Furthermore, much of this literature demonstrates the importance African communities place upon explanatory rationales of an intersubjective nature, especially about ambivalent or structurally ambiguous – and thus potentially dangerous – close social relations (Douglas 1970). In particular this literature highlights the especially problematic positions of neighbours (Bonhomme 2012) and kin (Geschiere 2013; Rio 2014)

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<sup>90</sup> Despite their outdated physiological methods and uncritical acceptance of the now-discredited Hamitic Hypothesis, Seligman and Seligman's section on the Acholi in their *Pagan tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (1932: 106-134) is really quite excellent and, alongside Seligman's (1925) Presidential Address, provides one of the few existing ethnographic accounts of Acholi rainmaking.

<sup>91</sup> It seems given the increasing amount of research on these issues in northern Uganda, this may no longer be the case among the academic community, although it may still be correct when speaking more generally.

and the structural tensions posed by the existential contradictions underlying everyday gender relations (Bleek 1976; Rio & Eriksen 2014b).

It is true this literature significantly expanded our understandings of witchcraft and has been especially important in de-exoticising witchcraft beliefs and in decoupling them from assumptions about their fundamental 'backwardness'. Nonetheless, such arguments only tell us so much, often relegating the supernatural to the epiphenomenal and negating or overlooking the fact that, in most places, witchcraft almost certainly predates the Christian, colonial or modern. Therefore, the multiple global manifestations of witchcraft seem less likely to result either from the incorporation of radically new cosmologies or as expressions of entirely different relational worlds than they are complex fusions of local systems with those global processes. After all, as Sahlins (1987) notes, history did not start with the coming of Europeans.

Certainly in Pajok, and likely in the rest of Acholi, witchcraft explicitly derives from a pre- (and even anti-) Christian order. This is an important historical and ethnographic fact, and because of this I suggest it is equally important we engage with alternate analyses of witchcraft than simply those beginning and ending with modernity, colonialism or so on. For example, Bonhomme (12: 227) argues

Many 'mystical' phenomena in fact stem from perfectly mundane situations and could thus be more aptly analysed as the unfortunate outcomes of an insecurity or vulnerability that pervades everyday social interactions. Such a redescription in terms of 'interactional' rather than 'spiritual' insecurity would enable us to deconstruct the category of 'the occult' by reconnecting it to more mundane concerns and, thus, to de-exoticize witchcraft and sorcery even more convincingly.

Perhaps, if we are simply interested in demystification. But I oppose such action if undertaken to the detriment of all alternate analyses: not the de-exoticisation of the magical *per se*,<sup>92</sup> but rather the persistent move away from the spiritual to the material.<sup>93</sup> This not only recreates the recurrent academic tendency to consider the supernatural epiphenomenal but leads to ethical problems associated with privileging our own concerns over those of our interlocutors. In other words, if the people we work with take magic as important and real, then so should we. Although Lambek (2015: 401) has suggested that 'one might say that witchcraft is a dividualist reaction to individualism', to me this assertion simply does not sit right. For example, as Stroeken (2012; Leonardi 2007) has similarly argued, the extension of such a position reproduces one of the major problems within the logics of

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<sup>92</sup> Although, I would argue that still we must ask why, how and for whom such things have become exoticised in the first place, the answer being, I suggest, part of the Western fetishisation of African difference.

<sup>93</sup> Another Western fetish.

the occult economy argument: that there was no witchcraft before 'modernity'. This is not to rigidly decry forms of analysis that highlight material or colonial dimensions, for example, but rather to suggest the concurrent existence of alternative explanatory frameworks. After all, as Sally Falk Moore (1999: 305-306) noted in her response to the Comaroff's infamous 1999 paper, the evidence proposing to link witchcraft and modernity is largely 'suggestive, not demonstrative'.

## PART 2: CUSTOMARY AND CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGIES AND PERSONS

## CHAPTER THREE: ACHOLI LIVES, ACHOLI WORLDS

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### Genesis: God within the Acholi world

It is important to point out, here at the beginning, that in the beginning there was no God. At least not in the Acholi world. Quite simply there is no evidence suggesting such a position. In this, my research in Pajok agrees with the arguments of both former Anglican Bishop of Gulu, J.K. Russell (1966), and Oxford-trained Acholi anthropologist Okot p'Bitek, who states that 'there was no high god' for Acholi (p'Bitek 1963: 28).<sup>94</sup> Although some Christian authors have tried arguing otherwise, it is likely they are imposing their own biases on the data. At worst, one might say they are creating God where none exists. That is, they attempt to either demonstrate that Acholi had an *a priori* idea of an Ultimate Being before becoming Christian or, perhaps, all peoples do. As p'Bitek (1971: 50) notes, 'the idea of a high god among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries'. Certainly, God came to Pajok along with the missionaries: although people now say things like 'our word for God used to be *jok* because we did not know any better', this is not equivalent to a demonstration of pre-Christian understandings about an Ultimate Being. For example, no one can give a 'traditional' creation narrative (beyond the specifically Pajok-connected migration narrative reproduced below), nor can they provide a view of ultimate good and evil beyond pragmatic and everyday applications of these. Whatever it is that God is or does – and even many evangelicals have difficulty answering these and similar questions – what is certain is that, unlike the Nuer conception of *kwoth* ('Spirit', Evans-Pritchard [1956]), in Acholi there is no pre-Christian understanding of something that might equate to the Christian God. . In this, the Acholi are by no means unique, and Horton (1975a: 225) notes that 'a whole list of [African] peoples are reported as having a religious life largely concentrated upon the lesser spirits, with minimal development of the concept of a supreme being... [All] are primarily subsistence farmers, and their social relations are confined rather strongly by their microcosmic boundaries'.

As this thesis analyses entanglements between Christian and customary cosmologies in Acholi Pajok, it is important to set out the main parameters of Acholi cosmology first. This is what I do here. Therefore, in this chapter I outline the important dimensions of the Acholi cosmos as conceptualised in Pajok. This includes elements of cosmogony (of a sort), such as given in Pajok-specific origin and migration narratives, and a discussion of what comprises the universe and how these are known. This basic framework is followed by a discussion of the pragmatic nature of people's orientations toward cosmos – an orientation I call the 'lived pragmatism' of Acholi being-in-the-world – and an overview

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<sup>94</sup> For a similar argument among the Acholi, see Wright (1940). On the lack of a High God among the Lugbara, see Dalfovo (1998).

of indigenous notions of time. I conclude by examining the connections between relational personhood and kinship: an aspect of everyday Acholi sociality connected to basic cosmo-ontological understandings. Thus, in this chapter I not only provide a structural overview of Acholi cosmology but demonstrate the basic relational underpinnings of Acholi personhood and sociality, laying the groundwork for the remainder of this thesis.

## Exodus: Migration, ethnogenesis and the cosmogony of Pajok

Handelman (2012: 67) has suggested that customary cosmoses differ radically from world monotheisms by being oriented more toward self-organising self-creation than hierarchical notions of encompassment (see Dumont 1980, 1992). Thus, in Handelman's view, a primary role of mythopoiesis in customary cosmoses becomes one of auto- and even ethnopoiesis. Further, as Gephart (1998: 129) has argued, 'the myth of origin is... one of the most powerful means of establishing a community's unity'. Throughout much of Acholi, such ethnic unity is established in the narrative of Labongo and Gipir (Atkinson 2010; Bere 1947; Crazzolara 1950; Finnström 2008; Girling 1960; p'Bitek 1973a; Porter 2016),<sup>95</sup> which narrates the origin of the neighbouring Acholi and Alur people. Nonetheless, although Crazzolara (1950: 59) noted that 'every Acooli [sic] or Aluur [sic] can tell you the story of the weary search for a spear and the ripping of a child's belly to recover a swallowed bead', this allegedly ubiquitous narrative is decidedly absent from the Pajok mythohistory (Malkki 1995).<sup>96</sup> Given this, and according to the rationale underlying Gephart's suggestion, it seems another generative narrative would be required. In Pajok, such work is done through the narrative of how Pajok became *Pa-Jok*, literally 'the people of *jok*' (or 'the people of God' as it is now most commonly phrased).<sup>97</sup>

### The origin of Pa-Jok

As just mentioned, Pajok's narrative of origin differs from that commonly found among Ugandan Acholi. This makes it a useful means of distinguishing the different migration traditions between Acholi

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<sup>95</sup> Although this event is usually termed a 'myth', I refuse the ontological biases this term assumes and, similar to the origin of Pajok (below) and the autobiography in Chapter 8, prefer the more impartial term 'narrative'.

<sup>96</sup> This may be because, as Crazzolara (1950: 57, 396-7) notes, the people who became Pajok likely split away from the main Luo migration before this event is said to have occurred. Nonetheless, Crazzolara (1950: 61) also notes that this narrative was common within Pajok when he visited during the early 1930s, as well as being an obvious variant of a narrative common to all Madi-speaking groups in the region, thus likely making it – like much Acholi history – of Madi rather than Luo origin (Allen 1987, 1991; Atkinson 2010; Crazzolara 1938, 1950).

<sup>97</sup> Most Pajok residents either do not see or choose not to comment upon the obvious contradictions between Christian ('God') and cultural ('*jok*') paradigms inherent within a statement in which the otherwise demonised term '*jok*' is here translated as 'the people of God'. See also Meyer (2004).

on either side of the border (Atkinson 2010). Depending on the version given – and there are nearly as many versions as people to tell it – an event of central historical import occurred during Pajok’s early migration, probably in the vicinity of the mountain Kit Aweno.<sup>98</sup> A relatively standard version of the narrative goes something like this:<sup>99</sup>

After the people now called Pa-Jok left that place,<sup>100</sup> they wandered for a long time. They were hungry and close to starvation. Finally, they came across a river.<sup>101</sup> At this river they found some cooked food waiting for them. They did not know where the food came from or who had cooked it. So the people said, ‘this food must have been cooked by *jok* and we are hungry, so let us eat it’.<sup>102</sup> Some of the people who chose to eat the food wanted to stay in the place where the food had been found. These people are now known as Patanga (one of Pajok’s twenty three *dogola* or lineages, see Appendix 2), which means ‘do not force them; do not make them do it’.<sup>103</sup> Other people who ate the food wanted to continue on with their journey. These people are now known as Ywaya, which means ‘let us go; let us start our journey’.<sup>104</sup> But some of the people were worried by the food and so did not eat.<sup>105</sup>

Because Ywaya were the largest number, and because they were the lineage of the *Rwot* (chief),<sup>106</sup> all the others decided to continue with them. [At this point, some versions of the narrative say something similar to: ‘And the people that were there at the foot of Akwera joined Pajok. They are now people of Pajok also. Those people are Pagaya and Paliyo’].<sup>107</sup> Soon after leaving the place where they ate the food of

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<sup>98</sup> Kit Aweno (meaning ‘the place with the nature of a guinea fowl’) is the likely place where deep myth, ancestral migrations, and remembered pasts coincide. For more information about the specific background details of much of what is provided in the following section, see Appendix 2.

<sup>99</sup> Much like the mythicohistories Malkki (1995) provides for the Burundian Hutu refugees she worked among in Tanzania, the narrative I give here is an aggregation and, thus, generalisation of multiple, specific individual stories, each of which obviously has their own idiosyncrasies as well as political agenda.

<sup>100</sup> As noted in Appendix 2, this ‘last place’ before becoming Pa-Jok is usually Akwera or Anuak/Lokoro.

<sup>101</sup> If leaving Akwera, this was most likely the Nyimur (‘Limu’ in Pajok vernacular), a river close to Got Akwera and currently within Uganda but which Pajok residents claim is the customary boundary between themselves and the Ugandan Acholi community of Ngomoromo.

<sup>102</sup> Some versions of the narrative say ‘God’ or ‘Satan’ instead of *jok*.

<sup>103</sup> These translations are provided by the narrators, as the translation of most lineage names is beyond my skill.

<sup>104</sup> According to Holly Porter (pers. comm.), ‘Ywaya’ often means ‘to pull’ and thus this name ‘could mean that some people were pulling others along with the journey’.

<sup>105</sup> Depending on what version, they were either concerned the food had been made by *jok* in its connotation as Satan or worried the food had been made by people who had poisoned it. Either way, they did not eat it.

<sup>106</sup> This would concur with independently collected historical narratives suggesting that the migrating peoples were likely an Ywaya-led group of Anuak or Shilluk origin following a *Rwot Kot* or rain chief.

<sup>107</sup> This suggests that, if anyone cooked the food for the migrating peoples, it was likely these lineages. It also links these lineages with the mountain, Got Akwera, which would agree both with other historical narratives I collected and the fact Pagaya are the *logwoko* or guardians of Got Akwera.

*jok*, they came to another river, where they stopped to take water and to settle for a time. By this time, those people who did not eat the food of *jok* were getting very hungry, they were crying with the hunger. The others said to them, 'We told you to eat the food which the *jok* prepared but you refused. Now you are starving and it will be your own problem if you die from the hunger'. So they named the people who refused the food of *jok*, *Obwoltoo*, which means 'shyness is a disease which will kill you; those that do not eat, let them die'.<sup>108</sup> This is the story of the name Pa-Jok.

Other historical narratives I collected suggest that this origin or migration narrative relates a period of hunger, drought or famine probably linked to one of the late-18th/early-19th century droughts that Atkinson (2010) argues are of primary importance in the development of an Acholi ethnic identity. Many of these other narratives note that no other place Pa-Jok tried to settle ever had enough water. Therefore, much as Atkinson (1989, 2010) relates for Ugandan Acholi, a migration narrative in which the people who became Pajok search for a suitable area for cultivation might not only relate a famine period – for the purposes of tentative historical dating – but also the process in which a variety of previously unconnected groups amalgamated to become a centralised Acholi chiefdom.<sup>109</sup>

Linking back to the opening of the chapter, none of the origins contained within the Acholi narratives of either Labongo and Gipir or Pa-Jok are about cosmic origin at all. That is, they have no real genesis: the people, the world, and the significant meta-persons encountered already exist when these narratives begin. They are about ethnic or social beginnings rather than cosmic or ontological creation. Indeed, when pushed, no one in Pajok could give any other alternative genesis account except that of the Biblical Book of Genesis itself. Acholi origin narratives are thus not about cosmogenesis but rather a form of ethno- or politico-genesis in a cosmo-ontological context. This echoes the Lugbara, where 'information given [in creation narratives] linked the origin of people to migrations. People were said to have been living in a certain place because of having come to it from elsewhere. Some of these stories contained mythical elements but creation never entered as an explanation' (Dalfovo 1998: 486). Thus, Dalfovo (1998: 487) concludes, such stories 'do not suffice to establish the concept of creation and of a creator'. Similar findings in Acholi indicate not only the lack of any coherent

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<sup>108</sup> Holly Porter has questioned the translations I was given. Her response is worth quoting at length: '*obwol* is a mushroom... Perhaps that they thought the food was poisonous? *Bwolo* means deceiving. If this was a name here [in Uganda] I would assume that it either means "poisonous mushrooms", or "deception is a deadly disease"' (Porter pers. comm.). Unfortunately, the recent escalation of conflict in South Sudan means I am unable to check the local veracity of these translations.

<sup>109</sup> It also provides an excellent example of the wider importance of food idioms in everyday Acholi existential orientations, something I believe requires further academic analysis. See also Porter (2013).

cosmogony (and therefore a correlated lack of any entity or thing instigating that ultimate beginning) but, I suggest, also the widespread assimilation of a now-hegemonic Christian paradigm.

## The cosmos, according to the Acholi of Pajok

In this section I give an overview of the basic structure of Acholi cosmology as described by people in Pajok. Together with powerful meta-persons such as *jok* and *tipu* (Chapter 4), this is the fundamental base of Acholi cosmology. Like many other things presented herein, however, there is no systematic Acholi interpretation of how things work, where they came from, or how they are put together: various people explain things in different ways and include some things while excluding others. As with cosmological concepts like *jok/jogi* (Chapter 4) or local socio-political histories (Appendix 3), much information is ambiguous or contradictory. Nonetheless, areas of meaningful coherence can be found. Given the difficulties just outlined, the following is something of a ‘best estimate’ of the most widely shared ideas of a general Acholi cosmology.

Instead of providing examples of all possible variations, I give an edited version of one Acholi’s conceptualisation of ‘life, the universe, and everything’ (Adams 1995). The narrative I present is from my good friend Abednego (Fig. 12), a remarkably spritely and amiable retired carpenter and engineer in his 70s, a member of the AIC in Caigon, and three times a refugee. I use Abednego’s narrative as an orienting thread not only because I feel it provides a ‘best fit’ depiction but, given the field of inquiry and the lengthy nature of Acholi oral descriptions, it is reasonably short and to the point. Moreover, rather than constructing a cosmology piecemeal from bits of different interviews, a part here or a thought there, I prefer to allow one interlocutor to speak for himself, to describe as best as possible how at least one Acholi person understands the world within which they live. In doing so, what may be considered lost as generalizable phenomena is supplemented by lived orientation,<sup>110</sup> its abstractions self-embedded. For, as Finnström (2006b: 201) has argued, what is cosmology if not lived?

### *The places of the Earth at the place of Abednego*

Abednego’s Caigon *Boma* home is located in an enviable roadside position about two hundred metres south of the Atebi River and right in the middle of southern Pajok’s main ‘business’ area. Composed

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<sup>110</sup> However, I should note that in the interpretative and explanatory sections which intersperse Abednego’s account, my analysis benefits greatly from the distilled abstractions of literally dozens of similar conversations.

of a tidy collection of three permanent buildings situated in an L-shape,<sup>111</sup> a visitor to Abednego's compound is greeted by the massive shading branches of a huge, old mango tree and a plain, sky blue sign reading (among other things) 'Peace, Obed-mot-i-Pajok, Luke 2: 14': 'peace, stay and rest in Pajok' (Fig. 13).<sup>112</sup> Just as the sign suggests, the home of Abednego and his three wives is always welcoming, and together we spent many hours sitting, talking, eating, drinking and simply being friends. Although this meeting took place during *cwii* (the rainy season), the rain had not yet come that day and the weather was hot and sticky. I arrived to find a group of people under the inviting shade of the mango tree, the women sitting on bamboo mats and the men on coloured plastic chairs. After the usual greeting of handshakes, hugs, and inquiries about how one another slept, I was given a plastic seat beside Abednego and, not long after, a small Coke bottle two-thirds full with an opaque liquid: *aregi*, a local spirit made from fermented maize or cassava. For some reason Abednego's was nearly the only place I felt comfortable drinking publicly. On an earlier occasion I had asked Abednego – long a member of the AIC – if drinking alcohol caused him problems with the church. 'You cannot discuss important matters without *aregi*', he had said matter-of-factly, 'that is what we believe here in Africa. The church says we should not drink, but I do not know. The white stuff [i.e. *aregi*] makes you strong. It helps with thinking. Anyway, I am old. I cannot change now'.

After a short discussion about the topic of our meeting and what sort of information I wanted, Abednego began. University educated and an avid bibliophile – one time I visited, he showed me the battered, old university textbook on African history that he had discovered somewhere in Gulu and was then currently reading – Abednego always presented an interesting and refreshing blend of belief and scepticism, imagination and pragmatism. What follows is an edited version of our lengthy discussion (held in English, as they always were):

*Wilobo* is the globe, the earth, with all the seas and everything. *Lobo* is the earth, so *wilobo* is all that concerning the things on the earth. *Ngom*, *kweyo*, now that is the earth itself: the sand, the soil. But *lobo* is concerning the earth... *Lobo dano*, that is the place of people, the country where people live. And *lobo mokene*, that is the different country. A different place, for different people. In the old days, the *lobo* was just here. It was the place where they knew there were people living. That was the only *lobo*. And then the others came, and so they knew there was *lobo mokene*, the *lobo* of others. That was also a *lobo*, another *lobo*, a different *lobo*... And *tim* is in the *lobo*. *Tim* is the bush, where there is no person. Just where animals stay. The place

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<sup>111</sup> For Pajok residents, a 'permanent' building invariably involves concrete sides and a corrugated iron roof.

<sup>112</sup> Luke 2: 14 reads: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'

of the demons, the *jok*... You can call that *lum* also. But *lum* is grass, not the bush. A lonely place, that is *lum*... *Tim* is like the forest, where you go to hunt. Can also be the *bor*, the far place. A place where no one goes to because it is too far... And those places, they are all the same. Outside, dangerous, far away.

In the beginning, there was only *lobo*, the place of people who are known, the social world, and *wilobo*, the rest of the world and that which encompasses it. As non-Acholi people became known, so the definition and understanding of *lobo* increased to simultaneously both include and exclude those people: they are recognised as different people, others, inhabiting the same plane of existence (*wilobo*) yet not inhabiting the same social world.<sup>113</sup> Their worlds are thus outside and other, which is what *lobo mokene* means: ‘the other’ *lobo*. This makes those people both powerful and dangerous, and many stories tell of these interlinked aspects of non-Acholi peoples, or even those Acholi who border other groups. In these stories, it are the Kakwa and Bari of Central Equatoria who are known to be powerful sorcerers, the neighbouring Madi who are shapechangers and poisoners (and who also bring poison into the community, see Chapter 6), the Lango and Teso of eastern Uganda who fraternise with demons, and the people of Tanzania who are the source of those things an older anthropology might call fetishes (see Evans-Pritchard 1956, 1972; Malinowski 2015) and who have the strongest magic of all (p’Bitek 1971: 130, 140).<sup>114</sup> Most cosmological power whether good or evil is thought to originate from these other peoples, including the cannibalistic power of a zombie-seeking demonic underworld (Chapter 8) as well as the rainmaking power of the Ywaya ‘stranger kings’ of Pajok (Atkinson 1989, 2010; de Heusch 1982; Sahlins 1987. Also see Appendix 3).

In the Acholi worldview, *tim* and *lum* and other terms connected to an idea of as ‘the wild’ are conceptualised as that which lies outside the Acholi *gang* (family/home/village), the social domain of humans. This encompasses not only the uninhabited wilderness itself, but also other peoples – both Acholi and non-Acholi – as well as unknown areas of the world. However, although populated by other human *people*, it is lonely, thus indicating its distance and distinction from the social world of human *persons*. Echoing theories about the cross-cultural definition of structural and categorical purity proposed by Mary Douglas (2002) and others (Leach 1964; Ortner 1972), these concepts form a cosmologically important meta-abstraction connected to basic ideas concerning culture and nature, inside and outside, human and other.

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<sup>113</sup> Okot p’Bitek (1986: 22) writes, ‘they have nothing to communicate to strangers, outsiders who are, therefore, not *dano* (Human) because they do not and cannot participate in the philosophy of life’.

<sup>114</sup> For a similar point among the Sukuma of Tanzania, see Stroeken (2012).

*Tim* is also a hunting place, that part of the dangerous outside simultaneously open to people and therefore at least partially enculturated. This ambiguity gives it cosmological power (Douglas 2002). Moreover, many meta-persons reside in *tim* and it therefore connotes a meeting place where much of what is both powerful (in the sense of Lienhardt [1961]) and sacred (*qua* Durkheim [1995]) lives and comes into contact with the human. All this makes *tim* liminal and needing mediation. In Pajok, mediators of *tim* are of three kinds: ritual elders or *logwoko* ('guardians', Chapter 4); spirit mediums or *ajwaki* (Chapter 6); and the *Rwot Kot* or rainmaker. Without such mediators, the local cosmology 'could not function' (Stroeken 2012: 86; see also Lévi-Strauss 1955, 1974). Importantly, each mediator intercedes within cosmological relations in different yet connected ways. While the rainmaker mediates between community and cosmos to ensure fertility, continuity and production on a wider bio-social scale, and a *lagwoko* mediates between a specific lineage and an exact meta-person to ensure fertility, continuity and production of a lineal or genetic nature, the *ajwaka* mediates between person, meta-person and cosmos through their own body or person, effectively collapsing yet embodying and referencing the precise relationality embedded within the other mediatory roles.

#### The universe and what it comprises

Abednego continued:

*Wilobo* also is the universe. That is *wilobo*. All the stars, the planets. All the things in the sky, *polo*, they are *malo lobo*. Above the earth. That is all *wilobo*, part of *wilobo*... Then *woko*, that is something which is outside... So the stars, *dwe* (moon), *ceng* (sun). These things are *woko*, outside the world, outside the *lobo*... They are *woko*, outside, but also they are all *wilobo*, connected to *wilobo*... And they are *malo lobo*... *Wilobo weng*, all these things are *wilobo*, they are all part of it together.

*Wilobo* is not just the world but that which encompasses it. That which is both outside and above *lobo* as the social world. It is simultaneously the earth and the universe. In Acholi, *wi* means 'the head' or 'the top' of something; that which is above. Similarly, the things comprising *wilobo* are also *malo lobo* or above the earth. There is a definitive geocentric stratigraphy at play placing the earth firmly underneath something (rather vaguely defined) above. Further, this above both holds and contains the celestial bodies at the same time as the things it contains are integral parts of it: that is, the celestial bodies are simultaneously both contained by and constitutive of *wilobo*. This is significant, as it demonstrates a basic relational structuring logic equally important for understanding Acholi personhood: just like the firmament is understood as having some independence while both

containing and being composed of celestial bodies, so too the Acholi person contains and is composed of both dependent (relational) and independent (individual) parts.

Equally important, I think, is that before the widespread incorporation of Christianity, and unlike as is common among either Christians or the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956), the heavens did not contain persons. There was no God-entity and no higher Power (Lienhardt 1961).<sup>115</sup> There was simply earth and above the earth, *lobo* and *wilobo*. Likewise, there is a certain social or ethnic homocentricity to the Acholi cosmos, where the (social) world of (known) people is understood as the centre of a horizontally expanding world of (both human and metahuman) persons. The world thus consists of people and persons connected in ways which accord with the reality (rather than the abstraction) of basic African segmentary principles: that is 'as *actual relations* between groups of kinsmen within local communities rather than as a tree of descent' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 202, emphasis added), where the extent of actually existing relations defines not only the closeness of segmentary abstraction but also the reality of social personhood.

Although Abednego never spoke about death, bodies or what happens to that aspect which might be called the 'soul' in the event of death, other community members did. Despite being riddled with ambiguity and contradiction, ideas around death have been significantly transformed with the coming of Christianity.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, prior to widespread Christian conversion, it is likely that, similar to the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956), the Acholi made a clear distinction between the body (*kom*) and that part making someone a social person, their *tipu*. This distinction is discussed in Chapter 4. For present purposes, the following will suffice (although specific instances invariably include some discrepancy from this generalisation): both before and after Christianity, bodies are buried and definitely not burnt, which is a great disrespect and certain to result in cosmological sanction. Funerals take place three days after death if the deceased is male or four days if female (Girling 1960: 22; Odoki 1997: 42; p'Bitek 1973b: 56).<sup>117</sup> The deceased's social component – their *tipu* – becomes an ancestor of their family and lineage (a *kwaro*) and should be respected (*woro*) and remembered (*poyo*) through intermittent offerings of things like food, beer and tobacco. There is, however, no standardisation to this, and people can and often do forget about these obligations until the deceased makes their

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<sup>115</sup> Although *Jok Malo* and *Jok Polo* ('Jok Who Is Up' and 'Jok of the Sky/Heaven') have since both been created through the dialectical encounter with twentieth century missionaries.

<sup>116</sup> Although as Chapter 8 shows, other aspects of the entanglement with globalisation are also involved.

<sup>117</sup> Girling (1960: 22) states 'It is noteworthy that at every stage in social development the numbers three and four are introduced, to connote the sex of the individual. The choice of these particular numbers has not so far been satisfactorily explained, although their use in similar contexts has been reported from widely separated areas of East Africa'.

presence known through misfortune or affliction.<sup>118</sup> However, as I also discuss more fully in Chapter 4, the *tipu* of someone who dies in a problematic way (like in the bush, through homicide, or remaining unburied) may become *cen* (ghostly vengeance) and haunt – the Acholi would say *yelo*, ‘disturb’ – those responsible.

Despite any variation, however, what is certain is that although the *tipu* leaves the body, which rots in the ground, it also remains within the same world, part of the same *lobo*. There is no alternate dimension of existence, no higher plane or place of the dead. Thus, as Deng notes among Dinka, so too among Acholi, where ‘the world of the dead is a mythical extension of the world they know’ (1988: 168). If there is any place where Acholi *tipu* might reside, it could be the *kac* or *abila* (lineal and clans shrines, respectively). However, as I discuss in Chapter 4, this seems unlikely, despite Malandra’s (1939: 27) assertions.<sup>119</sup> Thus, *tipu pa kwaro* (spirits of ancestors) are common in Pajok, as they must be in a cosmological system with no coherent notion of an underworld, afterlife, or place of the dead beyond the physical world of *lobo*.

Finally, I defer to Acholi anthropologist p’Bitek to highlight the importance both of fate and the anthropocentricity of the universe in Acholi thought: *wilobo* and *woko*, p’Bitek (1973b: 60; see also 1971 chapter 9) notes, can both be used to reference ‘the human predicament; they represent the problems, risks, sufferings and challenges that the individual faces during his or her lifetime [and] against... [which] man [sic] is impotent’. In other words, the universe and human existence are intimately interconnected. That humanity is within the universe is one of its defining characteristics, just as this universe helps to define humanity.

Now, back to Abednego, who here seemed to notice that he had forgotten something important.

#### *Dangerous places, dangerous things*

Stirring, Abednego reached forward and took the bottle of *aregi* and a small glass from the little wooden table which sat between us. Pouring himself a glass of the whitish liquid, he drank it in one swallow and handed the two objects across to me. ‘That is what the grandfathers used to believe’, he said, ‘before the English came and taught us the true things. But there are other things you must know as well, about the world, how we the Acholi live in it. But first you must drink’. As I poured myself a

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<sup>118</sup> Such ‘disturbings’ (to use an Acholi English vernacular term) are the most common source of cosmological affliction. However, as these are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 6, I will not explain them further here.

<sup>119</sup> It would be remiss not to note that Malandra (1939: 33) said *kwaro* live along river banks – typically the home of *jok* – ‘where they feed on frogs or upon leaves’. Given common conceptual elisions between meta-persons (Chapter 4), it is not surprising their places are also connected.

glass and took a sip, Abednego sat back in his chair and changed the direction of the discussion. ‘Now, let us talk about *ayweya*’, he said:

*Ayweya* is a place where people used to be hurt, a place of *tipu*, of *cen* (see Chapter 4). Where the Satan is staying strong, a bad spirit. Where people used to go to worship. And if it falls on someone at that place, then *ayweya mako* (it catches someone), like at the Atebi (well-known as the home of powerful meta-persons)... *Wang-Jok* (*jok* shrine, literally ‘the eyes of the *jok*’), that is an *ayweya* place, where *ayweya* is. And if a person gets sick then you need to go there and *pako ayweya* (worship that thing). *Kulu* is just the river, but *ayweya* is the place on the river where the *jok* lives. Demons stay there. So if you go there, you will be caught, because you go to the place of the Satan... But the *abila* (shrine) is different (see Chapter 4). That is the place to worship the spirit of your grandfather, the ancestors.<sup>120</sup> Not a Satan... And Satan, in our language, that is *jok*. *Jok* is like a Satan, can fall on a person and knock them down. Make them talk things they do not know. But if they talk the truth, then they can become a wizard, *lajok*... And the normal *lapoya* (madness) is permanent, but *jok* just comes from the Satan. It is not permanent, can take a person and then go away.

As *abila*, *cen*, *jok* and *tipu* are all discussed in detail in Chapter 4, I will not discuss them further here, expect to say that – as might be apparent from Abednego’s description – the first three of these terms all have their definitional problems and, in my opinion, are best understood as heteroglossic terms (Besnier 1996; Dalfovo 1998; Mogensen 2002). In discussing how the similarly Luo-speaking Jop'Adhola of northern Uganda talk about *juok*, Mogensen (2002: 421) argues the concept is ‘heteroglossic in the sense that it implies multiple competing, and sometimes incompatible, voices. Rather than seeking a resolution in the contradictions we should seek an understanding of the contradictions themselves’. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, it is the same among Acholi (see also Ogot 1961).

Thus, instead of discussing *abila*, *cen*, *jok* and *tipu* here, I discuss Abednego’s narration of *ayweya*. I particularly want to note the significance of multiplicity and place-boundedness (despite any heteroglossic elision of place and thing), the obvious assimilation of Christian concepts, and the moral loading indigenous concepts take because of this assimilation. Victor and Porter (Forthcoming: 11) define *ayweya* as ‘troublesome spirits usually connected to features in the environment such as big trees rocks or water points’. It is important to note the slight but possibly significant differences

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<sup>120</sup> In Acholi, the term for both grandfather(s) and ancestor(s) is *kwaro*.

between Abednego's comments and Victor and Porter's definition, with Abednego giving priority to the places involved in *ayweya* while Victor and Porter highlight the entities connected to those places. Note further, however, the conceptual slippage and elision of the categories 'place' and 'entity' in Abednego's description: what starts as a place *of* something ('of *tipu*, of *cen*' and so on) becomes the something of a place ('an *ayweya* place, where *ayweya* is').

There are several points of interest in this, as most Acholi meta-persons are distinctly place bound. Thus most *jogi* either live in or near significant environmental features, have their own specific shrine (the *wang-jok*), or they are said to 'live inside' the body of a person who they have possessed. Likewise *cen* is said to haunt the area near their place of death, and bodies are buried in the familial compound to ensure *tipu* stay near the family and become *kwaro*. Moreover, celebrations (*kwero*) to respect (*woro*) meta-persons also usually take place at particular places. However, from what Abednego and other community members noted, it seems a primary reason for such conceptual elision is it is not the place or the entity of significance but rather the force mobilised or power inherent in that place or thing.

Another aspect needing foregrounding is the central significance of morality to the constitution, conceptualisation, and practice of cosmology in Acholi. Therefore, Abednego is quick to highlight that although *ayweya*, *cen*, *jok* and *kwaro* may seem superficially similar, there is a world of difference between *kwaro* – as known persons you have mostly positive social relations with – and the latter terms. Another way to put this is *kwaro* are definitely known as persons while the personhood of the others remain ambiguous. This is most obviously demonstrated in the realm of morality or, more precisely, through the engagement of *kwaro* within a wider, positively valued and directed socio-moral order. Such positive understandings of the social, relational and moral positionings of *kwaro* (compared to the other types of meta-person) is precisely that which has allowed them to maintain something of a positive evaluation within the evangelical lifeworld compared to the other Acholi meta-persons.

Two other elements worth mentioning are the essential ambiguity and multiplicity of Acholi meta-persons. This is apparent from how almost everyone speaks about nearly all meta-persons, especially when speaking English. Thus, a *jok*, demon, or Satan are not only one particular manifestation of the possible many – 'the *jok*', 'the demons', 'a Satan' – but, following the lived realism (Finnström 2008) or radical empiricism (Jackson 1989; Stoller 1989) with which Acholi view the world and their lives within it (see below), the existence of such things is only known through encounter. Moreover, this mirrors how Acholi speak about meta-persons generally: singular in certain contexts, plural in others;

personalised and anthropomorphised in one situation, generalised and abstract in another.<sup>121</sup> Such inherent heteroglossia is likely why earlier attempts to define Acholi cosmological concepts suffered so much confusion, particularly early modernist accounts which ignored the lived realities of everyday usage while trying to create definitive abstract typologies. As Anderson (2001: 107) has argued, forcing such ‘a typology may overlook the complexities of a subject and even distort our understanding of it’.

Definitional problems are also apparent in ambiguities connected to the behaviour or powers of Acholi meta-persons: what Acholi might call ‘talents’ or *diro*. As Abednego notes when he says that *jok* can ‘make them talk things they do not know. But if they talk the truth, then they can become a wizard, *lajok*’, the same entity can be both good and bad, helpful and obstructive, benevolent and malicious. Or, perhaps, a better way to put this is that a meta-person’s actions can have both helpful and harmful effects despite their intentions. Thus, the ‘nonsense talk’ brought on by the effects of *jok* possession may lead to madness – *apoya* – or the acquisition of knowledge and talent resulting in the affected person becoming a cosmologically empowered entity, a *lajok*. This has as much to do with the specific circumstances involved in a meta-person’s interaction with the human world as it does any inherent quality of that meta-person.<sup>122</sup>

Evangelical Christianity and its demonization of tradition (Meyer 2004: 457) has obviously impacted Abednego’s worldview. Thus, in prioritising moral rather than existential or ontological evaluations of customary cosmological meta-persons, Abednego is quick to conceptually and discursively link almost the entire Acholi cosmology to Satan and the demonic. This is common among Pajok residents, no matter their church affiliation, but is particularly widespread among evangelicals. Once meta-persons are demonised, so are practices associated with them, and so too are their celebrations and worship. I think it significant, however, that Abednego stops short of demonising *kwaro*: unlike other meta-persons, *kwaro* are different because they are known. That is, people have seen, interacted with and remember them. They are certainly no more or less empirically real than the other categories Abednego discussed – they have just as much impact upon people’s lives as *jogi*, for example – but they are real in the sense of being socially identifiable, their personalities and idiosyncrasies known.

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<sup>121</sup> Such as is noticeable in mid-twentieth century debates over the nature of *jok*. See Chapter 4.

<sup>122</sup> Thus, as *kwaro* are both living grandfathers and dead ancestors, like the living they also have the same desires and intentions: capricious, helpful, jealous or reliable in different times and in different measures. This is why many mild illnesses and other afflictions are ascribed to their doings. In the case of *kwaro*-related affliction, however, and as Evans-Pritchard (1956), Lienhardt (1961) and Middleton (1960, 1965) noted among the Nuer, Dinka, and Lugbara respectively, this is always brought on by a failure to properly respect the deceased. Likewise, before the contemporary hegemony of Christian ideologies, *jogi* were similarly seen as potentially both helpful and harmful and were certainly more positively evaluated than they are now.

Moreover, their actions are always seen as moral: even when causing illness or misfortune, this is widely considered to have a just and reasonable cause (p'Bitek 1971: 104).

### Lived pragmatism in Acholi cosmology

Acholi anthropologist p'Bitek (1970, 1971) understands Acholi belief as a kind of positive materialism along the lines of 'if I cannot see it or I cannot touch it then I do not believe it'. Indeed, echoing p'Bitek, Russell (1966: 16) wrote that, similar to what Evans-Pritchard (1972) noted about the Zande, Acholi ritual 'is almost entirely utilitarian, hardly metaphysical at all (for the *jogi*, even though disembodied, are essentially part of the physical universe), and lacking in any speculation about creation and the existence of a High God'. Similarly to what Piot (1999: 101) noted among the Kabre of northern Togo, in Acholi rituals 'much... ceremonial action has to do with making visible actions and statuses that are not considered achieved until they are "seen" by others... What we have here is an everyday epistemology that relies on making things known by making them visible'.

Writing about conflict and its effects on the general existential positioning of Acholi in northern Uganda, Finnström adopts the phrase 'lived realism' (Finnström 2008: 18), indicating the term acknowledges Ugandan Acholi's understandings that they 'are always tied to history and the wider world'. Such an orientation is not confined to Uganda, however: acknowledging a debt to Finnström (2008) and Jackson (especially 1989, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2005), I suggest people in Pajok share a sense of 'lived pragmatism' toward the world. Green (1983: 4) has said that 'a spirit of fatalism commonly marks [religious] attitudes' across Africa. Indeed, throughout the early days of fieldwork I struggled coming to terms with an existential orientation I considered unnecessarily 'fatalistic'. However, following discussions with a number of close interlocutors at the end of fieldwork and re-reading Finnström and Jackson after returning from the field, I believe these orientations instead form of decidedly *lived* pragmatism; one both epistemologically and experientially close to the methodology of radical empiricism advocated by Jackson (1989) and Stoller (1989).

For Jackson (1989: 2-3), radical empiricism is an *ad hoc* method of understanding lived experience which is grounded 'in the actual events, objects, and interpersonal relationships that make up the quotidian world' and which 'includes "transitive" as well as "substantive" elements, conjunctions as well as disjunctions, and... [a] sense of the immediate, active, ambiguous "plenum of existence"'. Radical empiricism, writes Jackson, 'is first and foremost a philosophy of the experience of objects and actions in which the subject itself is a participant... [and] implies that there is no constant, substantive "self" which can address constant, substantive "others" as objects of knowledge'. In other words, this

is a being-in-the-world which is not only inherently relational – as Acholi personhood is also – but one which understands itself in and through its embodied interaction with that world.

Thus, what in Pajok at first seemed to me as fatalism is, I suggest, an orientation towards life, the world and existence in which lived experience is grounded in an ‘agnostic’ or pragmatic common-sense stipulating that many of the things happening to people cannot be objectively explained or rationalised. This is a worldview, in other words, which seeks to understand reality by describing its basic existential condition: uncertainty (Jackson 1989, 2002, 2005). And given historical experiences including ivory and slave raiding, colonial and post-colonial subjugation, and now three near-genocidal civil wars – as well as everyday or seasonal experiences such as disease and famine – existential uncertainty is quite possibly the one thing people in this region can undoubtedly be certain of.

Therefore, in this section I discuss what I see as three fundamental and interrelated aspects of contemporary Pajok residents’ orientations to and logics regarding the world, cosmos, and each other. These are: firstly, a needs-based conceptualisation of the religious and the cosmological, demonstrated in such things as the practical application of ritual primarily when needed only (as highlighted by Russell, above); a present-oriented understanding of the workings and significance of time;<sup>123</sup> and a pragmatic and generally untrusting attitude toward the actions and intentions of other persons and how these impact the workings of the world. I address these below.

#### *The everyday pragmatics of religion*

I suggest a pragmatic orientation to the religious is simply one manifestation of a more general alignment towards life. By the ‘pragmatics of religion’, I mean that such orientations are (a) primarily instrumental rather than intellectual or expressive; and (b) usually directed to specific ends rather than a generalised worshipping of an encompassing God who addresses worldly problems according to His own plans and timeframe (such as suggested by Dumont [1980, 1992]). Being focused toward the short-*duree*, such an orientation might be called a pragmatics of ‘the ever-present’.<sup>124</sup> The prevalence of this attitude toward the realm of religion in Pajok concerns many evangelicals and can be a source of significant tension. These tensions are especially obvious in connection to church membership and attendance, where the practical realities and everyday necessities of agricultural life in a hostile environment come into direct competition with the demands of church and God. It is

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<sup>123</sup> Such an orientation towards time has been noted across Africa. See: Booth Jr. (1975); Eliade (1959); Evans-Pritchard (1939); Mbiti (1971).

<sup>124</sup> Although coming to this conclusion independently, my understanding of this orientation in Acholi is reminiscent of what Eliade (1959: 86) called ‘the continual present’ and Mbiti (1971: 24) has termed the ‘absent future’ of African reckonings of time.

common to hear evangelicals complain not enough people come to church, especially men, and particularly in the long months of *cwii* (the March-November wet season). Apparently, things were different when the community lived in refugee camps in Uganda. In fact, it is not unusual to hear evangelicals say although life was difficult in the camps, and although the community had no freedom or access to land, at least they were 'closer to God'.

Such feelings were expressed on many occasions, a typical example being that given by my neighbour, lineage brother and name-mate Joseph, who said although life in Uganda had been 'very hard to live with', it was also 'somehow better, because the people were closer to God'.<sup>125</sup> Before fleeing as refugees, Joseph said, many people in Pajok used to 'practice the old ways' of customary religion. However, following attack in 1989, much of the population crossed the border into Uganda, becoming refugees. Many also became Christian. This included our beloved compound matriarch, Abuba, who had once been 'someone who danced with the *jok* and shook the *ajaya* (gourd rattle)',<sup>126</sup> as Joseph put it; an *ajwaka* or spirit-medium. Although Abuba always refused to speak of those times, Joseph told me that, like many others in Pajok, Abuba first truly heard God's Word in the Ugandan camps. Before that she practiced the religion of her socialisation: in her own words 'the old ways with the *jogi* and the *kwaro*'. It was in the camps, however, that she found God and came to understand the salvational message of the Bible. As Abuba said, 'in the camps life was very hard. You could not do anything, not go anywhere. No cultivating, no celebrations, nothing. No life, just waiting. But the missionaries were there, preaching where people gathered. So that is how I came to hear the Word of God'.

Many people converted to different forms of predominantly evangelical Protestantism in the camps. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2005: 234) similarly indicates for the uptake of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, 'the main attraction ... may be expressed in the word "relevance", by which they meant Christianity that was practical'. In a refugee camp, relevance often takes the dimensions of basic existential survival: people turn to God simply to survive. However, many camps converts have not attended church or read the Bible since returning to Pajok. They say they are too busy planting, weeding, or harvesting. Church-going evangelicals see things differently. 'Those people, they wanted God very badly to help at that time', said one Born Again woman, 'and so they prayed very hard in the camps.

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<sup>125</sup> My middle name is Joseph. Acholi have several names, one a meaningful personal name given at birth, one a Christian or Baptismal name, and then several names of lineal ancestors, usually a parent and grandparent. Joseph loved the fact we shared names and (originally thinking my first name was 'Brian' rather than the more unusual 'Ryan'), when his wife gave birth to a son during fieldwork, they named that boy 'Brian' so that he and I would share names also. For a longer discussion of Acholi names, see Grove (1919: 160-161). For a discussion of Nuer naming practices, see Evans-Pritchard (1956).

<sup>126</sup> As Baines (2005: 123) describes it, an *ajaya* is a 'shaker constructed out of a gourd; [a] traditional instrument used to contact the supernatural world'.

But now since they have returned, they do not pray. Because they believe they do not need God any longer'. Another woman similarly noted 'these backsliders do not think they need God now they are back [in Pajok]: they are now just working the land', meaning they have returned to the seasonal cycle of cultivation which dominates the annual calendar. However, as this woman said, 'these people, the backsliders, they are just concerned with the worldly things. So the digging, the drinking alcohol. They have forgotten about God, forgotten what He did for them, bringing them back home to Pajok, giving them their land again. So, soon it will be very hard for those ones'.<sup>127</sup>

The primacy of such daily concerns leads many evangelicals to say the community has 'lost faith' since returning from exile.<sup>128</sup> In exile, they say, there were definite spiritual and cosmological needs to fill: Rose, one of my closet female interlocutors said that, as refugees in Uganda 'people were suffering, truly! Many of the people needed God at that time. So they prayed a lot, really. But since returning, now they do not pray. They are busy with the work [agriculture], they have forgotten'. Since returning to their natal community, the existential need for spiritual solace is no longer felt and so the pragmatic and utilitarian relationship between the Acholi and the religious no longer acts as a motivational tool to bring people to weekly service. Instead, the practical requirements and cyclical movement of seasonal agriculture is more immediately important (Booth Jr. 1975; Evans-Pritchard 1939, 1940). In a refrain which was common whenever I asked anyone why they did not go to church even though they professed to be Christian, one man told me, 'You know, I want to go to the church, but I must feed my family. That is why I do not go. So it is hard'. It is not that the 'pragmatics' of agriculture and everyday existentiality do not involve anything god- or spirit-like, as many of the more powerful *jogi* populating the Acholi world are decidedly fertility oriented, and much of their customary efficacy based upon the successful (re)production of crops and children. Rather, some evangelicals see such present-focused orientations as decidedly non-Christian: the prioritisation of self and the moment over God and salvation. After all, as church leaders often admonished, 'God just wants us to worship Him, to thank Him, to give Him praise. That is why you must go to the church!'

I contend one reason even self-professed evangelicals no longer attend church is because of the pragmatic nature of traditional Acholi ritual practices, and especially how engagement with these is

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<sup>127</sup> For an extended discussion of the links between church orthodoxy, salvation ideology and the pragmatic needs of African religious systems, see Green (2002).

<sup>128</sup> The English word 'exile' is the most common vernacular term used when speaking about the community's refugee years between the late-1980s and mid-2000s and is even used in sentences otherwise entirely constructed in Acholi. Moreover, it is an important discursive trope within Pajok, effectively de-limiting the time in exile as liminal and outside the normal parameters of life and experience, marking it out as both abnormal (outside experiential normality) and as amoral (outside everyday morality). Thus, as well as idealising continuity between the present community – with its supposed stability and shared sociality – and the (non-refugee) past, much of what happened in exile is minimised in impact, effectively seeking to negate or disempower it.

directly connected to specific, stated needs (see also Evans-Pritchard 1956; Lienhardt 1961). As the religious is primarily engaged with by asking defined meta-persons to help with specific problems, there is no formal everyday ritual within customary Acholi belief (Russell 1966: 3). Outside such instances, these meta-persons can be ignored or bracketed off. The location-boundedness of many meta-persons has also been important in this development. For example, while in refugee camps, community members were alienated from many of the specifically-located meta-persons of Pajok, both helpful and harmful. There was, however, more opportunity to interact with and be affected by other, more dangerous and capricious meta-persons which are no location-bound, especially *cen* and 'free' possession-based *jogi* (Chapter 4). As discussed in Chapter 4, not only were interactions with *cen* much more common in Uganda than in South Sudan, but *cen* results from dehumanising forms of death and its effects. Without the presence of the beneficial meta-persons located in the Pajok environment towards whom they could direct rituals overcoming *cen*, I suggest that relational engagements with the omnipotence and omnipresent Christian God possibly seemed an important – and perhaps even vital – replacement.

In such ways, the Acholi are similar to the Dinka, for whom 'the ultimate objective of religious devotion is not so much to ensure salvation in a life hereafter as it is the physical and spiritual well-being of life in this world' (Deng 1988: 157-158). As Obwoya rhetorically asked me when we discussed my thoughts about pragmatic Acholi religious orientations, 'some people, they think why attend the church if they have no need for help?' After all, Obwoya pointed out, a person can still believe in Christ, accept the power of God, and confess their sins. They might maintain their personal relationship with God in other ways. As Obwoya also noted, why attend church if there are other pressing existential or relational concerns like gardening or attending funerals? Chua (2015: 350) notes similar orientations to religion among the Bidayuh of Borneo, where 'by and large such predicaments are subsumed by a form of everyday Christianity that is characterised by its this-worldly commitments rather than its transcendental leanings'.

This is not to psychologise or deemphasise the importance of the spiritual or religious; to say that it is only strong when people want help. Rather, it is to make the observation – similar to those made by analysts of other Nilotic peoples (Burton 1985; Deng 1980, 1988; Driberg 1923; Lienhardt 1961) – that although many people remain religiously oriented and profess themselves Christian, the underlying logics of faith and ritual practice in Acholi Pajok are primarily oriented toward the pragmatic requirements of the existential survival of one's self, family, and lineage. These people are no less Christian but other, more proximate aspects of the multitude dimensions of their lives are more immediately important. As Deng (1988: 158) remarked for the Nilotic Dinka, in this way Acholi also 'solve the paradox of their preoccupation with life as the objective of their religious practice and their

recognition that death is inevitable by viewing the ultimate goal not as the preservation... but rather as the continuation of life through genetic and social reproduction'. It is for this reason, I think, that for many in Pajok – including some evangelicals – meta-persons of biosocial continuity and short-term or present-oriented temporalities seem more salient than the distant future and meta-persons of salvation and the soul.<sup>129</sup>

### Trust and time in contemporary Pajok

A perfect example of pragmatic orientations toward time and the world in Pajok is a phrase I saw on the side of an *ot lum* (grass-roofed hut) sometime in February 2014: '*Anyim pe Gene*', one of the many phrases painted on various buildings around the community. I first grew interested in these public commentaries in early 2014, not long after the outbreak of war and around the same time I realised there was something more significant to the logics of narration than simply voicing opinion (see Chapter 7). I began compiling a comprehensive list of all written statements in the Pajok landscape, translating them myself, asking close interlocutors for both their apparent and deeper meanings, and getting the purpose of the inscription from the owner of the building on which they were displayed.

'*Anyim pe Gene* means do not trust what is ahead, do not trust in tomorrow', said Obwoya. 'Many people believe that here. That is common'. Unfortunately, the owner of this particular hut was never available but, according to others, it means no one can know the future and, because of this, you should use what you have today. In other words, because the future is unknown – a point of significant existential salience given the outbreak and rapid escalation of violence in the country since 2013 – you should not worry about saving (animals, items, money or so on) or even planning for the future.<sup>130</sup> As the meaning of this statement was often explained to me, why save something you will never enjoy, especially if tomorrow might not even come? In the lived pragmatism of Acholi South Sudan, all that is known is the present and, as that is all a person can trust, better to make the most of life while you possess it. When Obwoya first interpreted this statement for me, I noted the attitude of *Anyim pe Gene* seemed a common existential position among community members. 'Oh yes', he replied, 'but not just Pajok. South Sudan. Africa even. Because life is hard, people are dying. Fighting is always

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<sup>129</sup> This agrees with Green (2002: 180), who suggests ideas of salvation are more important to Western missionaries than many African Christians, for whom the emphasis is on everyday relationality.

<sup>130</sup> In the interests of not reproducing academic tendencies to exoticise violence, I should note that it is not just violence that people relate to in this way, but things like untreatable illnesses, lack of food or water, a lack of rule of law, unpredictable weather, when possessions are likely to break or be stolen, and so on. The important point is that it is not violence but rather *the general conditions of life itself* which make the future unknowable.

happening. Disease killing people. No rain, too much rain. So people think life is hard, and you never know what will happen tomorrow. You only know death is coming’.

Obwoya’s comment led into a deeper discussion on violence within the community and, given the worrying political climate of the time, concerns about interpersonal violence. Like others I had spoken with, both men and women, young and old, Obwoya knew interpersonal violence was never far away; that insult or anger very easily turns into physical aggression, even among friends and family. I had noted the quickness with which some people, especially young men, threatened quite extreme violence. When I mentioned this to Obwoya, he agreed, saying ‘you know, the beatings, the killings, they have become normal now to the young people, the youth. During the war, everyone was in the camp. There were people just dying everywhere, all around. People fighting, dying. So it became like nothing to them, those youth, because that is how they grew up, that is what they learned’. In other words, although violence and killing are generally understood as socially problematic, many younger men do not view of great individual significance. Indeed, extremes of interpersonal violence had almost become normalised, part of the everyday social world and, given the prominence of refugee and war experiences, part of the socialisation of many younger community members born and raised in refugee camps in Uganda. I had learned to somewhat expect such an answer. However, what he said next has resonated with me ever since, becoming one of my key orienting principles about the cultural significance of the power of words (see Chapter 7):

So you need to be careful, because if you anger someone they will promise to kill you. And so then they need to do it. Because they said it. Not just to talk. And maybe not straight away, but they will say that one day they will find you and kill you. And so then you will need to watch out, if you see that person. Because you do not know what that person will do, or when they will do it. Because he has said that thing and so now it must happen. Once said, cannot stop.

A basic ontological position on intrinsic human ‘badness’ is present in the comments and actions of many different community members, no matter their religious affiliation.<sup>131</sup> Many people’s life experiences include living through war and being socialised in refugee camps, around situations of extreme violence including widespread rape and the abduction of children by perpetrated all parties in both the Ugandan and Sudanese conflicts. Further, interpersonal trust is difficult to achieve, whether with outsiders, others in the community, or even church or family members.<sup>132</sup> This is

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<sup>131</sup> This is something Porter (pers. comm.) has also found among Acholi in northern Uganda, where she notes that Acholi are ‘astonishingly aware and accepting of their own [personal] capacity for “badness”’.

<sup>132</sup> See also Ravalde (2014: 5), who has stated that ‘lies, deception, and mistrust are common and openly expressed characteristics of almost every inter-personal relationship in Ocheru [eastern Uganda]’.

particularly true regarding money, widely seen as a corrupting influence so powerful it can debase even the most steadfast leader or devout Christian. People in Pajok are genuinely afraid of theft and corruption, both of which are common topics of discussion and central components in church sermons or public announcements. People have simply become intensely distrustful (Porter 2013; Ravalde 2014: 5). Such pragmatic orientations can provide an effective response to the ongoing crises of life as a peasant farmer in eastern Africa, whether such crises are environmental, human or spiritual in origin.

I therefore suggest that these pragmatic ontological and existential positions result from the interrelated aspects of contemporary Pajok residents' experiences of the world and each other. One main argument I present throughout this thesis is that, in many ways, basic pre-Christian Acholi logics continue into the present despite the religious and moral transformations resulting from the widespread uptake of evangelical Christianity and, in fact, that local evangelical manifestations typically only further solidify many of these basic logics and orientations. Attitudes of lived pragmatism towards time, the cosmos, life and other people – that is, toward experience itself – are just some examples of how pre-Christian Acholi experiences largely continue within evangelicals' day-to-day and religious lives. One main reason for the ongoing continuity of these orientations is that the basic moral alignments underlying such worldviews remain of utmost importance. Thus, despite religious affiliation, evangelicals still find themselves living in a world within which the basic and most prevailing everyday reality is a feeling of existential uncertainty bordering on crisis. One fundamental way of coping is the ongoing continuity of another element of everyday sociocultural embeddedness: kinship. This is the subject of the next section.

### **Personhood, personal relationships and kinship**

In many ethnographies of Christianity, kinship and tradition are positioned at the centre of Christian requirements to 'break from the past' (Meyer 1998). In Pajok, however, kinship remains a fundamental component of the everyday lifeworld, evangelical or otherwise. Rather than breaking from kinship, evangelicals in Pajok continue to stress the importance of their family and kin networks – things 'God gave us as human beings' – with the people in such networks usually continuing to provide someone's main avenue of support. This continues to echo the findings of Crazzolaro (1950: 70), who noted that, for Acholi, the most 'appreciated social ties are those of blood or... kinship... Relationship is precious... In this lies the value of "great family" or clanship organisation. The duties of relationship... must not be neglected. The interest of the one must absolutely be the interest of the other'. Indeed, not once did I hear anyone speak about a need to break away from or minimise kinship

connections. Instead, an evangelical in Pajok is more likely to say they must bring their families and lineages *into* kinship with God as ‘brothers and sisters in Christ’. This obligation is even promoted as a necessary part of Christian duty, part of the Great Commission which church leaders in Pajok are liable to call ‘the primary duty of all believers’.<sup>133</sup> Such declarations are also common in sermons, as the following example from the AIC in Caigon demonstrates:

And if your wife will not come to the church, you should not divorce them. Because God has given you that opportunity. Because an unbeliever can be made holy because of their family. So you should talk with them, read the Bible with them, share with them the Word of God. So that they can also get saved, welcome Jesus into their heart, become one with God and become the True Christian. Because Jesus Christ died for all our sins, not just for the believers but for all the world.

Therefore, in this section I provide background into some of the more important dimensions of kinship and relationality in contemporary Pajok. In particular, emphasis is placed on how these orient people in the world. Through these orientations I demonstrate how, in the mobilisation of kinship relations and fictive kinship terminology, kinship becomes cosmogonic and, thus, is inherently cosmological. Most especially, however, it is this section in which I begin highlighting how relational personhood is constructed in contemporary Pajok, demonstrating kinship to be a fundamental means of defining personhood, relationality and sociality in Acholi South Sudan.

### *Speaking about kin*

During lunch at a missionary training workshop organised by a Ugandan outreach programme in August 2014, Obwoya and I were talking with Christine, the wife of one of the AIC pastors (Fig. 14). Christine was concerned, she said, because my time in Pajok had nearly finished and Obwoya was yet to find a wife. She was worried that I would ‘leave without helping this boy [Obwoya] to pay his dowry (sic)’.<sup>134</sup> Obwoya and I both laughed at this, as did Christine. We all knew she was joking, part of the good natured teasing that accompanies many close interpersonal relationships in Pajok. We were also

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<sup>133</sup> Matthew 28: 16-20 reads (See also Acts 1: 8):

v16 ‘Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.

v17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

v18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

v19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

v20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”’.

<sup>134</sup> The term ‘dowry’ is the common Acholi-English vernacular for all transactions connected to marriage negotiations, monetary or otherwise. Readers interested in Acholi marriages should refer to Porter (2013, 2016).

all aware she was speaking ‘a real truth’, as English-speaking Acholi might say: Obwoya and I had discussed his life plans many times, including any potential marriage.

I knew the community viewed him differently now he had spent a year working with a *munu*. Jokes aside, Obwoya and Christine agreed that of course I would contribute to his *luk* (‘preliminary marriage transactions’) and other marriage-related payments (O’Byrne 2012; Porter 2013). As we had become close, and as Obwoya had few living kin he could ask for help, this obligation went without saying: we worked together, we were friends, and culturally we were now bound for life. Locally, our relationship was not conceived as being based on the exchange of alienable goods, services or money as it might be in Europe but instead in the exchange of the allegedly inalienable parts of ourselves: time, thoughts, energy, emotion.<sup>135</sup> It was a partnership assumed to extend beyond the circumscribed time and nature of its first stated iteration – PhD research – to involve us both, as well as our families, in ongoing reciprocal relations over the duration of lives. Piot (1999: 54) has argued that, during fieldwork, such exchanges are often ‘attempts to communicate, to bridge the gap between us, to establish relationship’. This is true, I think, for Obwoya as much as myself: even if supposedly alienable money was paid, as it was, this does not foreclose the ‘total social fact’ (Mauss 1990) that the everyday exchanges of parts of selves were foundational to our fully embedded (and fully human) sociality.<sup>136</sup> That is, to establish ourselves as persons as we established our relationship.

There is something deeply structural, something basic and all-encompassing in the use of local kinship idioms. Importantly, kinship helps to determine humanity, relationality, sociality and therefore also personhood. It forms part of a distinctive and over-arching conceptual structure: kin ties define people and society and are the basic everyday principles through Acholi people know and relate to themselves and others. Acholi society could therefore be described as one constructed on, consisting of, and defined (and structured) by how any one person or group relates to any other person or group in such a way that their connection is most simply, usefully, and importantly considered in terms of relationships based on kin, lineage and clan. Such ties are best understood as interrelationships between separate but intimately connected persons-as-kin – that is relational persons partially composed by sharing blood, food, land and other important social indicators with socially-close others – rather than as persons-as-selves or autonomous individuals (see also Piot 1999). The relational basis of ongoing sociality is therefore grounded in those aspects of social, cultural, and biological life which are shared simply by virtue of kinship connections. It is important to stress the partiality of such

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<sup>135</sup> It would be disingenuous of me to suggest that all locals conceived our relationship as being about sociality rather than money. In fact, it is even possible that most of them conceived it in this way. However, to the members of the AIC with who we spent much of our time, I think it soon became apparent our relationship was defined as much by friendship as it was employment.

<sup>136</sup> Whether or not money is deemed alienable in such a sociocultural world is another question entirely.

inclinations here: just as there is no complete (or completed) in-dividual (Dumont 1992), only becomings-individual (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), so too, I suggest, there is no complete dividual, at least not in Acholi and likely not in Africa (Daswani 2011; Werbner 2011). Rather, agreeing with Chua (2015), all sociocultural life involves different impulses of varying intensities towards forms of personhood which should be understood primarily as emergent potentialities resulting in temporary, if tempting manifestations – mirages even.

From what I can tell, in Pajok, only those within the same patri-lineage are generally referred to by kinship terms. However, the mother's brother and the widespread use of fictive kinship terms are two important exceptions.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, there is a noticeable tendency among Pajok residents to use kinship terms to indicate a particularly special relationship between otherwise unrelated people. This is especially obvious in the use of kinship idioms which create or indicate relationships that, following anthropological terminological precedence, might be said to have a 'fictive kinship' quality.<sup>138</sup> Thus, *megi* (old women) especially revelled in saying Marie and I were 'children of Bobi' or 'sons and daughters of Pajok'.<sup>139</sup> Similar practices were true of my lineage mates David and Joseph, who without fail would greet me as *omera* (brother). In another illuminating example, David constantly referred – in English – to an American missionary living in Uganda as his aunty. This not only mobilises a particular type of social relationship based in suggested biological and genetic kinship connections (and all the rights, responsibilities and reciprocal relations required therein), but also a particular type of status relationship, so that others in Pajok are reminded of the special connection between them.

The embedded social mobilisation of such terms is interesting and important because of how family, kinship and lineage connections are used to make particular statements about the world, the people in it, and a speaker's connections to those people. It is to create sociality out of language, such that language or words are given power to construct realities,<sup>140</sup> that is, that people learn to define themselves and others through specific reference to kinship – the culturally-dominant form of relatedness in Acholi – and then use their knowledge of these relations to structure and define both their lives and their social interactions. Along the lines Piot (1999) proposed about Kabre conceptualisations of personhood, this Acholi person is a specifically relational person, 'a diffuse, fluid

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<sup>137</sup> As Acholi use a modified Iroquois kinship terminology, in Acholi this actually plays out as men of the mother's generation of the mother's patri-lineage.

<sup>138</sup> Although, I am hesitant to describe these relationships as 'really "fictive"' and therefore somehow ascribe them with less importance than they obviously have to the people engaged in them. Instead, I prefer to consider how sociality and personhood are conceptualised when non-kin relations are mobilised through the idiom of kinship, unequivocally the most important and enduring form of everyday identification and relationality.

<sup>139</sup> Although these statements are not really a form of teknonymy, teknonymy is very common among Acholi, especially for women, who are often referred to or known as '*Min X*' ('mother of X'). See Porter (2013: 181).

<sup>140</sup> For further discussion of this aspect of Acholi ontological reckoning, see Chapter 7.

self – a self that is multiple and permeable, and infused with the presence of others, both human and nonhuman’ (Piot 1999: 19). It is important to note, however, this is not a fully partible person entirely composed of detached parts of other similarly composed persons, such as is commonly referenced in connection to Melanesia. Rather, as Chua (2015: 346) writes about Bidayuh Christians in Borneo, ‘such... relations do not constitute moral peers that are identical to Strathern’s partible individuals... [but] generate certain understandings and impulses that can be classified as dividualistic in Strathern’s sense’.

However, I believe there is also something cosmo-ontologically important in the use of kinship as a metaphor for relationality. This is especially true, I think, when connecting what I have just related to the magical power of words in Acholi to enact change within the world. Such is the argument presented in Chapter 7, in which I will insist that things spoken are inherently cosmogonic. Given the magical and cosmogonic power of words, in stating relations in such ways, a speaker makes them real. That is, they discursively produce their kin. As an overall point, how people use kinship terms to speak about themselves and others demonstrates the fundamental importance of kinship as a key structuring principle within Acholi logics, as well as a key means of defining social membership, relationality, and thus personhood. Moreover, this structuring principle is also a cosmological principle, a component of the basic building blocks from which the social, cultural, moral, and human universes are made and ordered.

## **Conclusion: The constitution of worlds and persons in Acholi South Sudan**

In this chapter, I have discussed the basic cosmo-ontological underpinnings of the pre-Christian Acholi world, linking these to a general being-in-the-world I have called ‘lived pragmatism’ and highlighting the connections between these cosmo-ontological underpinnings and the relational basis of Acholi social life. I have stated that there was no Acholi God prior to missionary influence and that narratives telling about the origins of Acholi people are about ethnic or social beginnings rather than cosmic or ontological creation. A basic structure of an Acholi cosmology has been presented, within which, I have argued, fundamental distinctions between inside and outside are linked to definitions of social personhood. I have further noted the significance of ideas around the multiplicity and place-boundedness of Acholi meta-persons, the obvious assimilation of Christian concepts within these pre-Christian logics, and the (usually negative) moral loadings which these indigenous concepts garner because of this assimilation. In doing this, I have demonstrated the centrality and significance of morality to the constitution, conceptualisation, and practice of cosmology in the Acholi world, arguing that the continuing moral significance of ancestors is most obviously demonstrated through their

engagement within a wider socio-moral order. It is this which allows ancestors to maintain something of a positive evaluation despite the increasing prevalence of an evangelical lifeworld and its concurrent demonization of tradition.

I have suggested that Acholi share a worldview of lived pragmatism which is not only inherently relational but seeks to understand and describe a basic existential condition of uncertainty. I have highlighted three primary components of this worldview: a needs-based or practical application of ritual; a present-oriented understanding of time; and a pragmatic and untrusting attitude towards the actions and intentions of persons and meta-persons. I have argued that the underlying logics of ritual in Pajok are primarily oriented toward the pragmatic requirements of existential survival and thus customary orientations and meta-persons continue to hold salience for many people, no matter religious affiliation. A major reason for this is that because evangelicals still find themselves living in a world where the most prevailing everyday reality is a feeling of existential crisis, the basic moral alignments underpinning a customary worldview still remains important.

Finally, although the literature suggests PECC church-goers elsewhere in the world commonly seek to 'break from the past' (Meyer 1998) and renounce traditional kinship ties, I have shown that evangelicals in Pajok actually stress the importance of their family and kin networks. I have suggested this also reflects a lived pragmatism toward the basic uncertainty of existence. Moreover, I have argued that kinship remains an important element in the constitution of Acholi personhood. Kinship therefore provides Pajok evangelicals not only with security but with the basic sociality and relationality required to be, become, and remain an Acholi person. It is on such a basis that my forthcoming argument about predominantly relational nature of Acholi personhood will proceed. Nonetheless, it remains important to stress the partiality of such inclinations. After all, as Lienhardt (1985: 150) argued about the constitution of Dinka persons, the fact that they are quite definitely relational does not in any way undermine their obvious individuality.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ACHOLI POWERS, PERSONS, AND META-PERSONS

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### Introduction: *Jok, tipu* and persons

*A study of Nuer religion is a study of what they consider to be the nature of Spirit and of man's relation to it. I had previously spent many months among the Azande people... From my earliest days among them I was constantly hearing the word mangu, witchcraft, and it was soon clear that if I could gain a full understanding of the meaning of this word I should have the key to Zande philosophy. When I started my study of the Nuer I had a similar experience. I constantly heard them speaking about kwoth, Spirit, and I realised that a full understanding of that word was the key to their – very different – philosophy.*

So states Evans-Pritchard's near the beginning of what remains one of anthropology's best expositions of indigenous religion (Evans-Pritchard 1956: vi). The third of his trilogy on the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1951, 1956), *Nuer Religion* is a comprehensive study of Nuer cosmology through the elucidation of a complex of concepts centred on *kwoth*, or Spirit. In this chapter, I follow Evans-Pritchard and provide insight into the philosophy of the Acholi of Pajok through analysis of the fundamental – and, as will be seen, interlinked – Acholi concepts of *jok* and *tipu*.

Fardon (1990) describes the tripartite cosmological basis of most West African peoples as 'God', 'the dead', and 'the wild'. As I have written elsewhere (O'Byrne 2015a, 2015c), these categories not only have great comparative strength but reflect predominant Acholi cosmological features. For example, if Fardon's category of 'God' is reframed toward a broader conceptual category like 'Deity' (or 'Power' [Lienhardt 1961]), then, in Acholi, this would include both the Christian and Islamic monotheistic Godhead as well as the quasi-deistic Nilotic category of *jok/jogi*,<sup>141</sup> a concept replete with comparative value.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> This conceptual expansion does not seem too great an analytical challenge: Fardon's thesis was based on the predominantly Islamic and Christian Chamba people of Nigeria and Cameroon, whose longer-term engagement with the synchronising work of those world religions effectively resulted in the de-sacralisation of pre-existing deities. This proposed expansion is merely arguing for the re-Africanisation of Fardon's conceptual categories.

<sup>142</sup> Nilotic people groups live across both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as within the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The *jok* concept is an important cosmological principle for virtually all these peoples.

The cosmological importance of a category of ‘the dead’ also has considerable ethnographic support among Acholi, especially in the meta-persons of *cen* (‘ghostly vengeance’),<sup>143</sup> *kwaro* (‘ancestors’),<sup>144</sup> and *tipu* (‘shades, spirits, souls’).<sup>145</sup> As will I demonstrate, these categories are not only linked, but fundamentally so. Like ‘deity’ a category of ‘the dead’ also has comparative strength among other Nilotic peoples, with Morris (2006: 149-150) noting it is such a dominant cosmological category across Africa that it might even be considered a Sub-Saharan cultural universal. Likewise, Fardon’s category of ‘the wild’ finds its ethnographic equivalent in Acholi South Sudan, especially in those interconnected terms linked to the concept of *tim* (wilderness) discussed in the last chapter.

Following Fardon’s (1990) rationale, the fundamental Acholi notions of *jok* and *tipu* might therefore be broadly defined as ‘deity/power’ and ‘the dead’, respectively. These meta-persons have important cosmological, ontological, moral and heuristic value, together fundamentally structuring the Acholi cosmo-ontological world. Accordingly, just as a full understanding of *mangu* is key to the Zande cosmological system, and *kwoth* to the Nuer, so are *jok* and *tipu* to the Acholi.<sup>146</sup> For example, Russell (1966: 4) considers *jok* to be ‘the most important “religious” word among the Lwo speaking people of Northern Uganda... [and] the centre of all clan ritual’.<sup>147</sup>

Beyond the rather limited functionalism of some earlier descriptions of ‘Acholi religion’, what is specifically new in the information presented here is the linking of *jok* and *tipu* to wider notions of personhood, sociality, and relationality. For, I suggest, it is through *jok* and *tipu*, and particularly a person’s specific and ongoing relations with these meta-persons, that an Acholi understands the important cosmological bases of their life and its socially embedded personhood. I should note, however, that full explication of the multiplicities and complexities involved in either of the terms *jok* and *tipu* is likely a book itself. Thus, rather than attempt a full delineation of either term, in this chapter

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<sup>143</sup> Although I return to the concept of *cen* later in this chapter, for present purposes it is sufficient to note that the conceptual similarity underlying most definitions of *cen* is of a purposeful and directed spiritual force or power that comes to haunt, attack, or trouble those connected with the acts that led to its formation.

<sup>144</sup> Although *kwaro* means all of ‘ancestors’, ‘grandfathers’ and ‘male elders’, some of these persons can be called ‘*kwaro*’ and obviously still be living. The conceptually important thing here is not, I think, the elision between life and death *per se* (although, as I mention later, this is significant) but rather the elision between the living and the dead, that is, that all the persons connected by the term *kwaro* have the same structural and lineal positions and, furthermore, retain these roles, responsibilities and powers once moving from life *into* death. Thus, death is not the utterly discontinuous ontological category in customary Acholi thinking that it is within Christian (and Christian-influenced Western) thought.

<sup>145</sup> Living persons also have *tipu*, which although embodied, separate from their physical matter on death. Again, the important point is not so much whether any particular *tipu* is alive or dead but rather that the most common cosmological association of the term connotes *tipu* as something connected to personhood.

<sup>146</sup> Such a statement is not particularly revelatory, and many authors have written at greater or lesser length with more or less accuracy about both concepts. See the references provided in relevant sections below.

<sup>147</sup> Whereas Malandra (1939: 27) has argued that ‘as all [Acholi] sacrifices, whether public or private, are offered up at this *Abila* it may truly be called the centre of their religious worship’

I use one lengthy ethnographic vignette to provide an interpretation of these concepts which is more relationally embedded than those which have previously been given. That is, I will use *jok* and *tipu* as 'lines of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) into both the world of Acholi sociality and the Acholi social world.

### *Jok* and the relational experience of extraordinary power

The widespread Nilotic concept/meta-person '*jok*' (pl. *jogi*) is variously translated in the literature as deity, demon, devil, force, power, Satan, spirit, and even God (or gods). According to Onyango-Odongo (1976), *jok* is that which is decidedly outside the ordinary – set aside, to use a Durkheimian phrase (Durkheim 1995). *Jok* is thus definitively an element of the Durkheimian sacred. However, due to the highly politicised historical spread of Christianity through Africa, as well as the continuing religious politics of contemporary African Christianity, *jok* is extremely difficult to translate accurately. This is made more problematic because, in Acholi, the same word is often used for *jok*-as abnormality, *jok*-as deity, *jok*-as-demon and *jok*-as-possessing-spirit: simply *jok*. Thus, the way *jok* is translated usually says more about the translator than it does the term itself, often seeming to confirm the assumptions of the translator rather than accurately rendering the multiplicity of *jok*'s many dimensions.<sup>148</sup> In my opinion, the concept's most accurate treatment is Mogensen's (2002) account of *juok* among the similarly-Luo Jop'Adhola of eastern Uganda.<sup>149</sup> Mogensen's analysis is noteworthy for its emphasis on the heteroglossia, multiplicity and contextual specificity of *juok*, highlighting the ways in which it can mean manifold and often contradictory things to the same person in different circumstances.

*Jogi* are central to customary Acholi understandings of the world and its workings (p'Bitek 1963, 1971; Wright 1940). Normally, *jogi* are located in the wilderness near rivers, lakes, and mountains (Allen & Storm 2012: 32; Baines 2010: 417; Girling 1960: 81; Grove 1919: 174). In Pajok, apart from several named 'free' *jogi* (O'Byrne 2015a) – 'free' in that they have no fixed place of abode and are not specifically connected to any one *dogola* or lineage (Baines 2010: 418; Behrend 1999: 116; p'Bitek 1971: 107) – most *jogi* are 'fixed' to particular *dogola* and have specific *wang jok* (places of sacrifice and residence).<sup>150</sup> As Girling (1960: 81) noted in Uganda, so too in Pajok, where a 'shrine consists of a cave, a spring, a tree, or other outstanding feature'. Whereas Girling argues *jogi* are either 'an impersonal spirit with no human attributes, known by the name of the physical feature where the

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<sup>148</sup> For similar arguments, see: Dalfovo (1998); Lienhardt (1961); Mogensen (2002); p'Bitek (1971); Wright (1940).

<sup>149</sup> See also p'Bitek (1963, 1971 chapter 3). Although p'Bitek's work is useful at delineating that which *jok* is *not*, being an extended critique of earlier and usually Christian and/or colonial authors, he makes no sustained attempt to present what *jok* actually might *be*. Being Acholi himself, this fact itself is likely significant

<sup>150</sup> See Wright (1936) for in-depth explanation of Acholi rituals relating to *jogi* and other cosmological entities.

rites are performed... [or] male, his name... known, and having a wife' (1960: 81), all known fixed or non-possession *jogi* in Pajok I am aware of are the impersonal variety.<sup>151</sup>

A *jok* is perhaps best understood as a powerful, extraordinary meta-personal force (p'Bitek 1963, 1971; Onyango-Odongo 1976), a 'Power' in Lienhardt's (1961) terms. However, such an understanding has led to debates over whether this power is a singular and indivisible static and unitary force (Driberg 1923; Grove 1919; Wright 1940) or a dynamic generic force with multiple, differential expressions (Ogot 1961; p'Bitek 1963, 1971; Onyango-Odongo 1976). As alluded to above, the heteroglossic qualities of *jok* make both these understandings partially correct, depending upon who is using the term in which situations and in what ways.

No matter how the term is conceptualised, *jogi* are unpredictable and have the potential to be either helpful or dangerous. Depending upon the circumstances, a *jok* can be good or bad, and they are often connected with giving and taking productivity, agricultural and biological as well as social (Menzies 1954). *Jogi* are therefore widely used to explain good luck and misfortune of all kinds (Baines 2010; Mogensen 2002) and interactions with *jogi* may involve possession or even death (Baines 2005; Malandra 1939; pa'Lukobo 1971; Seligman & Seligman 1932). A *jok* who possesses someone can sometimes be exorcised and tamed, with the person controlling that possessing *jok* sometimes becoming an *ajwaka* (spirit medium) (Baines 2010; Finnström 2006b).

In Pajok there is a strong conceptual analogy between *jogi and snakes, as well as with* Christian demons and Satan. This is something noted in several older ethnographies (Girling 1960; Grove 1919; Seligman & Seligman 1932). According to Grove (1919), this belief is particularly common among Sudanese Acholi, for whom 'the *Jok Tim* [*jok* of the wild] is generally regarded as a snake' (p.165), 'every stream has a *Jok* – sometimes in the form of a snake' (p.174), and although Sudanese Acholi 'do not hold all snakes sacred... the spirits of hills, rivers and forests are usually snakes; the *Lajok* [witch, wizard; see Chapter 6] has a snake in his stomach... [and] in general, if a supernatural power wants to take visible form, it will take the form of a snake' (pp.181-182).

Similar to these older ethnographies, people in Pajok not only say *jogi* and demons both eat snake meat (as do many people said to fraternise with the demonic, see Chapter 8), but that *jogi* often come as snakes while most big snakes are also *jogi*. Further, it is commonly noted that the Devil – the

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<sup>151</sup> Many of Pajok's *dogola* have their respective *jok* or *jogi*. However, the *jogi* of some *dogola* are more numerous and powerful than others (Girling 1960) and it seems likely the distribution and power of *jogi* help indicate Pajok's migration history, with those *dogola* possessing the most powerful 'fixed' *jogi* likely the area's original inhabitants. Indeed, it seems possible to position the recent migration history of Pajok's various *dogola* by tracing the important (and always *jok*-related) mountains in their migration stories. This agrees with Girling's arguments on the importance of mountains for Acholi migration narratives (1960: 14) as well as with Atkinson's (2010) arguments regarding clan distribution of *jogi* in Uganda (see Appendix 2).

ultimate Christian *jok* – came as a snake in the Book of Genesis. This is why *jogi* have been coming to people in snake form ever since. Snake-related manifestations of *jogi* are especially connected to narratives about *te pii* (under the water, see Chapter 8) which consistently relate stories about snake-headed people. Finally, there is a strong analogy between *jogi*, snakes, demons and the work of poison (*yat*) and poisoners (*loyat*, see Chapter 6), where, for example, poison has the same insidious power as snakes or the demonic and where both kill invisibly and seemingly randomly. Widespread cultural connections between snakes, poison, and (deadly and potentially evil) meta-persons thus continue within local understandings of Christianity.

To give just one specific example of the conceptual equivalence between snakes and *jogi*, during a discussion of events surrounding the flooding of the Atebi in September 2014 with my host David, he mentioned his friend had tried crossing the river at that time (Fig. 15). He got about a third of the way across when a snake came swimming past him, almost close enough to touch. With this, David's friend turned around. 'It was a sign', David said, 'otherwise he may have been a dead body also' (like the young man whose funeral I relate in Chapter 5). What is important is that both snakes and water are not only dangerous but connected to *jok* and other powerful meta-persons. The Atebi River is especially known as the home of strong antisocial meta-persons, which some people say are *jogi* and others call *catani* ('Satan's' or demons). Although David did not quite say this, he did note his friend said 'the river was telling him not to cross by putting that snake in his path'. Finally, as I demonstrate in Chapter 8, both these things – snakes and water – are also cosmic mediators, that is, they mediate between cosmic planes as well as between cosmological transformations (in a Lévi-Straussian sense).<sup>152</sup>

As I further demonstrate in Chapter 5, although not true for everyone, the introduction of Christianity means many people now consider *jogi* fundamentally problematic; essentially evil or demonic forces linked to the Biblical Satan. Indeed, it is common to hear someone say *jok* and Satan are identical, nothing but different words for the same thing. The underpinnings of this rationale are re-presented in evangelical sermons which further demonise *jok* and are based in local church leaders' rather simplistic understanding of the role and function of *jogi* in pre-Christian times. Through recourse to the trope of Devil worship especially, sermons and similar public denunciations of 'traditional culture' provide an effective and wide-ranging means of disparaging any and all non-Christian ritual activity. This is particularly apparent among Pajok's various evangelical denominations.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1974).

<sup>153</sup> For similar findings elsewhere in the region, see Baines (2010) and Mogensen (2002).

However, much as Mogensen (2002) noted among the Jop'Adhola in eastern Uganda, not all Christians subscribe to such simplistic analyses. For example, one evangelical leader told me 'people, they used to respect *jok*. Now some are saying that it is Satan. But that is not true. Because they used to respect as God, because of their beliefs, before the missionaries came... People are mistaken that *jok* is the same as Satan'. A group of evangelical women I was sitting with one day made similarly ambivalent comments: 'That talent [i.e. of being an *ajwaka* through possession by a *jok*] must be given by God, not Satan. So it is difficult to tell if it is good or bad, because it can help and it can make sickness' (Fig. 9). Further, despite what most evangelicals self-narrate as their steadfast Christianity, there is an obvious element of 'if the new ways do not work then the old ways will' in community members pragmatic attempts at guaranteeing cosmological security (Mogensen 2002). For instance, after one evangelical man told me people must to go to church when a *jok* possesses them, his wife added 'but if the pastors come and do the prayer and still not better, then you must go to the *ajwaka*'.

*Jok* is therefore a multi-dimensional concept, with each singular dimension including or excluding some of the wider concept's many features.<sup>154</sup> How should we approach defining and delimiting such a term? Inspired by Mogensen (2002), I understand *jok* not as the rational search for objective and singular truths as dominates the intellectualist tradition (Evans-Pritchard 1972; Horton 1967a, 1967b, 1997) nor the categorical imperative of modernist 'butterfly collecting' (Leach 1966: 1-5), nor as a structuralist 'empty' or 'floating signifier' connoting something felt to be germane and crucial but almost impossible to tie down and define (Lévi-Strauss 1987[1950]). Rather, I understand *jok* as the differential experience of extraordinary power(s), both human and metahuman, through the experiential and relational effects these have upon lives and lifeworlds. In this way, *jok* is an intersubjective orientation towards being-in-the-world. Thus, *jok* is 'constituted not only by cosmology, or the ontology with which we relate to it, but also by its role as images of intersubjectivity' (Mogensen 2002: 428), particularly where these images are about the 'experience of intersubjectivity... out of balance' (Mogensen 2002: 429). Such experiences are, by definition, multiple, embedded, contextual and often contradictory (as are *jogi*). By intersubjective necessity, both *jogi* and the intersubjective experience are also inherently relational. In the final analysis, therefore, 'the truth of *juok* [i.e. *jok*] is not its intrinsic or static property (as a universal force or a God) but what happens when it is invoked, activated, put to work and realised in people's life-world' (Mogensen 2002: 429). That is, its relational and experiential qualities.

There are two final facets of the *jok* concept I wish to pull out here. Firstly, as Baines (2005: 72) noted, for the majority of Acholi: '*Jok* and ancestor spirits guide the Acholi moral order, and when a wrong is

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<sup>154</sup> For a similar argument about 'divinity' among the Lugbara, see Dalfovo (1998; Middleton 1960, 1965).

committed, send misfortune and illness (*cen*) until appropriate actions are taken'. Although I disagree with Baines' conceptualisation of *cen* as an event (of misfortune, illness and so on) as well as her positioning of *cen* as the effect of *jok* or *kwaro* (rather than something independent of yet conceptually connected to both these things), this quote highlights something fundamental to Acholi ontology generally: the core importance of the everyday cosmological negotiation of morality.<sup>155</sup> Secondly, as Porter (2013) has noted, Acholi cosmo-ontologies are largely concerned with maintaining harmonious relations within a holistically-conceived environment which includes all social entities, living and dead, physical and metaphysical. In Pajok, this is often based in ritualised interpersonal relationships with powerful meta-persons having known connections to the family, lineage and clan, the appeasement of whom allows for greater existential control. In this way, both the moral and the relational basis of Acholi cosmologies are similar to those focussing on the pragmatic aspects of environmental control found in other African societies (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 1972; Lienhardt 1961).

### The guardian of the shrine

Toward the middle of fieldwork it became obvious that to gain a more rounded understanding of the local cosmological field I needed to become systematic in tracking down Pajok's various *logwoko* (ritual guardians). Upon hearing about my interest, David told myself and Obwoya to look for John Odoic (Fig. 16), as he could probably tell us about Oyara, the primary *jok* of the Bobi lineage. John Odoic is a Bobi lineage representative on the *Kal Kwaro* (ancestral council to the *Rwot*), as well as a close friend and paternal cousin of our compound matriarch, Abuba. However, despite his immense knowledge about other aspects of the Acholi cosmological and ritual systems, John told us he was not the person we were seeking: he was not the *lagwoko*. Nonetheless, he would arrange a meeting with the man who was. We should continue with our work, John said, and he would inform us at the appropriate time.

Like many afternoons in early November, when the day of our meeting with Kaliman Toyi arrived it was grey and rainy, yet still heavy with humidity. Kaliman's compound was only a few minutes' walk from that of David's. At this time of the year, the very end of the rainy season (*cwii*), the maize was now two metres high, the cobs long and thick and the tops heavy and drooping with the dull green spikes of their flowers. As we walked along the narrow, twisting tracks through the maize fields towards our destination, Obwoya and I chatted about the random discoveries which had occurred during research, just like Kaliman's location. As we approached the small two room concrete-walled

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<sup>155</sup> Such a position would agree with that provided for the Dinka by Deng (1988).

and iron-roofed building that was Kaliman's home, Obwoya quietly remarked that we had already come to see this man, many months ago, about something entirely different. We looked at each other and smiled. Such were the vicissitudes of fieldwork. No matter. We would now have the opportunity to discuss the Bobi versions of *tek kwaro Acholi* (Acholi tradition).

Wearing standard black trousers and an old, faded Manchester United jersey, mud-spattered from his morning's work in the garden, Kaliman was expecting us, having been told of our arrangement by one of John's grandsons (Fig. 17). After completing the usual formal greetings, Kaliman, Obwoya and I settled down onto a haphazard collection of seats – a dull green plastic chair, an old oil container, a short round log – while several of his sons and a handful of other people gathered around to listen. The old man began immediately:

You have come to learn about the *jok*, so I will tell you. The big one we have in Bobi, that one is called *Oyara*. That one is powerful. Back in the time of the ancestors, that one used to eat people. So they needed to get someone and kill them there. Just like when they build a factory in Juba or Kampala, they will go get a man and take them and kill them at that place. To make it work, make it powerful.<sup>156</sup> So the same. But they change the system when our grandfathers left Ayaci to come to Pajok.<sup>157</sup> And if you go to that place, you must be very careful. Do not go there without the elder from Bobi, or things will happen. Like one man went there and cut the trees and it came to him as a sickness.

I asked him how he knew that there was a *jok* in that place, if he had seen it, and what it looked like. He replied:

No one knows what that thing looks like, because no one can see. Just go and do the celebrations and leave. Just like with God. No one can see, but people talk to God. Know He is there. So just the same. Just follow the rules of the ancestors. That is the way of *jok*. [‘But how do you know it is there, if you cannot see it?’ I asked, somewhat provocatively]. You know it is there because people have been affected by it! Just like when you go to pray to God in church. You pray and it is true God hears you and helps you. But can you see God? No! But you know He is there. So like that, the same. And *Oyara* is like *Rubanga* (God), a *yamo* (wind). You cannot see, but they are there.

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<sup>156</sup> This is a rumour of the ‘transnational genre’ (White 2000) common about the connections between capital, modernity and the occult across Africa. For further examples of narratives of the transnational genre in contemporary Pajok, see Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>157</sup> Around 1930. See Appendix 3.

That is why you need to celebrate (*kwero*). But we can celebrate here also, in this compound, in that house out there, the *ot jogi* (house/hut of the *jogi*). When we have finished talking, I will take you.

We continued to speak about the many different *jogi* and hunting grounds of the Bobi lineage; about the different places that were respected, feared or celebrated; and about how the relevant rituals were done. Expounded through lengthy and often divergent commentary, details about these rituals were generally similar among each other, as well as with descriptions other elders had given me: they invariably involve the sacrifice of animals, the ritualised cooking and sharing of its flesh, and the sprinkling or 'spraying' (*kiro*) of food and alcohol around the area. Similarly to what Grove (1919: 175) found in the early twentieth century, words, although always spoken, follow a general acquiescent patterning rather than forming any specific ritualised address. Such ritual speech generally involves: a statement of the problem or issue to be addressed; recognition of the authority of *jok* to act on this issue; affirmations about that *jok's* cosmological potency; and a plea for the problem to be removed. In some cases, not all elements are involved. In others they might be left out or forgotten, not a problem, Kaliman said, so long as the crucial feature of all Acholi celebrations is present: 'the *jok* must eat'. The rest are details unnecessary either to the success of the ritual or the resolution of the problem. Just as Stroeken (2012: 217) has noted among the Sukuma of Tanzania, what is most important for Acholi is 'what the magic and the rituals could do; their experiential rather than historical significance'.

Most rituals have small differences in detail like what colour animal the *jok* wants for their food-sacrifice, how many people should be present, and what time of the day the ceremony should take place. These differences are usually the personal idiosyncrasies of the particular *jok* involved. Usually they are also a matter of negotiation: for example, if the *jok* needs a black chicken but only a red chicken is available, then an extra libation of *kongo* ('beer') might surmount any shortcoming. In this, like many aspects of everyday life, Acholi 'religion' is decidedly pragmatic in nature, oriented primarily towards resolving problems and overcoming difficulties. Close enough is good enough, it seems, as long as there is food.<sup>158</sup>

Suddenly, after talking for several hours, Kaliman stopped, saying he was tired and had told us everything. Our discussion had finished. Before we went, however, he would show us the *kac* (lineage shrine) and the places where the *jogi* come to eat (the *ot jogi* mentioned earlier). We stood and went around to the back of the small concrete building. The structure that confronted us consisted of a *kac*

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<sup>158</sup> This would seem to be the same among the Kabre of northern Togo, for whom Piot (1999: 127) noted that 'when one object or person is unavailable, another will do just as well'.

and two *ot jogi* (Fig. 18), conspicuously placed on the verge of a small clearing at the edge of a maize garden. The *kac* was made from four short Y-shaped stumps, stuck into the ground at about knee height, on top of which six or seven thick-ish sticks created a flat surface, described by Kaliman as a table. One *ot jok* flanked the table to either side, small conical huts perhaps waist high, made out of grass, their doors looking out into the compound. Behind the whole structure, almost consumed by the encroaching maize, a large branch had been stuck into the ground. Gnarled and bent like an old man at the end of a long day's work, it twisted skywards over two metres before the tip dipped down again ever so slightly. The whole arrangement very nearly replicates those shrines described in Malandra (1939: 29), Seligman (1925: 32), and Seligman and Seligman (1932: 122).

In telling us about the structure, Kaliman repeatedly described the branch as *tye kwaro* (literally saying 'it is the ancestors or grandfathers'). When pushed on this point, he explained that the branch did not represent *kwaro* but rather that it *was kwaro*; that is, that it was not *like* the ancestors but instead the literal embodiment or physical substantiation of them. p'Bitek (1971: 93-94) makes a similar, although perhaps not so ontologically forceful point, saying 'the *abila* was not just the [things]... it is described as the "protector", "one who feeds"... *abila* stands for the ancestors'. When the time comes to celebrate at the *kac* (*kare ki kwero*, or 'time of celebration'), then the Bobi *lodito* (elders), the *lagwoko*, and any specific concerned individuals must go to the site of the *kac* and slaughter a male sheep. This is cooked and some meat placed within each of *ot jok* so that the *jogi* can feed. The rest is eaten by those assembled and the bones hung on the *kwaro* tree; in other words, given to the *kwaro* to satiate their appetite.

When standing in front of the *ot jogi*, the hut on the left is male while that on the right female. It is important to note two things about these structures: firstly, that each hut simultaneously calls forth all lineal members of that gender, both the living and the dead, as well as any *jogi* connected to them or the lineage; and secondly, that these huts are not representations but substantiations, in that the huts do not represent lineal members but rather they *are* them. That is, they manifest multiple *actual* persons and, like Gellian indexes (Gell 1998; see also Blanes 2014: 9; Mosko 2010: 210), do so in the same time and place concurrently. Although the *ot jogi* are said to be 'the places where the *jogi* stay' (*kabedo i jogi*), they are not the permanent residence of *jogi* but temporary shelters. *Jogi* live in the bush and only come during rituals. Kaliman pointed out they are not called and nor does the ritual bring them. Instead, they come on their own, fully aware of when their presence is required in the social world. Described in these ways, *jok* is partially a spiritual or non-corporeal force which powers

similar to a reduced almost omnipresence and omniscience<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, Kaliman's description simultaneously anthropomorphises, animates, and personifies *jogi*: they need food, shelter, a table, and have genders.

Therefore, the *kac-ot jok* structure brings together the living and the dead, male and female, human and meta-human, deity and mortal, as well as past and present (and, by association, future also). Time, place, person, and state of being (living/dead) are collapsed and refracted, literally structuring and embodying all possible lineage relations (in all senses of the word) contemporaneously. That is, as well as being places of power (and Powers, in Lienhardt's [1961] sense), in the ritual moment the *kac* quite literally *is* the lineage. There is therefore an important paradoxical juxtaposition at play, a simultaneity or potentiality, one which both references and allows all conceptualisations and constructions, and one which ritually manifests the social (and inherently social nature of the person) at the same time as it engages these collapsed social persons in ritualised exchange relations. Through exchange and ritual, distinct persons become a person, their personhood both created and shared simultaneously.

### *Tipu* and relational personhood

In this section I describe the various conceptualisations of *tipu*. This explication includes the conceptually linked deathly phenomena of *cen* (ghostly vengeance) and *kwaro* (ancestors or grandfathers), as well as the more essential and inclusive *tipu* (shades, shadows or souls). As these concepts are predominantly about the continued presence of aspects of previously living but now dead persons within the world, for the purposes of heuristic simplicity one could describe them all as 'relationalistic'.<sup>160</sup> Grove (1919: 177) notes that Sudanese Acholi make a distinction between the *tipu* or ordinary spirit and *cen* or haunting ghost, arguing this distinction is identical to their English language counterparts. Likewise, for Onyango-Odongo (1976), *tipu* are the good spirits of the dead – (otherwise known as ancestors, or *kwaro*) – while *cen* are the bad spirits of the dead. Seligman and Seligman (1932: 126) also noted the connections between these terms among Sudanese Acholi in the early 20th century, saying 'It is clear that the *cen* and *tipo* [sic] are distinct entities; the *cen*, always malignant, is not especially attracted to the *kac* [lineage shrine] but wander[s] freely'. Thus, while *cen*

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<sup>159</sup> However, *jogi* are not omnipresent in the sense of the Christian God: although *jogi* can effect persons and things in multiple and seemingly otherwise unconnected places simultaneously, they are definitively *not* all powerful everywhere at all times. Their power is contextual and relational.

<sup>160</sup> But definitely *not* 'spiritualistic', not only because of misgivings similar to those of Sahlins (2016), who argues this term carries a long history of Euro-Christian cosmological and cultural baggage, but also those of p'Bitek (1971: 104), who notes that the *tipu* of the *kwaro* are not spiritual parts of the ancestors but dead *continuations* of them in life.

and *kwaro* are both connected to dead persons, the difference between *kwaro* as the social manifestation of *tipu* and the malignant or antisocial *cen* is that the former are explicitly connected to a specific lineage. That is, the *kwaro* maintain social relations with the living through ritual exchange. In doing so, they retain the fundamental essence of their personhood: relationality.

Despite any inherent differences, the categories of *cen* and *tipu* relate to such similarly conceived categories of experience that for most people in Pajok they are conceptually linked, not only in discourse but also in ritual practice. For example, in trying to explain the similarities and differences between *cen*, *jok*, *kwaro*, and *tipu*, a group of women described them in the following way:

When you die, you have a spirit, a soul (*tipu*). That is *tipu pa dano* (soul or spirit of a person). But then there is *catani* (Satan), and if someone is getting sick, then that sickness is the one brought by the *catani*. That is *jok*. That is not from your *kwaro* (ancestors or grandfathers), your *dogola* (lineage). That one is not your friend. And there is no difference between *cen* or *jok* or *tipu*, they are all the same.

Despite being physically dead, *kwaro* (ancestors) continue to live on in the physical world, unseen but no less real.<sup>161</sup> According to Grove (1919: 177), a person's *tipu* 'is supposed by all to continue living after death. This belief is involved in their ancestor worship'. Likewise, Malandra (1939: 27) suggested *tipu* appear

Sometime after their death. The time of this is not definite. These souls have no permanent dwelling. After a period of wandering about, they indicate some particular signs, by which the people of the village may know their sacred duty; namely, to build a small temple [the *abila*] as shelter for the souls of their ancestors.<sup>162</sup>

However, the statements Pajok locals make about the resting places of *tipu* are highly inconsistent. This is also similar to that found by Grove (1919: 177), who stated 'opinions [about the place of spirits]

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<sup>161</sup> This conceptual linkage between ancestors and grandfathers is similar to the Dinka, for whom 'because of the procreational foundations of Dinka religious thought, the ancestors and the clan spirits are generally referred to as "grandfathers" or "ancestors"' (Deng 1988: 159; see also Burton 1978).

<sup>162</sup> In writing of the ancestral shrine, Malandra argues that which I (and Seligman & Seligman [1932: 122]) call an *ot jok* is called an *abila* and that, rather than the whole structure being a *kac*, this term should only apply to the branch behind the table. I cannot speak of elsewhere in contemporary Acholi, but these distinctions were never made by ritual elders in Pajok, for whom the important distinction was between clan and lineal shrines, and for which they used the terms *abila* and *kac*, respectively (and thus I follow the Pajok vernacular). Whether this is a geographical or historical peculiarity I cannot say, although I am inclined to think it the result of Pajok's distinctive historical composition as a relatively coherent grouping of various semi-autonomous lineages (*dogola*) within one definitive *kaka* (clan). Proof of this would require some comparative study with large Ugandan Acholi chiefdoms, however, because P'Bitek (1971: 104) simply notes that the terms are used interchangeably by most Acholi.

vary with different localities'. Such ambiguities are also apparent in Malandra's own account, where as well as the inconsistencies of the above account, he later in the same article states the *abila* 'is only a rendezvous where, according to the testimony of the living, the souls of the dead come to rest' (Malandra 1939: 29, emphasis added).

Nonetheless, despite any ambiguity, it is apparent that the effects of Christian theology now dominate almost everything to do with death and what English-speaking evangelicals are now likely to call 'the soul'. This can be demonstrated through an informal interview I had with three women outside a small food stall one day. As we sat around a low, rectangular wooden table, eating a tasty and warming chicken broth with our hands and using small chunks of *posho* or maize-flour bread as spoons, we chatted about some of the events taking place around the community at that time. Almost inevitably, as such conversations seem the usual means of disseminating news, talk eventually turned to a recent funeral. Marcellina, the oldest woman at the table and a Catholic, said people die because death was brought about by humankind's own actions: 'Death was not the plan of God. It was human beings who created death. And Satan, he is the one killing us. And here in Pajok, when you die, nothing will happen to you. You die, that is all. The end'. At this, however, the youngest woman interjected. Joyce, who worshipped at AIC Caigon, said it is known that people come from dust and that when they die they return to dust. 'They are just bodies', she said, 'that is why they bury them. So when you die, they bury the body but the *tipu* goes back to God in Heaven. To be with God. But the *tipu* of bad people, that remains to disturb you'. Despite any differences in these descriptions, although Christian theology now structures existential and ontological orientations in both cases, customary cultural logics still continue: in the case of Marcellina, it is cosmological action responsible for killing people; for Joyce, it is the embedding of immorality within the human world and the connection of 'badness' to cosmological disturbance.

Such ambiguities are common when trying to develop a coherent framework of Acholi cosmologies, a point further indicating the importance of Mogensen's (2002) argument of the need to privilege the heteroglossia of pragmatic and experiential analyses. Nonetheless, despite such ambiguities, when pushed everyone admits that although the physical form of a person may die, one way or another their 'spiritual' or 'social' aspect remains.<sup>163</sup> Such understandings are further demonstrated by burial requirements ensuring the *tipu* of newly deceased stay close by and do not wander away to get lost.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> See Malandra (1939), Mogensen (2002), Ravalde (2014), and Seligman (1925) for similar findings across the wider region.

<sup>164</sup> Thus burials takes place as soon as possible after death, ideally on the same day, and as close to the main compound building as possible, as described in the previous chapter. See also Wright (1936).

Thus, although a person's physical body may die, decompose and turn to dust, their personhood is retained, assuming in death many of the same personalities, roles and responsibilities they had in life. However, unlike what is suggested by most research conducted on Acholi cosmologies elsewhere (admittedly, mostly within northern Uganda's ongoing post-conflict context), *cen* is not particularly relevant in Pajok: *cen* is not something most people speak about unless specifically asked and, when asked, many say any previous *cen* was left in Uganda with return to Pajok. Indeed, I was told on multiple occasions that both *cen* and *jok* possession are not only more common in Uganda than Pajok, but that such phenomena are more problematic for communities of Ugandan rather than South Sudanese Acholi. Instead, people in Pajok speak of *kwaro* and *tipu*, with *tipu* often now functioning as a catch-all term for all morally negative or neutral aspects of the dead. The two categories of *kwaro* and *tipu* are therefore the most salient human meta-persons in everyday pre-Christian understandings. Evangelicals also now discursively connect *cen* to *ajwaki* or *jogi* and so on, which combine to form a now-diabolised category of pre-Christian cosmological concepts and persons: demons or *catani*. Thus, in the current world of Christian cosmological normativity, *cen*, *jogi*, and similar meta-persons are generally linked with Satan, devil worship, and evil people or practices.

#### Tipu and kwaro

Seligman (1925: 32) once noted that 'the everyday working religion of the Acholi is the cult of the dead, whose spirits, *tipu* [sic], are regarded as taking a profound interest in the doings of their descendants and as being responsible for much of the good and most of the evil that befalls them'. Alternatively referred to as *tipu pa dano* ('spirits of people'), *tipu pa kwaro* ('spirits of the ancestors'), or *tipu pa woro* ('spirits to be respected'), the meta-persons referred to as *tipu* are essentially those captured by the English terms 'spirit' or 'soul', indicating an unseen but known quality of each human person. *Tipu* is thus a meta-category referring to the internal yet social element of all persons, dead or alive: their personhood. However, it is also used to indicate recently deceased and known persons someone has a socially close relationship with, specifically *kwaro*.<sup>165</sup> As p'Bitek (1971: 104) has argued, *kwaro* 'are not spirits but the ancestors as they were known before death... They were thought of as

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<sup>165</sup> Dalfovo (1998: 477-478) notes that the cosmological system of the Lugbara of northwest Uganda/northeast Congo has a similar connection between the grandfathers (*a'bii*) and spirits of the ancestors (*adro*). Opposing a view of customary monotheism, which he argues was the outcome of missionary influence in the area, Dalfovo uses this connection to suggest the dynamic, multidimensional, and practice-oriented nature of pre-Christian Lugbara cosmologies. Allen and Storm (2012) have noted the historical and cultural similarities between the Lugbara and the Madi, with Allen (1987, 1991a) further noting those between the Madi and the Acholi. It is thus possible that there is some wider comparative cosmological synthesis between the grandparent-ancestor-spirit linkages in this region. Further research should be undertaken to substantiate this suggestion.

whole beings, not dismembered parts of man, i.e. spirits divorced from bodies'. Better than 'spirits' or 'souls', then, *kwaro* and *tipu* should be considered as bodiless social persons.

The cosmological centrality of ancestors is common across Africa (Bere 1973; Burton 1978; Chitando 2000; Deng 1974; Fardon 1990; Fry 1976; Green 1983; La Fontaine 1959; Roscoe 1911, 1923). For example, Turner (1968; see also Ruel 1998) states ancestors are vital components of the Ndembu system, manifesting not only in religious and ritual life, but also as affliction and misfortune. As Malandra (1939: 27) suggested, the spirits of the Acholi *kwaro* are revered precisely because this respect encourages them to positively and beneficially exercise power 'so hunting will be successful, evil spirits will be deterred from entering their villages, sickness may be unknown..., women may not be barren, children will enjoy health and happiness and crops will be abundant'.

A conceptualisation of relationality in which familial, lineal, and communal (re)production is tied to pragmatic activities emphasising cosmological and social relations at the same time as reinforcing group membership is the practical and ritual basis for the intercession of *kwaro*. Virtually all aspects of cosmological life in Acholi Pajok connect to the underlying cultural logics of social and biological (re)production, and the meta-persons which are positively esteemed are those considered responsible for ensuring the (re)productive success of such activities as agriculture, hunting and sex (this includes both God and *kwaro*). The activities of these meta-persons thereby ensures the continuation of social and biological life and, being charged with continuing the future (re)production of specific families and lineages, ultimately the community itself.

Thus, when speaking about connections between *tipu* and everyday experience, most people reference how negative yet powerful and always morally-evoked aspects of deceased ancestors intervene to disturb the world of the living. Such interventions are usually the result of someone either failing in their ritual or social requirements or breaking some taboo (such as *kiir*, which is always relational in orientation, see Chapter 6). As Fry (1976: 21) points out, in this the ancestors 'stand opposed to the machinations of those who would go against collective ideals and ignore their social obligations for reasons of jealousy or personal advancement'. Customarily it would be the role of *ajwaki* to communicate with the spirit world and diagnose any problems that were not known to be the result of *kiir* (Baines 2005: 13, 2010: 418; Finnström 2008: 189; Malandra 1939: 34). This was summarised by a former head chief and devout Christian, who told me:

*Tipu pa dano* are the spirits of the old people, the *kwaro*... And they are the ones causing the sickness, according to the old belief. They say the sickness is due to the spirit of a certain person, if you have done something to that person. They know this

by going to the fortune-teller, the *ajwaka*, because they can see with their mind and say something to the spirit and then tell the person why the sickness comes.

Ancestral spirits can cause sickness and misfortune (of either an individual or lineage-based nature) as well as madness or sterility (which, according to the conceptual logics structuring Acholi society, are both seen as more socially than individually problematic; see also Mogensen [2002] and Porter [2013]). For example, one old man argued 'you cannot see them, the *tipu pa kwaro*, but you know them through the sickness and the bad luck (*gum marac*), or through talking with the elders', while another man said 'if you are a mad person, they will say the *kwaro* were not happy with you'. Therefore, if someone who still follows the customs of 'the old ways' suffers from a *kwaro*-related affliction, they will ask their family to perform the necessary rituals and call on their ancestral spirits to remove the sickness. Offerings of food and alcohol must be made at the *kac* to appease their *tipu* and turn aside their wrath.

If appeasement succeeds, the problem will disappear. If it continues, it was not sent by ancestors after all but may instead be possession by a *jok* or demon, depending upon religious orientation.<sup>166</sup> Thus, as one man described it, 'if sickness is coming but the *kwaro* are not helping, then they used to go to the *layat*, the *ajwaka*. To do the proper celebration. But today, people are not going. Because not the true thing. Instead they must go and pray'.<sup>167</sup> As this quote indicates, dominant discourses suggest that although people used to go to *ajwaki*, this happened before people knew about God and now they pray instead. In another example, an evangelical man of the Palyec lineage ('people of the elephant') said 'the belief is now that you should go to the pastor or the priest and say the name of *Yesu Kristo* [Jesus Christ] and it will leave. But in those days, the people believe you need to get together with your clan and beat drums and dance'. Nonetheless, despite what Christians say, the community's *ajwaki* are still popular alternatives and can count many evangelicals among their customers.

The reason many evangelicals say *ajwaki* should not be consulted is because they are considered conceptually connected to or in communion with demons. They are therefore unable to 'really' remove them: any help an *ajwaka* provides comes not with God's blessing but rather Satan's. In this way, using an *ajwaka* to remove the effects of *tipu* is like making a pact with the Devil. Such

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<sup>166</sup> The specific meta-person at fault largely depends upon which cosmology either a person or their dominant kin subscribes to. It is therefore necessary to call either an *ajwaka* or a pastor to intervene, with a communal decision made on the basis of the beliefs of those who may fear they will be affected, like kin.

<sup>167</sup> Although this man may have been speaking about a spirit medium (*ajwaka*) who is also a healer (*layat*), which seems a relatively common combination in Uganda, at least, the wider context of the elision between these actors again highlights problems of creating analytical definitions divorced from contextually specific practices, as well as the effective demonization of tradition common to the now-hegemonic Christian paradigm.

understandings connect *ajwaki* to Christian ideas of customary meta-persons as otherworldly entities associated with demonic possession, the removal of which forms an important component of contemporary evangelical Christianity across Acholi and beyond.

### *Cen*

*Cen* has been variously translated as: ‘polluting spirits’ (Allen 2010: 249, 260); ‘spiritual haunting whereby the ghost of a person who was killed violently or had their remains desecrated torments those connected to their death’ (Anyeko et al. 2012: 120); ‘spirits of people who had died by violence or abroad and received no decent burial and thus, thirsting for vengeance, sought to afflict their relatives with disease and misfortune’ (Behrend 1999: 108-9); ‘a departed spirit, vengefully disposed (Crazzolara 1938: 199); ‘the spiritual power of those who have suffered a violent death’ (Finnström 2006b: 204); ‘troublesome spirit’ (Odoki 1997: 40); ‘polluting death-like spirits including vengeful ghosts’ (Porter 2012: 83); or by Acholi anthropologist Okot p’ Bitek (1971), simply as a ‘vengeful ghost’ or ‘ghostly vengeance’. A moral component linked to a purposeful and directed spiritual force which troubles those connected with its problematic death clearly underlies all these definitions. Unlike Acholi in Uganda, however, where the existing literature makes *cen* seem of central import, in Pajok I usually only heard people talk about *cen* when specifically asked about it.<sup>168</sup> Even then its existence was often denied, or more usually it was spoken about in relation to other cosmological meta-persons (as noted above).<sup>169</sup>

When people in Pajok do speak about *cen*, they say *cen* continues living in the world because somebody offended them while still alive (see also Baines 2005; Finnström 2001). The main reason is failure to give the deceased the same things someone should provide any other socially-close person. These include food, medicine, alcohol, or assistance. Refusal of offerings can also lead to *cen*. Thus, just as it would in life, forgetfulness, ignorance, or persistent refusal of relationality cause *tipu* to become angry and manifest as *cen* to disturb the living. This denial of social and relational obligation becomes refracted back quite literally as the spiritual perversion of the spirit of the gift: the refusal of gifts becomes equated with the refusal of social ties and, thus, the manifestation of the vengeance

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<sup>168</sup> The seeming lack of *cen* in contemporary Pajok seems like one possible example of cultural and cosmological change due to the effects of Christianity. However, this begs the question ‘why does *cen* still remain relevant among Christianised Ugandan Acholi?’ I suggest such transformations are instead more likely due the differential historical effects of colonial intervention or war, perhaps, even, a part of the local discursive idealisation of exile and return mentioned in Chapter 3.

<sup>169</sup> My inclusion of *cen* here should not be understood as giving the concept unnecessary and ethnographically unsound import in the context of Pajok, but rather a move to help with comparative analysis, as well as for heuristic and definitional purposes. As Evans-Pritchard (1956: 94) noted, ‘were I to leave [*cen*] out of my account altogether I would risk impeachment for a selection of the facts or the suppression of some of them’.

that is the necessary inverse of gift exchange logics (Jackson 2002: 41; Mauss 1990: 33, 147; Sahlin 1997: 182).<sup>170</sup> Among both Acholi and Nuer, such negative relations can manifest as bad dreams in which the identity of the wronged person is made known (Baines 2005: 12; Seligman 1925: 33).<sup>171</sup> Burton (1978: 145) notes that Nuer ‘conceive of the living as having a debt to the [recently] deceased and this is evident in the phrase used... which implies the paying of debt and hence the severance of relations... [and] a sentiment of negative reciprocity between [them]’.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, in Acholi those disturbed by *cen* may not be the ones directly responsible for *cen* but instead anyone in the perpetrator’s family or lineage, demonstrating both the inherent relationality of the concept as well as the moral component it contains (Baines 2005: 10-11).

It must be noted, however, that not everyone agrees with either the reality or the efficacy of *cen*. For example, one man noted that ‘*cen* is someone who died and was angry... And then sickness will come. And so the people will think it is the *cen* of that person who died. But not a true thing, just a belief’. Nonetheless, I should point out this statement does not mean this man denies the reality of these meta-persons. Quite the opposite, in fact. Like many evangelicals I spoke with who partially denied the existence, reality, truth or efficacy of customary meta-persons or categories, this man was not making a claim for ontological realism or denying the authenticity of the unseen. Instead, he was making a hegemonic statement denying the worth, value or effectiveness of customary practices in the face of a normative Christian cosmological paradigm which relegates non-Christian beliefs to the realms of the demonic at worst and the unreal at best. Therefore the next chapter turns to Christian cosmologies, moralities and persons, investigating the transformations these have undergone in their own entanglements with local Acholi systems and experiences.

## Conclusion: The relational basis of Acholi persons and meta-persons

In this chapter I broadly connected the fundamental and interlinked Acholi concepts of *jok* and *tipu*, with the categories of ‘deity’ and ‘the dead’, respectively (Fardon 1990), arguing that these categories of meta-person are key to understanding the Acholi cosmological system. Moreover, I have argued

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<sup>170</sup> Building on Mauss’s (1990: 8-12) invocation of Maori understandings of exchange, Jackson (2002: 41) perceptively notes the Maori word for reciprocity is used both for gift-giving and violent vengeance, arguing that, ‘analytically-speaking, violence... [is] a social phenomenon whose conditions of possibility inhere in the “three obligations of reciprocity – giving, receiving, repaying” (Mauss 1990: 37, cited in Jackson 2002: 41). The intimate links between vengeance and exchange are sometimes missed in the literature on the gift.

<sup>171</sup> Seligman (1925: 33) also reports that in this, the ‘the general resemblance of [Acholi] beliefs to those of the Dinka and Shilluk is remarkable’.

<sup>172</sup> It is important to note that Burton (1978: 10) argues that it is only the ‘ghosts’ of *recently* departed kin who are considered problematic. After four to six months and performance of the relevant ritual, these ‘ghosts’ become ancestors, and hence positive.

that it is through an Acholi person's specific and ongoing relations with *jok* and *tipu* that we begin to see the cosmological bases of their life and its socially embedded personhood.

The introduction of Christianity to Pajok means many evangelicals now consider *jogi* as essentially evil or demonic forces linked to the Biblical Satan. However, despite what many evangelicals say, a pragmatic engagement with *jogi* and similar non-Christian meta-persons remains common. *Jok* is a difficult concept to translate, and any accurate description needs to emphasise the term's inherent heteroglossia, multiplicity and contextual specificity, taking account how it can mean manifold and often contradictory things to the same person in different circumstances. Inspired by Mogensen (2002), I understand *jok* as an intersubjective orientation towards being-in-the-world, that is, as the differential experience of extraordinary power(s), both human and metahuman, through the experiential and relational effects these have upon lives and lifeworlds. I have therefore argued that in the final analysis 'the truth' about *jok* lies in its relational and experiential qualities, a position which also highlights the negotiation of morality which lies at the heart of Acholi cosmo-ontologies. In Pajok, such a relational ontology is based in ritualised interpersonal relationships with powerful and known meta-persons.

Through the ethnographic vignette of the Bobi *lagwoko*, I demonstrated the connections between ritual and relationality within Acholi cosmo-ontologies, arguing that the *kac-ot jogi* shrine does not represent the ancestors but rather embodies and substantiates them: it simultaneously calls forth all lineal members living and dead, collapsing the ontological dimensions involved to manifest multiple persons in the same time and place concurrently. Time, place, person, and state of being are refracted, structuring and embodying all possible lineage relations contemporaneously. The *kac* quite literally is the lineage and, through the ritualised exchange relations which take place around the *kac*, the personhood of all lineage members is simultaneously created and shared.

In describing the various conceptualisations of *tipu*, I highlighted the conceptual linkages between *tipu*, *cen* and *kwaro*. I have argued that while *cen* and *kwaro* are both connected to dead persons, a primary difference is that, as ancestors, *kwaro* are especially connected to the lineage. That is, they maintain social relations with the living and, further, these relations are primarily maintained through ritual exchange. It is because of this relationality, I have argued, that *kwaro* retain the fundamentally social essence of their personhood. However, unlike much of the Acholi literature, *cen* is not particularly relevant in Pajok. Indeed, many people say any *cen* was left in Uganda when they returned to Pajok. Nonetheless, people within the community seem to understand *cen* as the denial of social and relational obligations which anger *tipu*. Thus conceptualised, *cen* might be a manifestation of the spirit of the gift perverted.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGIES AND MORAL PERSONHOOD

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### Introduction: Evangelical Christianity in Acholi South Sudan

In this chapter, I build upon the evidence presented in the previous two chapters to further my argument that many contemporary manifestations of everyday evangelical orientations in Pajok continue to play out decidedly pre-Christian structuring logics. This is particularly true, I have argued, in the connections between cosmologies and personhood and, especially, in how personhood is conceived and mobilised. Therefore, in what follows I provide a further introduction to evangelical Christianity in Pajok – particularly the Africa Inland Church (AIC), the largest Protestant denomination in the community, among whom the majority of my fieldwork was conducted. I will highlight aspects of Acholi evangelical morality and personhood linking to other important parts of everyday life in Acholi South Sudan and argue that, although there may be some significant moral ruptures in the Christianisation of the region, there remain important ontological and cosmological continuities which unify pre- and post-Christian lives and worlds.

Following an introduction to the AIC, I discuss the evangelical sermon as the most obvious concretisation of evangelical ideas, ideals and ideologies, before connecting the major thematic points of evangelical sermons to what it means to be a Christian – and thus moral – person. The thematic content of the sermon will be demonstrated to reiterate and link with wider Christian cosmological conceptualisations, particularly around the workings of the cosmos and the places of God, humanity and sin within it. It is argued that engagement with and negotiation of sin is a fundamental feature of evangelical cosmologies and that this negotiation happens not only within the evangelical person but, more broadly, in the evangelical person's engagement in and with the world. I will further argue that negotiations between the sinning self and the sinning world are intimately connected to the negotiation of evangelical personhood as well as demonstrating the embodied morality of the evangelical person so created: just as engaging with immoral or sinful actions in the world desacralizes the evangelical person in zero-sum understandings of the connections between sin and eternal damnation, so too a moral engagement with God helps to position the evangelical actor as deserving of salvation.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Much like among the Dinka (Deng 1988: 165), the Acholi have no indigenous word for 'sin', with the usual word *bal/balo* (actually meaning 'to spoil') or the less common *pe atir* ('not right/true') or *rac* ('ugly' or 'bad') having slightly different connotations, all of which are also able to be used to speak about people, actions, things or processes which the English term 'sin' cannot (such as food spoiling; the narration of a story or event being incorrect; or a person looking ugly). See Chapter 6.

Again, I reiterate the point that although the processes involved in negotiating personhood and morality may seem to highlight instances where local understandings of personhood manifest as either relational or individual in nature, these are transient moments rather than crystallised identities. In other words, over the course of the social interactions which comprise their day-to-day lives, most evangelicals in Pajok are constantly pulled by impulses of both a relational and an individual type. In this way, as discussed in Chapter 2, the inclinations enacted at any one time are not definitive positions but momentary manifestations of particular tendencies which collect or concretise in and through specific social contexts.

### At the funeral of a drowned youth

After the majority of people have finished eating the sumptuous meal of several different meats and other foods, the inevitable ‘disco’ music finally starts,<sup>174</sup> pumping out of the intimidatingly large loudspeakers now a seemingly vital part of any contemporary Acholi life-cycle ritual. It is nearly 5pm and many people have been here since midday, getting saturated by the heavy September rain as they joined in the prayers, listened to the sermon, and shared in the life, death and grief of the recently deceased young man and his family. The crowd’s reaction seems to indicate the music is a welcome relief from the sombre moralising of the sermon but, for now at least, it remains at a low enough volume to allow conversation. Like always, it is the women who are first to get out of their seats and dance. In this instance – being a *lyel pa Katoli*, a Catholic funeral – it are the women of the Legion of Mary who lead the way, together creating a rough circle about eight to ten metres in diameter, and slowly rotating anti-clockwise around it, shuffling their feet and swaying at the hips (Fig. 19).

There is an obvious cultural love for song, dance and music among Acholi. Indeed, many Acholi use their specific ‘traditional dances’ as a means of displaying ethnic and cultural distinction, noting their dancing is among the best in Africa (Kaiser 2006b, 2008; O’Byrne 2012, 2014b). Music, song and dance remains essential in all Christian services and celebrations and are seen as primary means of praising God (Fig. 20). These elements can also be understood as a primary demonstration of the fundamental continuity of customary Acholi cultural orientations within a Christian lifeworld. Significantly, prior to the coming of Christianity, music was a central feature of all major life cycle rituals, from birth through marriage to all three funeral stages.<sup>175</sup> Song and dance were also necessary components of all annual

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<sup>174</sup> In Pajok, ‘disco’ is a widely used vernacular term in both English and Acholi (where it is ‘disko’) referring both to all non-traditional music ‘made to dance to’ (no matter the origin of that music) as well as to the dances and dancehalls where such music is played. For more information about music at Acholi funerals, see Kaiser (2006b).

<sup>175</sup> What Kaiser (2006b: 191, 202 note 5) sees as the centrality of third stage funeral rites among predominantly Pajok-originating Sudanese Acholi in Kiryandongo refugee camp in the 1990s and 2000s does not seem to have

or seasonal cultivation rituals, such as the widespread chiefdom planting and harvesting rites (Atkinson 2010) now defunct in Pajok. Music and dancing thus connect life, death and fertility in the biosocial (re)production of individuals and families, lineages and clans. Importantly, this is (re)production understood primarily at the level of the social rather than the individual, and is thus tied to the creation and maintenance of social persons; that is, of the becoming of relational personhood.

There is more to the ritual importance of music than underlying structural logics, however, and most Acholi seem to truly enjoy their performative engagement in song and dance. Nonetheless, there is certainly something about the ways in which people engage in these elements of ritual or religious life that, I think, speaks to the continuing importance of pre-Christian sacrificial and cosmological orientations in Christian performances (evangelical or otherwise). For example, often during evangelical events there will be an excited, almost frenetic movement to begin dancing. This is very often initiated, or at least numerically dominated, by middle-aged and older women. This is interesting in itself, as community leaders often told me that this category of woman is considered very important for ritual displays of emotion, particularly at funerals.<sup>176</sup> Female dancers are therefore vital at weddings and funerals both. One has to wonder if this is in some way connected to their doubly ambiguous positions as lineage-crossing women who are no longer fertile, and therefore sacred, both in the Durkheimian (1995) and British-structuralist sense (Douglas 2002, 2008). I have also been told that ensuring the public or social demonstration of appropriate emotions at such events is vital, as doing so will make relevant meta-persons aware of the event as well as its social and emotive significance. It is important to note this does not change whether the meta-persons are the customary powers of *jogi* or *kwaro* (see Chapter 4) or the Christian entities of God and Christ. Indeed, given the demographic composition of Pajok and the wide-ranging social and relational ties mobilised by any one life-cycle event, it seems virtually certain any major ritual or celebration will be important to both Christian and non-Christian meta-persons simultaneously.<sup>177</sup>

I suggest, therefore, that the public demonstration of grief at an event like a Christian funeral (for example) is just as much linked to the continuing reproduction of customary orientations toward the productive and destructive potential of ancestors as it is the same potential inherent in the tripartite Godhead.<sup>178</sup> That is, just as customary rituals which publicly involve ancestors are as much about

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continued with return to Pajok, as while funerals are an almost-daily occurrence in Pajok during the dry season, very few of the funerals conducted over the period of my fieldwork were third stage rites.

<sup>176</sup> As I discuss later in this Chapter, women are generally seen as being more susceptible to emotions (including jealousy, which is also why they are more likely to be witches and poisoners, see Chapter 6).

<sup>177</sup> If these *are* even necessarily discrete entities, in the terms of debates around the translation and translatability of Christian terms highlighted, for example, by Peel (1990), Sanneh (1989) and Shaw (1990).

<sup>178</sup> Indeed, I should note, as p'Bitek (1971, 1973b) highlighted, that it is not appropriate to show grief for the death of an infant (who was never properly socialised and thus not a person) nor of an elderly person (who

minimising any offense and appeasing their whims and jealousies as they are the events surrounding the ritual itself (birth, marriage, etc.), so too Christian celebrations are about a need to appease and not offend God. God is, after all, jealous and vengeful.<sup>179</sup> Thus, I argue, what might first appear as if a significant structural transformation in the underlying cultural and cosmological logics instead actually manifests simply as a transformation in form rather than function. In other words, the local manifestations of Christianity apparent in public rituals are those which continue to prioritise the same elements as were privileged in customary rituals of the same kind. They therefore maintain a cosmological or ontological continuity which provides evangelical Acholi some limited opportunities to continue engaging in specific and performative cosmological orientations deeply significant to them as socioculturally-embedded relational Acholi persons. This is the allowable Christian performance of specifically Acholi sociality.

#### Acholi funerals, Christian services

Funerals (*Iyel*) are central parts of everyday life in contemporary Pajok. This is particularly true during *oro* (the dry season), which due to the practical needs of agricultural subsistence is when many burials are postponed until. Indeed, during *oro* it often seems barely a day passes without at least one funeral taking place somewhere in the community. Like Acholi elsewhere (Girling 1960), Pajok's twenty-three lineages have at least an ideal of lineal exogamy.<sup>180</sup> The kinship obligations connected with any funeral therefore mobilises a large proportion of the community's population across all possible demographic divisions, including religion. Indeed, a funeral may be one of the only places whereby an evangelical pastor will partake in a service led by a Catholic catechist or *vice versa*.<sup>181</sup> Nonetheless, no matter the person and no matter their family, every funeral I attended was definitively Christian in character: only once did a funeral I attend explicitly include non-Christian rather than Christianised pre-Christian elements. This was the funeral of the *Rwot Kot Madit* ('Big Rainmaker' or 'Chief of the Rainmakers'), Opio Lobo (see Appendix 3), and the inclusion of such elements at his funeral were widely considered essential due to the deceased's status and structural position, as well as to prevent any of the

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had a long and fulfilling life). In the former case, grief can lead to the cosmological sanction of future infertility (O'Byrne 2012) while in the latter, rather than grieving the lives of these elders should be joyously and even amorously celebrated (p'Bitek 1973b).

<sup>179</sup> See for example: Exodus 34: 14; Deuteronomy (throughout); Joshua 24: 19; Isaiah (throughout).

<sup>180</sup> Although as Finnström (2008) and Porter (2013) both noted among Ugandan Acholi, the cosmological sanctions involved with breaching such exogamous ideologies can be turned aside through ritual action.

<sup>181</sup> The Catholic congregation in Pajok was stripped of their priest in late 2013, seemingly as they had not been able to build either a permanent church structure nor a compound for him to live in, although my feeling is that there was an element of church, regional and ethnic politics at play, compounded by the fact that the priest at that time seemingly did not want to stay in Pajok any longer. Two catechists now head the congregation in Pajok.

potentially catastrophic repercussions which might result if the rainmaker's *tipu* was angered by their omission.

Moreover, no matter the denomination, all funeral services follow the same basic structure and, more or less, have the Christianised components of the service superimposed upon the Acholi ritual which preceded them. However, as noted in Chapters 3 and 4 and much like ritual life in general, outside of these wider structural similarities there is great variation in specific details between funerals. Further, these variations seem largely individually idiosyncratic and relatively independent of denomination. Thus, the description which follows is a generalisation only.

When a person dies, their grave is dug as soon as possible (Fig. 21). A short and informal prayer service takes place at this time, led by a pastor or catechist from the church within which the deceased was a member. The main service takes place several days later, also led by the same church (Fig. 22). These services vary depending upon denomination, but follow the same structure as a standard service within the corresponding denomination with the proviso that the funeral includes an interlude – usually after the sermon – during which the burial and filling of the grave takes place. Before the burial, older or close female kin will sit with around the coffin, weeping and keening as customarily expected, while other women prepare and serve food and alcohol – still a vital component, no matter religious affiliation. Male kin and guests of both genders usually sit around drinking and chatting (p'Bitek 1973b).

Both preceding and following the service there is a 'biographical' element, during which major events in the deceased's life will be recounted – birth, education, marriage, refugee-related movement and so on – and family members of the deceased named. A significant and vital part of the biography is the 'tracing' (*lubo*, see Chapter 6), during which the cause of death is always given and the reasons for establishing this cause explained.<sup>182</sup> This is one of the most important components of any Acholi funeral, both historically and since the arrival of Christianity, as it is during the biography that family or guests will publicly confirm, deny or seek to foreclose any specific concern about the cause of death including witchcraft-related accusations: after all, as I describe in Chapter 6, and as Evans-Pritchard (1972) details among the Zande, there is usually no such thing as coincidence in Acholi. Every event has its cause and, no matter someone's religious affiliation, most people are quick to highlight that many causes of death are witchcraft (or demonic) in origin, particularly when the death is of a young person or otherwise unexpected.

Following the service there is always a large meal, which usually includes at least several goat dishes. However, beef is now generally present at funerals organised by wealthier families, as are bottled

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<sup>182</sup> Also see Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 276) for why the public demonstration of relationality within funeral biographies among Southern Tswana form an important part of the construction of personhood.

water, soft drinks and beers, the presence of which is very definitely a demonstration of wealth, status and distinction. After everyone has been served food there is always music, dancing and widespread drinking of alcohol (Fig. 23). At this time, usually just before sunset, the number of people swells substantially as those who have either been working or who simply did not want to attend the always-moralising Christian service start arriving to take part in the food and festivities, which will last until sunrise.

#### *Dancing, funerals and the mother-in-law taboo*

Returning to the funeral for the young man I was describing earlier, the women of the Legion of Mary are all middle aged mothers or older. Most of them are wearing pristine white dresses wrapped around with multiple layered sarongs and blankets of many colours, such wrapping being the traditional Acholi designation of a grieving woman. Unlike the rest of the women present, who are similarly clothed in the symbols of grief, the women of the Legion also wear the badges of their position in the church: a blue and white patterned shawl, tied in a triangle over one shoulder; and a white headscarf printed with a vivid Renaissance painting of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child (Fig. 24).

I note to Obwoya that the fact the Legion of Mary begin the dancing repeats a pattern I have noticed from other funerals we have attended: that the middle-aged women begin dancing as soon as the music starts and it can take a long time for any men to join them, particularly young men. I asked him if this was a gendered thing and explained that, in my culture, it would take men a bit of time to ‘warm’ (an Acholi idiom) to dancing in public, especially during daylight or before consuming alcohol. Or, I added, perhaps it is an Acholi cultural thing, like with emotions (as discussed earlier)? Maybe women are seen as lead dancers or lead mourners? That it is their ‘job’ to ‘begin’ the proper dance ritual? Because, I remind him, at some of the more celebratory events we had been to, community leaders and other middle aged men often joined the dancing immediately, especially to do the *otoli* warrior dance.<sup>183</sup>

I found Obwoya’s response extremely interesting. So much so that we moved away from the growing volume of the funeral celebration to talk about it more fully. As we left the dancing, Obwoya explained that the reason young men do not dance early during a funeral is because you may meet your *maro* (mother-in-law) there, especially because it is the women of that age who always start the dancing. Therefore, he said, if a man was to go to the dance floor while it was still daylight, and his mother-in-law was also at the funeral – which, due to the obligations inherent in lineal and other close social ties,

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<sup>183</sup> See Kaiser (2006b, 2008) and O’Byrne (2012, 2014b) for further information on Acholi music and dances.

is likely, then he might meet her. 'That', Obwoya said, 'would be very bad! Because, as I have told you before, you are not allowed to meet, or greet, or speak to your mother-in-law!'

Obwoya went on to say that, after we had last talked together about this, he had gone to speak to Anek, a woman he was close with. Anek was not only a member of the same church as Obwoya – the Church of Christ in Lagi – but also one of the local SPLM women's leaders (Fig. 25). He had asked Anek about this taboo, he said. In particular, he had asked her what people in the COC must do about this taboo, because the congregation of that church has a tradition in which all the people who attend service exit the church to make a single-file line in the space outside, shaking hands with all those who have left before them on the way out (the idea being that everyone who attended service will meet, greet, and thank their fellow Christians). In almost exemplary pragmatic and concrete Acholi fashion, however, Obwoya had asked Anek this question in the form of a specific situation pertaining to a particular social relationship: what would happen if he, Obwoya, married one of Anek's daughters? Would Anek still be able to greet him at church, or not?

Anek had been very surprised by this question, Obwoya said, thinking perhaps that he was trying to 'con' one of her daughters (local Acholi English vernacular for 'to seduce'). He had denied this, telling her it was something we had been speaking about and that he was unsure and wanted to know. 'Because all the people at the church are Christian and all Christians are equal as brothers and sisters in Christ', he told her. Yet, Anek had gruffly replied if it was not one of her daughters then he must have interest in another church member. With that she left. However, Obwoya had been passing Anek's house several days later when she called him over, saying she had thought a lot about his question. 'It is a very hard question', Anek told him, but according to the old beliefs of the Acholi people (*tek kwaro me Acholi*) and what the community had been doing for a long time, she believed that if Obwoya married one of her daughters, then they would not be able to greet each other at church. In that situation, he would need to exit the church as soon as service ended, greet everyone he could, and leave the line before she arrived. 'That would be the best way', Anek said, 'because according to the old rules (*cek Acholi macon*, literally 'the laws, rules or regulations of the Acholi of long ago'), we cannot do that. That is against the old ways'.

Obwoya also noted that, 'although a lot of what happens in the church is now trying to go against the traditional beliefs' (his phrasing), 'the people are still keeping some of the traditions alive, even those which divide the people of the church from themselves' (again his phrasing), such as the mother-in-law taboo. This had led him, he told me, to understand that some beliefs or customs were so strong they cannot ever be changed, like the one just explained. He said also that, according to his understanding, a man cannot greet his mother-in-law even if he and his wife go to visit her at his wife's

natal home. Instead, his wife must speak for them, as their mediator. They are not even allowed to pass anything between them, as anything that they touch 'may infect the other one', making the younger couple's children sick. Instead, everything must be mediated by the younger woman.

## Salvation, damnation and the basis of faith at Africa Inland Church

### *Introducing the AIC*

The AIC in South Sudan is an Africanised mission church which, although originating from the work of European missionaries in the mid-twentieth century, has become indigenised enough that it is now largely independent from European influence, at least outside major urban centres. This is certainly true in remote locations like Pajok, where although the original church hierarchy remains in place, decisions made by church leaders beyond the immediate community have little or no impact. The AIC is an evangelical denomination which prioritises biblical explication, a somewhat puritanical Christian morality, and the neutralisation of demonic influence alongside a message of salvation, both of which are enabled through prayer and the maintenance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as personal saviour. Nonetheless, a significant amount of the specific manifestation of these elements in the AIC in Pajok result from syncretising processes. This means that – apart from the sermon, which embodying a distinctly paternalistic and colonial authority, remains strictly controlled by local church leadership – much of the content of the weekly service demonstrates a significant indigenisation, particularly in acceptable forms of praise, worship and other emotional displays.

Further, although the power and mission of the AIC seems to be aimed at the salvation of believers through the neutralisation of the demonic underworld, unlike many evangelical or Pentecostal churches it promises neither riches nor health to the believer. It is very distinctly not a health or healing church, nor does it promote the basic tenets of a prosperity gospel. Likewise, the AIC is very definitely not a spirit possession church; glossolalia, 'being slayed in the Spirit', prophetic impulses and other standard Pentecostal forms of worship are not only actively discouraged but explicitly seen as examples of the demonic: due to the ways Pentecostal worship seems to replicate indigenous manifestations of spirit possession, they are, in the words of one AIC pastor, 'just like what happens when the Satan comes and possesses someone'. When I asked a group of evangelical leaders how such a thing could be true when so many people were converting to Pentecostal forms of Christianity in Uganda, one of them replied:

It says in the Bible that the enemy is strong, that there will be many false churches.

That they will look like the true churches but are not. So need to be careful. Because

when you look closely, inside you find nothing: lots of dancing, clapping, singing, falling down, speaking nonsense. But no Gospel. Even the sermons, just the same thing, repeated. Lots of Hallelujah, Amen, but no teaching, nothing. That is how you can know the false church.

One Sunday at AIC Caigon

As the opening reading finishes and the pastor steps down from the podium, the music begins. First the drums. Played with small sticks, they tap out a rhythmical yet disjointed beat. Next are the various *adungu* – stringed instruments somewhat like a harp, their different sizes each give the melody a distinctive tone (Fig. 26). The effect is immediate, and people begin smiling, clapping, stamping their feet. The sound builds, swelling to fill the high ceilings of the large concrete building.

After several moments, the voices of the church's choir start, the Acholi lyrics picking out the different harmonies of a classic American song of praise (Hoffman 1878). Some voices are deep and resonant, others high and lilting, and together they blend to create a sweet and soulful harmony, striking the chords of the heart through the sheer simplicity and beauty of their song. Shivers rise along my spine and arms. Slowly, the congregation join in. Softly at first, but by the first chorus, with increasing passion and intensity.

*Wulwokke (wulwokke) Iremo (iremo)*

*Nilonyo ginabala mewu (nilonyo ginabala mewu)?*

*Pe wubilonye ka Yesu pe kwedwu*

*Wulwokke iremo pa Yesu.*

*Have you bathed (have you bathed) in the blood (in the blood)*

*That cleanses your sins from you (that cleanses your sins from you)?*

*You will not be cleansed without searching for Jesus*

*You must wash in the blood of Jesus.*

As the voices mix and blend with the music, the sacred space of the hot and uncomfortable church building is transformed. What had just minutes previously been a shuffling, mumbling, disengaged mass was, all of a sudden, a shared choral community; a deeply impassioned Christian collectivity voicing their mutual belief and faith.

Even more spectacularly, as the choir's performance draws to a close, half a dozen women dance towards the dais, singing loudly and waving handkerchiefs around the performers' heads. As they do so, the crowd dances in small groups among the pews. Other women ululate loudly, the shrill sound piercing the harmony like the back-and-forth of the ravens who sit among the trees outside. All of which makes the singing grow increasingly louder, the congregation get ever more boisterous, and the feeling of sheer joyfulness all the more apparent.

Then, just as abruptly as it began, it is over.

Silence descends, the feeling of exuberance dissolves, children begin to mutter, and one of the pastors rises to begin the weekly sermon.

This is the sound of the African Inland Church. Unlike anything in my past, for me the intensity of sound and emotion of AIC worship will always be the sound of Africa. The scene described above is from just another regular Sunday in the middle of the 2014 rainy season, and Marie and I have been living in Pajok for nearly a year. In an effort to get known as widely as possible among the community, as well as to be able to speak about and compare Pajok's different Christian denominations, we have attended a minimum of two services at each of the churches in Pajok centre. Last Sunday, for example, we shared service with the Evangelical Free Church at Pajok Primary School. This week, however, we are back among one of our favourite congregations: the large AIC church of St Andrews which dominates Caigon *Boma*, led by our lineage brother Joseph.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Pajok is the site of three AIC churches: the main Saint Andrew's AIC church in Caigon *Boma* – south of the river and west of the main road – and smaller churches in Lagi *Boma* north of the river (Figs. 4 and 20) and Pugee *Boma* close to the Ugandan border. Unlike the wooden-post and grass-roofed churches in Lagi and Pugee, Saint Andrew's is one of only two 'permanent' church buildings in Pajok *Payam* and was built primarily by the good will and donations of charitable Christians in Australia, the current home of many of Pajok's refugee diaspora. It is the main church compound of the AIC in Pajok, housing not only the church building but also one of Pajok's seven Primary schools. A church and school have shared the site since the community gifted the land to the AIC in the 1970s, although the original church was destroyed during Anyanya II (Fig. 27).

As a result of its wider structural and organisational hierarchies, AIC services always involve the same three fundamental components: prayer; sermons; and worship. Together these fill complementary but equally important social, cultural, and religious roles. Although as the realm of high status males prayer and sermon are given privileged position, all three components fulfil part of a Christian community's obligations toward God. Furthermore, each demonstrates the importance of particular sections of the church community, and singing, dancing and joyous celebration in praise of the Lord Jesus Christ – that part of the service AIC members generally term 'worship' – is considered fundamental not only within the shared sacred space of the weekly service but also in the individual religious lives of Christian women, children, and youth. Indeed, worship is possibly the only legitimate space in Christian Pajok these otherwise marginalised groups can make active and valid claims for equality of status.

Prayer is vital in developing and maintaining a relationship with God and might be the practical minimum required to be a 'True Christian': even if someone does not attend church, if they pray they are Christian. At home, prayers are preferably conducted by the male family head and ideally accompany Biblical education. This mirrors the structural and ideological components of service. In the AIC, although individual prayer is largely private, pastor-led public prayer is a necessary component of any service or church event. Whether public or private, prayers usually consist of one or more of the following: 1) thanks for God's action in people's lives; 2) thanks for Christ's sacrifice for their sins; 3) statements about the power of Christ's work; 4) exhortations for deliverance from sin; 5) requests for forgiveness of sin; or 6) requests for practical assistance.

When I speak of worship as the domain of women, children, and youth, I refer to a performative space within the service that is spatially, temporally, and structurally set apart and within which the actors are different. Each of these groups – women, children, and youth – roughly corresponds to a different type of choir. The most important are the 'Youth' or 'Church Choir', a mixture of people 30 and under (Fig. 20). There are also choirs for younger children and others for married women with families.

Music is a central feature of all public life in Pajok, whether customary or Christian. It is joyful, fun to do, and the public expression of happiness. Musical performance during church service is captivating, alluring, and pulls the audience in – sometimes literally, as dancing congregation or choir members interact with others present. In this way it might also be construed as an idiom and mode of communication with present but non-visible meta-persons. Worship is particularly fun and entertaining at the AIC, and people jump, sway, clap, stamp their feet, laugh, shout and sing. Such performances 'enliven them, explicitly drawing people together in rituals of support and solidarity while sacralising a notion of a... community that acts together to manifest God's love in the world' (Chua 2015: 351).

Many performances also incorporate elements of comedy, irony, and farce, especially in the form of moral plays. Like the sermons they seem to mirror and invoke, these plays invariably involve discourses on the evil of alcohol, fighting, gambling and theft, as well as narratives on maintaining peaceful marriages or the dangers of *ajwaki* and 'traditional religion'. As Taussig (1993) notes in his *Mimesis and Alterity*, the power of mimesis is in the slippage between mimicry and difference. Thus, in their actions, evangelical Acholi women and children may be making claims for or about their equality through such performances, with the slippage revealed through irony and farce being where the strength of their claim is revealed. Therefore, at the same time as they reiterate common evangelical themes, such plays also function as social critique: not only of drunkards and adulterers, but oftentimes state or community leaders, especially following the outbreak of war in December 2013.

For church leadership at least, the sermon is the central feature of the weekly service. It is a moralistic and authoritarian engagement with the Bible as represented to the audience through the mediation of someone with the appropriate legitimate authority: the pastor or preacher. The intent is to simultaneously convey Bible content as the literal Word of God and to interpret and pass on the practical and moral messages contained therein. Sermons invariably consist of verse by verse reading and interpretation of the Bible, usually with references to other verses conveying similar messages or providing further evidence.

As always, on the week in question, the weekly collection is followed by a song of praise to welcome the preacher to the dais. The responsibility of giving the sermon is fulfilled on a rotational basis and this week it is the tall, slender and striking figure of Pastor Charles Nyeko who approaches the pulpit (Fig. 28). Unlike most weeks, however, the song which greets Pastor Charles is half-hearted, barely audible, and with very little engagement. This is an unusual occurrence. In fact, the lack of engagement is so noticeable Charles quickly stops the song. Grabbing the microphone used to help give the bass *adungu* more power, he demands the entire congregation stand, including the children, and tells them about the importance of this song: 'This song is about thanking God and the people of the church', he says. It is thanking them for the gifts they have just given and for the gifts that each of them will soon receive. 'Because', Charles says, 'it is the duty of each and every Christian to thank God for giving you the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. Because He was given to all of you so that you will have the gift of eternal life. He sacrificed His Son to give you that gift, the gift of living together with Jesus Christ in Heaven!' He starts shouting '*Apwoyo Rubanga!*' – Thank you God! – over and over again, and the church band starts playing a new, louder, and more upbeat song.

This really gets the congregation going, so much so that it seems like an entirely different group from that of only minutes before. Within moments of the music restarting, everyone is dancing, even the

elderly people, and many of them are not only dancing at their seats but are moving around the church, filling the aisles and empty spaces at the front and back of the building with a mass of heaving, swaying, ululating bodies.<sup>184</sup> The pastors are now down from the dais too, arm in arm with the choir and other congregation members, and some people start grabbing the arms of those beside them, pairing up in miniature dances of shared celebration, while others wave handkerchiefs wildly around their heads.<sup>185</sup>

This goes on for perhaps five minutes, the joyous energy subsiding slowly, until Pastor Charles again takes the microphone and indicates it is time for the sermon. The music stops abruptly, the congregation return to their seats, and Charles starts preaching, explaining the eschatological message of salvation and damnation contained in Daniel 12: 1-12.<sup>186</sup> The message of this book is the basis of the whole Bible, he says, the whole reason for God's plan, why humankind must be Christian. It is about truth and lies and spiritual blindness. About how a true Christian needs to be a child of God. 'Don't let the Devil blind you!' Charles implores as the sermon comes to an end an hour later,

Do not let the enemy fool you! That is the worst mistake, that is spiritual blindness. The Devil is only a liar, a deceiver. Nothing good, nothing true can come from Satan. You keep saying '*diki, diki, diki*' (tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow) but *diki* never comes! *Diki* never ends! *Diki* belongs to Satan! It is always *kombedi* (now)! And if you keep doing what you are doing, the next day will belong to Satan. Not to you. Not to

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<sup>184</sup> Ululation is the high-pitched la-la-la sound made by women as a sign of happiness or appreciation.

<sup>185</sup> Handkerchief waving is another way Acholi women may publicly demonstrate their joy.

<sup>186</sup> Daniel 12: Prophecy of the End Time

v1 'At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.

v2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

v3 Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.

v4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

v5 Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank.

v6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?"

v7 Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

v8 Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?"

v9 And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

v10 Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

v11 And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

v12 Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days'.

God. And you will be *otum* (ended, finished. The implication is spiritually dead)! Let us pray.

## Christian persons and moral truths

As can be seen from the short extract of the sermon I gave above, the basis of this as most AIC sermons is the moral exhortation to live better lives and be better Christians. Indeed, similar messages are the basis of most evangelical sermons in Pajok, which generally revolve around one or more interlinked messages or Truths, often directly focused towards the audience and layered upon each other as part of a mutually reinforcing moral lecture. Given the fact that most sermons last between one and two hours, as well as the sheer number of sermons I heard delivered over the sixteen month period of fieldwork, the different components comprising evangelical sermons can most usefully be summarised in the following form:

- 1) That *Yesu Kristo* [Jesus Christ] died on the cross for humankind, that He was God personified and that because of His love for humankind, He willingly sacrificed Himself so that all people who willingly accept and believe in Him will be saved and have eternal life;
- 2) That salvation and eternal life require someone becoming Born Again (*kwo manyen*, or 'new life'), to give one's life to God, and to accept Christ as one's personal saviour;
- 3) That the basic requirement of being a 'True Christian', that is, to be the Born Again person noted above, is the need to follow God's laws and live like Jesus Christ. This means following a set of moral and ethical prescriptions and proscriptions (see below). Slipping in this will negate a person's Born Again quality, thus affecting personal salvation;
- 4) That these codes are based primarily in the need to reject 'worldly' things or acts (especially aspects of customary communal or ritual life considered contrary to the points above), including: going to an *ajwaka*, participating in 'traditional' rituals, drinking alcohol, attending 'discos', committing adultery, or theft (again, see below);
- 5) A need to subscribe to the Truths that God created people and the world (Genesis 1) but humanity rebelled against Him, thus allowing both sin and death into the world (Genesis 3) and thereby necessitating the life, acts, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ to allow the redemption of humankind. God is positioned both as a just and loving God and a just and true judge, an understanding articulated as meaning He must judge sin with death – 'the payment for sin is death', is a common saying – because such punishment is the only justice possible for sinning against God and His perfect moral code. Therefore, because of Christ's great sacrifice, adherence to the preceding points must first be demonstrated before a believer can be saved;

- 6) That since humankind's original sin in Genesis 3, all people have inherently been sinners and thus each person is automatically doomed without the personal salvation of Christ, which can only be achieved by accepting Christ as personal saviour and adhering to the points above. In fact, the trope of 'we are all sinners' or 'all the world is sin' is one primary means through which Pajok evangelicals orient themselves in the world;
- 7) That all sin originated from *Catan* (Satan or the Devil), who is also the origin of evil and who is always bringing more sin to the world. This is explicitly connected to the inherent evil or temptation within worldly and traditional things mentioned in point four above, 'the problem of evil at the heart of all human beings', and the reason why 'there is nothing good in the world'. Thus, the rejection of Jesus Christ is the acceptance of the world, and thus sin and Satan;
- 8) Lastly, the millennial/eschatological message that the world is now facing The End of Days, that the end of the world is coming and that this can be known by the state of the world and the actions of humanity, as per the point above. The truth of these matters are known through signs demonstrating the decay of earthly morality: adultery, AIDS/HIV, decadence, theft, violence and, perhaps most evocatively, the recent renewal of warfare.

As well as the major recurring themes of sermons, there also seem to be four major everyday practical considerations of which an evangelical must be aware and around which institutional ideas of the moral Christian person and actor tend to solidify. Two of these considerations are prescriptions while two are proscriptive in nature. These form the basis of most evangelical moralising about the state and nature of the contemporary world, being used to define and demonstrate both 'the cursed world' and 'the end of days' descriptions that evangelicals so often apply to the world and time in which we now live. It should be noted that, although generally publicly voiced through the person of the evangelical pastor or in the forum of the sermon that dominates the Sunday service, these are also the primary considerations mobilised by an 'average' evangelical: when asked to discuss their understandings of faith, such considerations are much more commonly mentioned than any deeper theological issues.

The four practical components of how to be a 'True Christian' are: 1) the need to read the Bible daily. Failing in this is to deny the importance of the God's Word and, thus, God Himself (this despite the fact that many church goers cannot read, particularly women); 2) linked to this, the need to pray daily, described as 'talking with God' (*loko ki Rubanga*), where failure to do so denies the power and importance of God in the believer's life, as well as denying the importance of their relationship with

Him; 3) to not go to discos or similar events where there is alcohol or other temptations.<sup>187</sup> This is not only because alcohol itself is demonised, but because it leads to ‘dangerous’ liaisons between sexes; and 4) the need to be aware of immoral activities, particularly non-marital sex, as such practices are Satanic temptations designed to lead believers away from a relationship God and toward eternal death.

As can be seen, both the content of weekly sermons and the everyday considerations a True Christian must follow are as much moral as they are theological or even Biblical. They are as much about ‘living the right life’ and abiding by a shared moral social code about that life – being norm-abiding members of a shared moral community – as they are about one’s faith, belief, or religious activity. Such demands are also generally pragmatic in nature and about lived experience, the same fundamental principles at work in customary Acholi life as well as ‘traditional’ religious practices. And it is in these never-ending ‘encouragements’ to lead the right life that the individualising eschatology of Christianity meets the social and behavioural components of the rest of life. According to the anthropological literature on Christianity (Chapter 2), one might assume that it is through demands to ‘live the right life’ that other social ties like kinship might be broken or reduced in everyday significance, replaced by a church in the sense of a *kanista*: a community of believers, rather than a building. Adherence to such everyday practices would therefore be the basic foundation of a community of choice rather than birth, and as such have a fundamental role in defining the idealised way that evangelicals wish to live and the type of people they would prefer to be around. However, such breaks are not as common in Pajok as the literature suggests they are elsewhere. Instead, the social requirements to engage in ongoing kin, lineage, and other social relations continue to form what remain perhaps even the most important everyday aspects of evangelicals’ lives.

### Sin, forgiveness and lived pragmatism as an Acholi Christian

As in the rest of the Christian world, sin also plays a fundamental role within the cosmological, discursive and structural logics of evangelical Christians in Acholi South Sudan (Cannell 2005; Eriksen 2007; Hackman 2015; Klaitis 2011; Meyer 1998, 2004; Mosko 2010; Read 1955; Robbins 1998, 2004).

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<sup>187</sup> I should note that this proscription does not include funerals, where although the evangelical must remain abstinent they should still attend all appropriate funerals. This is because, as one of the most important social-relational elements of community life, as well as a demonstration of sociality and community membership, attending a funeral is near-compulsory for kin, age-mates and friends. Not attending amounts to refusing sociality with the living and relationality with the dead. It certainly opens one up to claims of being a bad neighbour or, worse, a witch (as the denial of sociality is widely the hallmark of evil). After all, as Chua (2015: 350) notes, ‘notionally, death is an occasion that draws together the entire community and (in an unwittingly Durkheimian turn) makes it visible and real to its attendees.’

In fact, I believe it would not be an overstatement to say that in Pajok the conceptually comparable and mutually reinforcing realms of sin and morality are the two primary arenas through which Christian lives and lifeworlds are shaped and defined. As I demonstrate when I discuss witchcraft in Chapter 6 and the magical power of words in Chapter 7, Christian conceptualisations of cause and effect reflect and sit alongside indigenous ones. Sinful actions also have consequences not only in this world but in that to come, the world of either everlasting life or eternal damnation. Sinful actions therefore have the potential to capture the relationally-embedded Christian and hold them within the world, if not directly through the actions of themselves or others, then through the ways another's actions can 'make you think the bad thoughts about them'. And as evangelicals never tired of reminding me, 'the thought already, that is a sin'.

For evangelicals in Pajok, sin is widely understood as those actions which breach both the moral proscriptions of the Bible and Acholi sociocultural norms and values. As well as actions, however, it also includes thoughts and desires which are not acted upon. In this way, it is easier to define evangelical understandings of sin by that which it is not, rather than that which it is: sin is therefore everything that is not definitively Biblically and socioculturally allowable. 'Everybody sins', I was told, 'God knows this. But he is a just and loving God'. Therefore, as long as people are faithful and repent their sins they will be forgiven. However, forgiveness is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died so that 'the wages for our sins' (God's just eternal punishment) could be forgiven. Because, as they say in Pajok, 'a sin demands punishment'. This makes forgiveness an important discursive trope among evangelicals in Pajok, perhaps even a necessary one. I wondered constantly, however, to what extent local ideas about the Christian ideal of forgiveness merely reproduce pre-Christian Acholi notions about the inevitability of cosmological sanction. There is a significant section of the anthropology of Christianity literature about the importance of forgiveness (Coleman 2006; Eriksen 2009; Mayblin 2010), and the significance of similar cultural understandings have been noted among some scholars of the Acholi (Baines 2005, 2010; Blattman & Annan 2009). This is most notable in Porter's (2012, 2013, 2016) work around rape in northern Uganda, in which she highlights how the tensions between notions of justice, forgiveness and social harmony are negotiated in contemporary Acholi Uganda.

However, my experience in Pajok instead highlights that, rather than the present-oriented practices of ritualised compensation and animal sacrifice upon which pre-Christian sociocultural systems still pivot to some extent, local evangelicals seem to prioritise ideals about eternal and salvational or

millennial justice in the future rather than forgiveness in the present.<sup>188</sup> Thus, for example, among evangelicals in Pajok, forgiveness is first and foremost a trait of the divine rather than the worldly. Likewise, human beings are inherently sinful – ‘born into sin’, as the saying goes – and it is widely acknowledged that all human beings will by default be judged and condemned by God unless they confess and repent these sins. Most evangelicals therefore believe that ‘real’ forgiveness can only be awarded on the condition of confession and repentance to God. Forgiveness on earth does not count, except as a mark of distinction for a ‘True Christian’ and an element of maintaining one’s access to eternal salvation. Indeed, from what I was told by evangelicals in Pajok, forgiveness is more an act to ensure an evangelical’s own personal salvation through adherence to Biblical prescription than it is a desire to maintain social harmony.

I even suggest that, whether the person involved in such a situation subscribes to one or both Christian or customary Acholi notions of cause and effect, forgiveness as understood in the contemporary West might not really be that important at all. Instead, although throughout Pajok there is a publicly stated need to forgive, it seems as if fundamental logics of moral power crystallise around ideas of Divine Retribution and God’s Justice, on the one hand, or the vengeance of ancestors and *jogi*, on the other. Rather than grand idealised notions, the reality is of a partially circumscribed forgiveness such as required by the lived pragmatism of everyday interpersonal life in a smallish and relatively tight-knit community largely dependent upon ongoing face-to-face interaction. This is, I think, the ‘social harmony’ which Porter (2013) speaks about: simply getting on with others in the knowledge that, either through Christian or customary meta-persons, cosmological justice or sanction will invariably follow. For Porter (2013: 15), social harmony ‘refers to a highly valued ideal in Acholi [that]... denotes a state of normal relations among the living and the dead, linked to an idea of cosmological equilibrium and a social balance of power and moral order’. This might be described as a type of indigenous functionalism whereby responses to any breach of this social and moral order is primarily aimed at ‘re-establishing normal social relations between the clans of the wrongdoer and the wronged, and the living and the dead around them, and thus restoring social harmony’ (Porter 2013: 100). In other words, this is forgiveness which only goes as far as the requirements of social harmony.

Sinning is positioned as both a crime against the community and, especially, a crime against God. As Read (1955: 271) argued about the connections between morality, sin and personhood for Christian converts among the Gahuku-Gama of New Guinea ‘the Christian believes that man’s first duty in all things is toward the Divine Creator. . . . It is from this that [the] Christian derives his strong sense of

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<sup>188</sup> Although, to be fair to Porter, she does note that (especially Christian) ideas of forgiveness largely take precedence ‘in situations where this is thought to lead to social harmony’ and that it ‘is usually coupled with a low expectation of justice in this life and a strong belief that, in the end, God will judge’ (Porter 2013: 155).

sin, of actions which are contrary to his true nature and therefore an offence to the Divine Creator'. Sin thus indicates not only the breaking of bonds of communal sociality but also a break with God and, concomitantly, a person's eternal condemnation of the soul: the 'second death' Pajok evangelicals so often speak about. Forgiveness becomes unnecessary in such cases, because the persons engaging in these practices are actively choosing the Devil over God, the world over salvation, and death over life. Further, one does not need to seek retribution against or compensation from a sinner or criminal, because retribution is divine and compensation rewarded as eternal salvation. These are 'the real rewards', both of which are known to be better than the transient temporality of earthly justice. The real effects of seeking justice or providing forgiveness in the present world are understood as minimal except for how they impact an evangelical's access to the next one.

One event which at the time struck me as highlighting the differential interconnections between forgiveness, justice and sin was the loss of a large, female pig from God's Tender Mercy (GTM) compound sometime in July 2014 (Figs. 29, 30 and 31).<sup>189</sup> Expensive animals but with a relatively high profit margin, especially from the trade of live young, David had purchased the pig as part of a plan to increase agricultural profits. One day, however, the sow went missing. It emerged she had been killed and eaten by a group of families from the neighbouring Kapa lineage with whom David's Bobi lineage had been having ongoing land trouble. David was not surprised, he said. As there were very few pigs in the area, he was sure the Kapa knew it belonged to him and likely targeted it as a means of hurting him. He thought that this was probably because, being connected to *muni*,<sup>190</sup> they think he is rich. He said that although entitled to take them to court, he would not demand compensation: 'you just have to leave that thing', he said, 'and put your faith in God. In the end they will answer in front of God, and God knows all. So they will have a big problem. I put my faith in Jesus. He will reward His faithful'.<sup>191</sup>

Among evangelicals in Pajok, such a phrasing has a double-meaning: Christ rewards His faithful with salvation and eternal life and, likewise, with the promise of Divine justice for all sinners. David was therefore explicit in his faith-based knowledge that he would get justice, just as those responsible would eventually get their due punishment. Significantly, David never independently mentioned

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<sup>189</sup> 'God's Tender Mercy' was the official name given to the compound at which Marie and I lived during our time in Pajok. It consists of an interlinked orphanage, nursery school, and church compounds with attached farm on the Bobi lineage land deep in Lawaci *Boma*. GTM is organised and operated by David in Pajok and funded by Jeff and others in America (Jeff is introduced below).

<sup>190</sup> Not myself and Marie so much as Jeff, the major source of funding for the GTM operation, although obviously we were not blameless in such an assessment.

<sup>191</sup> This echoes the attitudes of several of Porter's (2013) informants: firstly, the widely held belief that courts cannot be trusted as they often find in favour of those who can afford to pay the largest bribe and, secondly, that it is better to find 'solace through prayer and by handing the responsibility of justice over to God' (Porter 2013: 119). See also Leonardi *et al.* (2010).

anything about forgiving or forgetting what had happened. Even when pushed, he replied 'yes, I will find it in my heart to forgive. That is what God demands. So it is up to God now'. What seemed important for David was that this justice would be meted out in the eternal realm rather than during the earthly lives of those involved, meaning that such justice would be eternal rather than the fleeting reward and punishment of the world. Forgiveness was seen as another Divine prescription, a demand from God needing to be met so as to ensure one's own salvation. Moreover, experience had taught him to trust neither the impartiality nor the inevitability of worldly justice: he had already lost one seemingly open-and-shut court case over an issue of assault during our time in Pajok (O'Byrne 2015e) and allegations about the corruption of courts and the police is widespread in Pajok as well as South Sudan more generally (Leonardi 2015; Leonardi, Moro, Santschi & Isse 2010). Why engage in the affairs of the world when what passes as justice can very easily be corrupted or otherwise perverted by human temptations and desires? Better to trust in God, certain in the knowledge that although the world is sinful and cursed, God's justice is perfect and absolute.

Such a rationality problematizes Porter's (2012, 2013) notion of social harmony as a preeminent cultural and moral logic among the Acholi, making me think, rather, that social harmony is likely one dominant manifestation of those existential orientations I have termed 'lived pragmatism'. In other words, social harmony becomes a pragmatic and utilitarian means of engaging with inevitable social conflict and ensuring the largest number of people can live as conflict free as possible, whereby the rights of individuals are subsumed under or within the needs of the collective. Considering such a rethinking of Porter, the moral and pragmatic qualities demonstrated by David's rationale in the above example become obvious, I think: unable or uncertain of getting justice in the present, he sustains an orientation – based in absolute ontological certainty – toward maintaining the temporary social harmony of the earthly present on the condition that justice will be meted out with the eventual and Biblically-prophesised Second Coming of Christ. As Green (1983: 2) argues, 'moral sacrifice fully makes sense only when individual good and social good coincide. But since this is not apparently true in the domain of ordinary human experience... only the metaphysically (or religiously) grounded promise of perfect retribution makes a policy of commitment to morality reasonable'. Hence, for evangelicals, social harmony might be a primary logic grounding the lived pragmatism of their temporary earth-bound Acholi sociality, but justice is an element of eternal judgement, the damnation of sinners, and the salvation of the faithful. Either way, idealised total forgiveness is somewhat irrelevant.

## Teaching to be Christian, learning to be a person: The centrality of exchange with God

In this final section, I describe one of the many religious events which took place in Pajok during fieldwork to provide explicit examples of the ways in which Pajok evangelicals use gift and other exchange metaphors as a basis for their personal relationship with God. In doing this, I demonstrate that although evangelical personhood may be largely conceptualised individually – that is, through a singular person’s dialogical relationship with the Divine – it is nonetheless actualised relationally, namely, through the discursive and practical exchange of parts of the Christian self with that of one or more elements of the tripartite Godhead or other Christian persons or meta-persons. In demonstrating this, I will show that: evangelical sermons and preachers discursively highlight the importance of establishing ongoing exchanges with God; that these exchanges are primarily understood and mobilised through gift-based forms of relationality; and that such gift-based relationality is actualised so as to explicitly create particular forms of evangelical sociality which, in turn, encourage an explicitly Christian form of relational personhood. I will conclude by using data from the same conference to establish how evangelicals from across the globe can share similar conceptualisations about a form of Divinely-shared intimate personhood, demonstrating they explicitly conceive of themselves as being of the same body and person as Christ; that is, that they consider that in being Christian they are sharing in the Divine and, likewise, it is through sharing in the Divine they are becoming Christian (Klaits 2011).

The conference I focus on was an evangelical Bible workshop which took place in October 2014, held at the recently-completed permanent church building attached to the God’s Tender Mercy (GTM) compound where Marie and I lived during our time in South Sudan (Figs. 29, 30 and 31). This conference had been organised by Jeff, the American preacher who helps fund and run GTM and, over three days, aimed to explicate the Book of Colossians, a book Jeff feels is fundamental to the Biblical message. I could have chosen to make my argument with any of the major evangelical activities which took place during fieldwork but I selected the GTM event because it was not tied to any particular denomination. Indeed, although still definitively evangelical, it presented itself as especially inter-denominational, as being about the teaching and learning of Biblical truths. I suggest that the discourses mobilised present a more generalizable understanding of evangelical ideas about personhood, relationality, and the importance of exchange with the Divine than the analysis of any specific denomination could.

This was the fifth consecutive year Jeff had conducted a Bible workshop at GTM, with that of the previous year (2013) taking place several weeks after our arrival in the country. During the 2013 workshop, which had been led by several Acholi preachers from northern Uganda and an American

missionary based in Kitgum, the Book of Ephesians had been methodically explicated over the course of four days. That year's workshop had given us an excellent introduction to the religious life of the Pajok community. Moreover, by the end of the week, not only had we met many community and church leaders, but I had found a research assistant: it was at this conference I had first met Obwoya, who sat beside me throughout the entire workshop, chatting and helping with translation.

In 2014, to celebrate the opening of the new church building, David and Jeff were joined by two other American missionaries as well as group of four Ugandan preachers (Fig. 32). One of these Americans was Teresa, the woman whom David referred to with the English-language fictive kinship term of 'aunty' (see Chapter 3), a quiet and friendly person who at that time was living and preaching in Kitgum and whom Marie and I had already met on several occasions. The other was Russell, a tall, generous man who had flown to South Sudan especially to preach at the workshop. We had not met Russell before the workshop but, because of his outgoing and generous manner, I instantly took a liking to him.

After leisurely taking breakfast and coffee with our guests on the first morning of the workshop, I walked the short distance to the church building and arrived to find one of the pastors already in the middle of prayer. I was surprised: the proceedings had started nearly on time, a rare occurrence for any church service or major event in Pajok. I was struck immediately by the content of the prayer: rather than the common moral admonitions, behavioural proscriptions, or requests for assistance, the pastor spoke at length about the importance of giving to God. He was saying a true Christian needs to give to God with all their heart and doing this is a way to thank Him for everything He has done; for the gift of life, and especially the gift of eternal life. He said that giving to God with all your heart is the most important thing a Christian can do, and that the people who do not give to God or the church are not True Christians. This means that God will take retribution on them, that God will see they are not giving themselves to Him and give them eternal death instead of eternal life.

I understand this discourse as a form of mediation between the congregation and the divine, an enjoinder on how to maintain access to salvation. That is, as a moral statement on the importance of relationality. Indeed, after he had finished the opening prayer, the same pastor went on to lead those gathered in another shared prayer, during which he not only thanked the congregation for giving their time to learn about God and his Word, but also thanked God for the gift of life as well as being part of the lives of congregation members. As Green (2002: 191) notes about Pogoro Catholics, 'the concept of mediation articulated... is not about specific persons or objects standing between people and divinities, but a process through which the Christian person is able to incorporate into themselves Christian substances and objects, and in so doing to embody a particular relationship'.

He then went on to ask for God multiple blessings. These were requested as gifts for church members and their families and were spoken about as recompense for the gifts those gathered had given to God. That is, these prayers were phrased almost as if seeking reimbursement from the Divine for what the congregation had given Him that day, especially those things which were primarily part of their essential and allegedly inalienable selves: time, energy, emotion. As these requests followed the gifts of prayer and thanks to God immediately preceding them – gifts given by the congregation to God – I think it possible to understand such prayer requests as further supplications for Divine gifts and, moreover, as requests for gifts which are based primarily in the relational mobilisation of ideologies surrounding social reciprocation. Such elicitation echoes those of members of the El Shaddai Catholic prosperity movement in the Philippines, who 'lay claims to the power of God by indebting God to them' via reciprocal exchange relations (Wiegele 2005: 9). According to such logics, it might be argued that, because of what the congregation had just given, God was now being compelled to render further gifts. That is, that God was being immediately reminded about the reciprocal obligations involved. The moral obligations imposed upon God by these compulsions are even greater when it is understood that the offerings the pastor was prioritising in his prayer were precisely those in some way containing inalienable aspects of the Christian person: their time, energy, emotion and so on. Moreover, as those gathered were still in the process of giving these inalienable parts, and as they would continue to do so over the following three days, the debt incurred would only continue to grow.

Interestingly, the opening prayer concluded with the following request:

We are asking you God even to bless those who did not give today but who still believe. Because you know they want to give but have nothing. You can see inside them, you live inside their hearts. You know they love you, trust you, believe in you. You know they are one body with you. Although they did not bring you gifts today, they give to you their hearts just like you ask.

From this this prayer it is possible to demonstrate the occurrence of the following processual interactions. Firstly, that God lives inside the body of the believer and, because of this, knows what they are thinking and feeling. Therefore, He knows if someone is a True Christian or not and thus understands that even if someone is a True Christian, there may be times during which they are unable to provide some of the gifts God requires from a believer. However, because He lives inside the True Christian, He also knows that they give themselves to Him and that this is the most important and most pure of gifts. Moreover, in living inside the believer's heart, God actually shares their body – 'they are one body'. That is, just as in ethnographies of Melanesian socialities, they embody each other

and, therefore, share elements of personhood. Finally, it is obvious exchange is crucial in this process, especially the exchange of otherwise-inalienable parts of selves alongside more obvious material gifts.

### *A brief interlude on gender*

As with the previous year, in 2014 conference attendees are divided upon gender lines. After opening prayers, while men stay in the church building, the women go to the shade of one of the large mango trees nearby, to be given an interpretation 'more suitable to their understanding' (Fig. 33). Marie joins them, just as she did in 2013. Speaking in the privacy of our hut later, Marie tells me that, sitting intimately together on a collection of woven mats, the female-oriented version of Biblical truth focuses on emotive personal conversion narratives and other testimonies to the power of God in women's lives. Unlike the men's group, the women's sessions are highly fluid, almost unstructured, and focus less upon Biblical knowledge and understanding than personal experience. Indeed, not a single Bible is present other than those belonging to Teresa and the two Ugandan women leading the group.

On the other hand, the men's group I sit with proceed systematically through the Book of Colossians, following a 'read, explain, discuss' structure. We sit on moulded plastic chairs and face the front of the room, classroom-like, each with our Bibles and many taking notes. Questions are answered but personal experience is minimised, except in the provision of anecdotal evidence or when giving real-life examples for theological points. Demonstrative emotion is almost entirely absent. When I ask about this later, I am told that while women are regarded as emotional and submissive, it is a man's place to gain the intellectual and economic resources to secure the everyday needs of his lineage and family. Such dichotomies therefore reproduce both wider Christian norms as well as those locally dominant evaluations of gender-appropriate behaviours, competencies and specialisations presented by Baines (2005, 2010, 2016), Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin (2014) and Porter (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016).<sup>192</sup>

Acholi society is historically structured along patrilineal, patrilocal, and, indeed, patriarchal lines, with power and control over any one group of (mainly) patri-kin at either a household, lineage or clanship

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<sup>192</sup> It should be noted that, although far from submissive, women's lives were historically – and remain – very strongly controlled, their roles and positions ordered within an Acholi society which continues to be distinctly structured along hierarchical lines, whether along the dimensions of generation or gender. Moreover, although Christianity and colonial governance may have further entrenched these differential gender roles and hierarchies, none of the vast post-conflict literature on gender in Acholi has, to my knowledge, ever argued that gender was more fluid or permeable in pre-Christian or pre-colonial Acholi society (see the literature just cited for an excellent starting point on these issues).

level resting with the eldest and highest status male group members, generally through group-based decision making. Although locals contend this gendered gerontocracy is collapsing due to the continuing effects of conflict, it still dominates much of daily life on both sides of the border, especially in rural areas like Pajok. In such areas, the customary social and cultural practices which historically structured everyday social life largely continue to control the average person's daily rhythms and interactions. Although life is undergoing a long process of transformative interaction with modernising and globalising forces, women still find themselves in situations where they have little or no formal power, limited ability to conduct their own affairs, and often little control over their economic or even physical security. This is particularly true for women who are divorced or widowed (Baines 2005, 2010, 2016; Baines & Amony 2015; Porter 2012, 2013). As the Comaroffs note, however, this is not to say that 'in the context of everyday social life, as well as in political processes... females were [or are]... inert or impotent' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 270). Rather that, 'legally speaking, they lived [and continue to live] in the passive voice' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 271).

Men tend to dominate women in many daily interactions in contemporary Pajok, even women from outside their family or lineage who, culturally, they should have little control over. Indeed, such interactions are so normalised they are virtually taken for granted by many. Furthermore, such actions are generally validated through discourses legitimating gender inequality by one of three means: 1) by recourse to Acholi traditions seating gender-based inequality in shared cultural heritage; 2) through a gendered division of labour that naturalises male social dominance based on perceived biological difference; and/or 3) on Christian teachings that frame women as socially, physically, intellectually, and morally weaker. The last of these cites a Biblical basis for the ongoing propagation of current, and unequal, gender relations.

Thus, many now-familiar tropes of conservative Protestantism are apparent in Pajok also, especially in the realm of everyday gender relations that reference an explicitly Biblical orientation emphasising women as weak, inferior, and immoral: whose sin is not only responsible for the Fall of Humankind (Genesis 3), but whose sexual appetites or appeal are also the basis for the general degradation of society in the present (Porter 2013). It must be said that the processes whereby custom and Christianity merge to further entrench such social and structural inequalities are not limited to the Pajok community, nor even South Sudan, but seem common within post-conflict Acholi communities. Several researchers of Ugandan Acholi note similar perceptions in the Acholi sociocultural world (Atkinson 2010; Baines 2005, 2010; Finnström 2008; Porter 2012, 2013), with Finnström not only suggesting that, in Acholi, 'Manhood [is] associated with Christianity, even modernity' (2010: 191) but also observing his male informants routinely mentioned 'women are weak' (2010: 190).

When analysing the Biblical basis for gender interactions, it is not difficult to see how people of any sociocultural background could draw similar conclusions: the Holy Book is replete with references to the roles and responsibilities of men and women, husbands and wives.<sup>193</sup> It is telling that many of these demand the complete submission of women to dominant male kin, whether husband or father, and conceive of women as the property of those dominant men,<sup>194</sup> who's worth is deemed best judged by her productive and reproductive capacity and potential (1 Timothy 2: 15). Although other verses can be found giving more positively structured gender messages (Colossians 3: 19; Ephesians 5: 25-28), the overwhelming numerical, doctrinal, and ideological dominance of these seemingly more patriarchal passages allow a tight fit between the Christian and the customary versions of normative gender relations in contemporary Pajok.

A comparison between local evangelicals' main Biblically-based interpretations for gender inequality with the historically dominant ideas of customary Acholi gender relations shows a strong symmetry: firstly, Acholi cultural constructions of social control state that important decision-making processes at the familial, lineal and community levels are the domain of men, whose decisions should generally be obeyed (Baines 2005). However, although this is the rather normative way of discussing and explaining both contemporary and historical Acholi gender relations, how this plays out in practice is often very different: not only can a strong-willed married woman have considerable power in household decision making processes, especially after the birth of children, but well-respected elderly women (*megi*) often have significant roles within the lineages of both their marriage and their birth, especially in relation to issues of land, kinship and marriage, areas within which they are deemed to have important and sometimes even unique knowledge.

Secondly, historically determined ways of organising Acholi society mean that, as members of their father's or husband's lineage, women gain membership of that lineage through the relationships they have with male kin and the birth and then marriage of their children (Baines 2005; Girling 1960). Lastly, as Baines (2005: 22) notes, 'Acholi women [are] defined almost exclusively in relation to their reproductive role. The socialization of girls revolve[s] around their preparation for the role of wife and later, mother [and] the most important lessons passed on to young girls [is] "how to respect and care for a man"'. Just like in Biblical Israel, customary Acholi gender norms are such that women should

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<sup>193</sup> For example, see: Colossians 3: 19; 1 Corinthians 11: 5, 11, 34-35; Ephesians 5: 21-30; 1 Peter 3: 1-7; 1 Timothy 2: 11-15.

<sup>194</sup> See: 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35; Ephesians 5: 22-24; 1 Peter 3: 1-2, 5, 7; 1 Timothy 2: 11-14.

submit themselves to their male kin, for whom they are first and foremost valued as wives and mothers (Baines 2005; Porter 2012, 2013).<sup>195</sup>

## Conclusion: Christian metaphors for Divine relations

On the morning of the second day of the 2014 GTM workshop, it was time for the American missionary, Russell, to preach the Good News of Colossians 3 (Fig. 34). After going through the book verse by verse, he arrived at verse 15: 'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful'. After it was read, Russell enjoined the congregation to not give up on their life, to never finish their relationship with Christ or give in to the temptations of the world:

It is a Heavenly gift we have been given, my friends, because we have a Heavenly Father who cares for our spiritual needs. So do not give up because of the worldly things. Because we have a gift from Him, a blessing. You see, when Christ died, I died, and my life was placed in Christ so that now God looks at me and sees Jesus. So thank God that we have His sacrifice and His righteousness. Because now our life is bound up with Jesus, it is inside Jesus, it is surrounded by Jesus. We are one body. All believers are one body, and we are all one body with Christ. Anyone who believes in Jesus is a part of the church of God, the body of God. And this here – at this point he opens his arms expansively, pointing to the room in which we sat – it is not a church, it is only a building. God's church is not a building, it is the people. And we are all the church, together in Christ, one body in Christ.

It must be pointed out that, although Russell is an American, he seems to have the same relational ideas of personhood as those which Pajok evangelicals say they share with Christ. In Russell's case, as parts of his personhood – his life and sin – are detached and 'placed in Christ' so that is 'bound up with Jesus... inside Jesus... surrounded by Jesus'.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, although I have argued throughout that both evangelical and Acholi persons are similarly relational rather than partible or dividual in orientation and structure, this seems to me as quite suggestive about the possibility of an at least *idealised* partible or dividual evangelical personhood: the Christian detaches their *life* and places it *inside* another person

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<sup>195</sup> This is a rather idealised and male-oriented view of gender norms and relations. Obviously, how it plays out in practice often differs significantly. See Porter (2013, 2016) for more in-depth and nuanced accounts of this.

<sup>196</sup> Although the detachment of sin is not explicitly stated in the example given, it is implied: 'So thank God that we have His sacrifice and His righteousness' is an obvious reference to the fact Christ was 'sacrificed' for the redemption of sin and the salvation of believers. Moreover, the detachment of sin to give in exchange to God and Christ for this salvation is not only a common evangelical trope, but also came up in an earlier section of the same sermon. One example being: 'you must give up your sin to Jesus! That is the only way you can be saved'.

– Christ – where it becomes so indistinguishable from that person that *even God cannot see a difference* (and remember, God is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful). This is the total collapse of individual difference and the integration of relational similarity, a similarity so completely identical that the becoming-Christian literally becomes Christ, even in the eyes of God.

Moreover, this dividual form of personhood is shared not only with Christ but, as Russell states repeatedly, with other believers. All believers share in Christ's body and person and, through Christ, God's body and person. They also share in the body and person of each other. They have all given their life to Jesus and, so it is implied, in turn they have all been incorporated within the body of Christ to such an extent that they, too, all share in Jesus' body to the extent that God Himself cannot distinguish between the human sinner and the perfect redeeming Christ. Thus, according to this rationale, one outstanding defining feature of *all* True Christian personhood is *explicitly* a generalised relational and perhaps even dividual personhood shared with God, Christ and each other. This is an important finding, made even more significant by the fact that it is a missionary from America making this statement. The wider comparative implications of this should not be ignored: as American (and Americanised) evangelical Christianity has become so widespread, and as both American and Christian cultural milieus are said to significantly value and even prioritise explicitly in-dividual forms of personhood, the unambiguously relational (or perhaps even at least ideologically-dividual) emphases of Russell's sermon demands further comparative analyses of these (and similar) dimensions of evangelical Christianity internationally. For example, as Green (2002: 182) notes, a primary impetus of 'ordinary Christians' in Africa involves 'the establishment of social relationships between people and the divine beings of Christianity' more through 'the incorporation and embodiment of substances and words with Christian powers' than 'ideas of spiritual reciprocity in a political economy of salvation' (Green 2002: 194). Likewise, Chua (2015: 348) notes that 'central to all strains of Bidayuh Christianity in the area [Borneo] is the need to cultivate relationships with God, Jesus, and other tutelary beings, while avoiding the potentially damaging wiles of Satan'. Pajok demonstrates the importance of all these wider elements in the establishment of divine relations.

Later that day, after another fine and wholesome lunch, it was the turn of Pastor George from Kitgum to deliver the message of God (Fig. 32).<sup>197</sup> George's sermon was noticeably different to that of the previous speakers: emotional, personal and evocatively punctuated by the repetitive use of 'Hallelujah' – to which the gathering would inevitably respond 'Amen' – it was much more interactive and upbeat, as well as far more entertaining and engaging (Fig. 35). Despite significant performative differences,

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<sup>197</sup> Pastor George is generally known as 'Big George', due to the fact he is close friends and constant companion of another of the Ugandan missionaries who visited Pajok: 'Little George' (Fig 32).

however, Big George also connected his faith to the relationship he shared with God through the body and sacrifice of Christ, noting repeatedly that it is only because Jesus lives inside him that he is a True Christian.

After a long and expressive sermon during which he paced the floor, repeatedly punched his right fist into his left palm, and hopped from foot to foot, George came to a standstill. Quietly, and almost subdued after what had preceded it, he finished by saying:

God chose me just like He chose Peter and Andrew when they were fishing. And He placed the Word within me, and that Word is Jesus. And as I have Christ in me, I must be very careful! So I cannot do anything bad, cannot think or speak the bad things. Because that will hurt Jesus, will make him to be in pain. It is like if God is a gardener. Jesus is a big tree, like that one there – here he paused, pointing to a large mango tree outside the window – and we are the branches. We are the same body. But if we are dying, God will cut those branches to make the good ones bear more fruit, to help the tree grow. Get courage from that. Now we must testify. God Bless you all. Amen.

Much like the section from Russell's sermon which I gave above, Big George's concluding emphasis is decidedly about his own, and by implication the generalised believer's, connection to and relationship with Christ. As with Russell, the association between Big George and Christ is one of shared personhood, the sharing of bodies and selves. The Word that is Jesus is within him, having been placed there by God (a clear reference to John 1: 1 and 14).<sup>198</sup> Thus Christ (who is God personified, John 1: 14) lives within and is part of Big George as He lives inside and is part of all believers. The extent to this shared body and self is demonstrated through the analogy of sin, pain and the pruning of trees: if a believer is to sin, then Christ will be pained because of it; the implied eternal pain that the believer will endure is felt by Christ as an actual physical manifestation, one so strong that Christ-as-God will need to cut parts of Himself away so as to allow it to heal. Furthermore, as the personification of God the Father, Christ simultaneously substantiates not only the believer's shared relationship with Himself but also with God. Unlike the example given by Russell, however, in Big George's illustration the sharing of personhood is initiated by God: God chose Big George (and all other believers) and, in doing this, placed the Word that is Christ within him. This is a relational personhood of God's own choosing, meaning that it is what God wants Himself, His Son Christ and His believers to be. It is how He has

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<sup>198</sup> 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1: 1); 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth' (John 1: 14).

chosen the human-Divine relationship to unfold. The relational person is thus a divine person, as well as Divinely inspired.

It is interesting to note that unlike the rather abstract phrasing of the Americans' sermons – much of which are largely hypothetical statements disconnected from the everyday experience of most conference goers – the Acholi translators and preachers continually related everything back to the realm of the experiential and figurative, using concrete metaphors. This was achieved by referencing specific regional or community dynamics, or speaking about real events in the lives of the people in the room. Mentioned throughout my fieldwork journals are references to being struck by how Western missionaries struggled to connect with local experiences and understandings. The abstract way they teach – setting out and defining what I think to locals might seem like unnecessary or minor conceptual points – is divorced from most Acholi Christians' everyday realities and overall life experiences. It is also entirely different from the ritual and conceptual components of customary Acholi cosmologies (such as was mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4), based as they are upon pragmatic notions of control and intimate relationships and interconnections between known and named entities. Thus, Western missionaries' continual insistence upon things like defining the meaning of the term 'infinite' and then going to great lengths to exactly describe how God's infinite cosmos works is, I think, of no real concern to the majority of Pajok's evangelical population. They are much more interested in specific, everyday practical solutions to worldly and cosmological problems: how to protect ones' family from witchcraft; how to stop oneself being disturbed by ancestors; how to live so as to avoid satanic temptations. Therefore, in Part Three of this thesis I focus on local manifestations of the similarities and differences between customary and evangelical negotiations of demons and witchcraft, precisely because these are the everyday cosmological problems of most concern to the majority of people in contemporary Pajok.

## PART 3: DEMONS, WITCHCRAFT AND MORAL COSMOLOGIES

## CHAPTER SIX: WITCHCRAFT, POISON AND MAGIC AMONG ACHOLI

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### Introduction: Witchcraft as relational action

Following the devastation of nearly five decades of civil war, life in post-independence South Sudan is difficult at best, with the outbreak of new violence in 2013 only increasing people's sense of danger and uncertainty. Not all dangers are visible, however – indeed, many of the worst are not – and Acholi South Sudanese fear the supernatural powers owned or embodied by some of those living among them. Acholi understandings of such magical phenomena provide an important moral dimension to a cosmological system oriented toward maintaining cooperative sociality between all entities, physical and metaphysical, living and dead (Baines 2010; Finnström 2005a, 2008; Porter 2012, 2013). Such cooperation is important precisely because 'bad feelings' such as anger, envy or jealousy often lead to those types of interpersonal magic that falls under the anthropological categories of witchcraft, sorcery and magic: the evil eye, poisonings, curses and similar (Bonhomme 2012; Grove 1919; MacCarthy 2014; p'Bitek 1971; Street 2010; Stroeken 2012; West 2008). As will become clear, for simplicity as well as theoretical reasons, I follow the Acholi English vernacular and simply call all these phenomena 'witchcraft'.

In this chapter I delineate Acholi ideas around witchcraft. In doing so, I demonstrate the inherent connections between the world of medicine or healing and that of jealousy, misfortune and death, thus elucidating essential Acholi cosmological linkages between medicine, magic and misfortune. As with similar logics across Africa (Allen & Storm 2012; Mogensen 2002; Stroeken 2012, 2014) and Melanesia (Rio 2010, 2014; Rio & Eriksen 2014b; Street 2010), I suggest effect and intention are especially important considerations in linking Acholi conceptualisations of two divergent yet connected lines of flight: firstly, witchcraft and morality; and secondly, illness and well-being. Likewise, these cultural assemblages integrally converge in the assessment, definition, and practice of social personhood.

This chapter expands my argument about the significance of relational conceptualisations of Acholi personhood. It also foregrounds the importance of convergences between relational understandings of personhood and Acholi notions of agency, intentionality, and morality as highlighted throughout Part Three of this thesis. Therefore, in this chapter I not only discuss how Acholi ideas of personhood relate to indigenous concepts about witchcraft but link Acholi notion of agency and intentionality to witchcraft and its interconnected social and cosmological effects. In particular, analysis of the varied expressions of Acholi witchcraft demonstrates the significance of relational indeterminacy. Thus, in this chapter not only do I delineate the world of Acholi witchcraft but I simultaneously illustrate how

Acholi notions of accountability, responsibility and morality necessarily involve not only the individual but also the social and thereby relational body. In doing so, I show that indigenous Acholi understandings and experiences of witchcraft are directly tied to ideas about the manifestation and negotiation of morality, power and relationality.

Evans-Pritchard (1972, chapter two) famously stated that, among the Zande, witchcraft exists to explain otherwise unexplainable events. Witchcraft and sorcery help inform Zande ideas about cause and effect: interpreting misfortune through the idiom of witchcraft, Zande believe illness and misfortune are the effects of the (usually) intentional actions of ill-disposed sorcerers or witches. While not necessarily wrong – as will be seen, my argument proceeds along somewhat similar lines: that Acholi concepts of witchcraft are tied to ideas of cause, effect, agency and intentionality – to some degree Evans-Pritchard’s argument is both a tautology and a truism. Superficially insightful, the idea of the ‘native’ as amateur scientist tells us nothing not true everywhere: that people tend to attribute culturally appropriate meanings to difficult or unknown events, especially when facing personal, social, or existential crisis.<sup>199</sup>

Thus, following Englund (2007) and Myhre (2014), I prefer to see witchcraft and sorcery not as ‘phenomena to be interpreted by means of analytical concepts and contextualised in terms of *specific* relationships, but instead hav[ing] a conceptual character *that concerns relationality as such...* [owing] to the fact that *they are concepts for conceiving of social relationality*’ (Myhre 2014: 6, emphasis added). Indeed, in a phrase which equally exemplifies Pajok, Rio and Eriksen have argued that witchcraft in Vanuatu is ‘an underlying structural condition of relations between men and women and *an ever-present potential of social relations themselves*’ (Rio & Eriksen 2014b: 1, emphasis added). Similar to Street’s (2010: 266) informants in Papua New Guinea, where a person’s health serves as ‘an index of the state of their social relationships’, so too in Pajok, where it is thought ‘sickness might be caused by sorcery or poison enacted by someone out of jealousy or anger’ (Street 2010: 266). I suggest, therefore, witchcraft in Pajok is intrinsically relational in orientation. That is, it is fundamentally about the qualities and meanings given to relations between persons. In this way, Acholi witchcraft is about the ongoing negotiation of everyday social interactions rather than the category or structural positions of those involved.

Consequently, I suggest a proposition which reverses the order of Evans-Pritchard’s analysis: instead of asking what witchcraft can say about unexplainable events, I ask what such events tell us about witchcraft. Or, to put it another way, I suggest that as well as investigating how witchcraft illustrates indigenous understandings of cause and effect, there is also a need to explore how emic

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<sup>199</sup> See, for example, Finnström (2008), Geertz (1973), Jackson (1996, 1998, 2002), Merleau-Ponty (1962).

understandings of cause, effect, agency and intentionality provide greater insights into local manifestations of witchcraft. After all, as Street (2010: 265) found among evangelicals in Papua New Guinea, use of a magical idiom is never solely for the purposes of explanation: in any given witchcraft situation there are multiple things that are or could be relevant or possible. Explanation is only one.

### Witchcraft? Sorcery? Magic?

Although Malinowski (2015) prioritised the linguistic element of magic and Evans-Pritchard (1972) highlighted the importance of the material, I investigate the impact of each of these elements within contemporary Acholi, demonstrating how the linguistic and the material – the said and the done – are synthesised in the contemporary magical practices of Acholi South Sudan. Before I begin, a point of definitional clarity. It is important to note there are fundamental contradictions between Acholi witchcraft and Evans-Pritchard's (1972: 1-3) famous distinction between the sorcerer and the witch.<sup>200</sup> To paraphrase Evans-Pritchard, a witch is somebody whose magical powers are inherent within their person while a sorcerer uses external, physical means or tools to cause harm. Although this distinction is a useful working definition and heuristic device, it suffers the typological fallacies Fernandez (1978: 201) termed the 'categorical imperative' of modernist scholarship: it is easily falsified by the always-murky quagmire of ethnographic realities.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, as Stroeken (2012) has argued, it is perhaps better to recognise the witch not as an actor but rather as a solidification or accretion of the webs of everyday sociality within which persons are bound; as manifestations of relational becomings frozen by immediate experience.

Thus, although the Acholi definitely have some entities or powers who might simply be called sorcerer or witch, there are a variety of events, persons, powers and things that belie such easy separation. These two categories are perhaps most importantly combined in the ambivalent figure of the *ajwaka* (pl. *ajwaki*). Although the term *ajwaka* is probably best defined as diviner or spirit-medium, the English term 'witchdoctor' is now widely incorporated into the local vernacular across Acholi, with all the pejorative connotations contained therein. As Porter (2012: 89) observes, *ajwaka* is 'often translated

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<sup>200</sup> This disagrees with the assertion of p'Bitek (1971: 121). However, not only does p'Bitek seem to make a distinction between the magic of *ajwaki* and those of other powerful persons who might be considered witches or sorcerers, he also clearly states that *latal* use material substances, spells and animal carcasses (p.124). I am not the first to note discrepancies between Evans-Pritchard's Zande typology and ethnographic data on magic elsewhere in Africa. For example, see Green (1983), Marwick (1965), Turner (1964) and Stroeken (2012).

<sup>201</sup> For similar criticisms of simple classificatory schema, see Engelke (2007), Meyer (2004), and Ranger (1986).

with the lump term witchdoctor that is inappropriately applied to all people who deal in some way with the supernatural or traditional herbal remedies'.<sup>202</sup>

Customarily, an *ajwaka* is a mediator between the living and the dead, the human and the meta-human, and someone with a particular affinity to the various meta-persons of Acholi cosmology.<sup>203</sup> As an *ajwaka* is most likely possessed by one or more *jogi*, they are the medium through which those *jogi* interact with the Acholi social world. They therefore have the ability to connect human and metahuman persons and events and are 'believed to have a strong communication link to the spirit worlds, and ability to heal [the] afflicted' (Baines 2005: 13). The role of an *ajwaka* includes the divination of spiritual agency and misfortune, the appropriation and application of traditional medicines, and both providing and combatting curses. For these acts, they use the inherent powers of the spirits possessing them as well as a variety of tools, plants and animal materials. *Ajwaki* are usually but not always women; often barren; perhaps suffering from conditions which Western biomedical science would deem mental illness; and very commonly kin of other *ajwaki* (Baines 2005; Grove 1919; Stroeken 2012). Girling (1960: 160-161; see also Allen & Storm [2012]; Baines [2010]) has suggested the reason *ajwaki* 'are often daughters of women who were themselves *ajwaka*... [is] Acholi regard any manifestation of *jok* as being particularly likely to be inherited through females'.

Thus, according to Evans-Pritchard's definition, an *ajwaka* was not only a spirit-medium but simultaneously both and neither witch or sorcerer as well as a practitioner of helpful and dangerous magic. Indeed, an interesting question is not whether *ajwaki* are witches or sorcerers, helpful or dangerous, good or evil – as they are all these to different people in different circumstances – but rather in what specific circumstances they are considered one thing or the other, who by, and why. In other words, how do the relations being mobilised and the intentions involved impact the meanings such persons are given? How, to put it bluntly, are Acholi understandings of witchcraft determined by the relations and intentions involved?

Significantly, *ajwaki* are considered cosmologically and socially important figures whose person embodies the potential to create, transform and reconfigure relationality itself, bringing others into different kinds of relations with varying types of meta-persons. In other words, an *ajwaka* is primarily a mediator: someone who, by virtue of the moral authority they gain in mediating between domains of existence, not only mediates relations between the living and the dead but also between living

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<sup>202</sup> I strongly agree with Porter's position. Nonetheless, as the term 'witchdoctor' is now the usual translation of *ajwaka* (in local and academic worlds), I suggest there is wider analytical significance in the interrogation of how such changes have affected contemporary lived realities in Acholi. Further research should investigate this.

<sup>203</sup> Ethical concerns around preserving the anonymity of the *ajwaki* I met mean I do not give photographs or any other personal details. Although not likely endangered by such information, ensuring this seems a small step.

humans. In the words of Ronald Green (1983: 13), their ‘voice and actions connect the community with the moral and spiritual entities who help shape human destiny [and] in this sense... is the physical embodiment of... retributive order’. It is suggestive, I think, that the near-definitive diabolisation of *ajwaki* by evangelical Christianity goes hand-in-hand with the near-total assimilation of an *ajwaka*’s major roles and functions by Christian concepts and persons: just as *ajwaki* mediate between living and dead, human and meta-human in customary Acholi systems, so in local evangelical cosmologies these vital functions are replaced by Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Thus, I suggest the diabolisation of *ajwaki* – and likely persons with similar customary mediatory functions among other peoples – may even be required for these Christian meta-persons to take up their cosmo-ontologically crucial mediating roles in the teleological processes of universal salvation and damnation (Hann 2014).

### Witchcraft and magic among the Acholi of Pajok

*Religious beliefs are sacred ideas. Rites are actions accorded sacredness. What... is valuable in this formulation is the discriminating effect that the notion of sacredness entails. It is helpful to ask of any society or culture whether certain ideas — categories or names of beings, particular qualities or values—are ‘set apart’, to be distinguished from others... But the question has to be open-ended, empirically answerable. Religions, for all their interpenetration with the societies in which they exist, focus upon different qualities, conditions or objects. The ‘sacred’ is not everywhere the same (Ruel 1998: 113).*

So states Malcolm Ruel in his neo-Durkheimian critique of ‘symbolizing’ analyses of ritual and religion. The general position offered by Ruel provides inspiration for what follows, in which I set out to deliver empirically grounded answers about those everyday magical powers which, in the Acholi sociocultural world, are ‘set apart’. In doing so, I want to note that despite Durkheim’s (1995: 409-411) delineation of two kinds of sacred religious force (the ‘auspicious’ or good and moral versus the ‘inauspicious’ or evil and impure), in Pajok these are importantly linked. After all, as Durkheim (1995: 411) himself notes, these are ‘not two separate classes, but two varieties of the same class, which includes all sacred things’: in Pajok, the difference is often simply a matter of relationality.<sup>204</sup>

Acholi have multiple terms to describe differing witchcraft practices and practitioners. As well as the *ajwaka* there are several other entities and states of being needing consideration, some of which could

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<sup>204</sup> Along similar lines to Cannell’s (2005) critiques about the underlying Christian-ness of anthropological ontologies, I suggest one reason Durkheim’s categories do not hold in Acholi may be that, despite his avowed atheism, traces of dualistic and Christian thinking continue to permeate his work.

be defined as either sorcerer or witch-like in nature, and all of which are potentially dangerous. I approach these manifestations of the Durkheimian sacred not as distinct things to be categorised, but as social logics, processes, and relations to be explained. After all, as Lévi-Strauss (1985: 139; see also Dumont 1992) argued, ‘instead of being led astray by a multiplicity of terms one should consider the... relationships uniting them’. I therefore ask what it is that unites these sometimes otherwise disparate meta-persons and powers. The answer is, I suggest, their connection to their interconnected definition and expression of morality, personhood and sociality.

#### Magical words and powerful thoughts: Curses and invocations

There are several indigenous Acholi witchcraft notions relying on magical powers inherent within the person. These are: *bal*, *kiir*, *kwang* and *lam*. Although these concepts are definitely distinct and associated with different actions or intentions, they share structural similarities or family resemblances, and are sometimes used interchangeably. The similarities are, first, that these powers are intrinsically internal capacities mobilising embodied forms of cosmological sanction. Second, they primarily occur between neighbours or kin, usually involve feelings of jealousy or anger and typically respond to prior or ongoing negations of important social norms, relations or values. Such breaches might include a refusal to: share food, alcohol or possessions; offer appropriate respect; or engage in activities which, in Porter’s (2012, 2013) terms, create or maintain ‘social harmony’. In other words, they are refusals of the transactional nature of Acholi personhood and social life, and therefore involve the denial of sociality and the transgression of relationality. Thus, as antisocial behaviour and the denial of reciprocity forms the basis of many of these curses-as-sanctions, ‘we should not be astounded that relations... reveal... the meaning of something as seemingly unrelated as witchcraft’ (Stroeken 2012: 11). As p’Bitek (1971: 146) noted, Acholi have always ‘included in the idea of the curse... the moral principles of right and wrong’.

*Lam* is a curse from a socially close person, generally originating from not sharing something desirable with them. If feelings of anger or jealousy develop, these may manifest as *lam*.<sup>205</sup> *Lam* is especially powerful when enacted on a man by a paternal uncle, or by a mother or wife to members of her household. In these cases, it is often enacted out of anger at the victim’s refusal of the vital kinship bonds which structure Acholi society. To overcome a manifestation of *lam* requires acknowledgement of both the person wronged and the wrong done to them, as well as, importantly, the shared

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<sup>205</sup> As with most Acholi words, a noun (*lam*, meaning the person with the power to curse, as well as the curse itself) becomes a verb (*lamo*, the act of cursing by a *lam* person) through the addition of the suffix ‘O’. Thus, for example, *en lamo lam*, ‘he curses a curse’.

relationship providing context for *lam*. Such recognition requires the offender to give a gift, after which they will be forgiven and released from the curse. Thus *lam* is a social levelling mechanism as well as a form of moral power which both demands and recognises sociality and relationality all at once. It is important to note, however, that *lam* does not necessarily involve intention: if a *lam*-empowered person has *lam*-like feelings, they cannot stop those feelings from becoming *lam*, intended or not.<sup>206</sup>

On those occasions when *lam* does begin with intention, 'it is the brother of *kwang*' (as they say in Acholi English). In this way, *kwang* and *lam* are conceptually linked: both are curses and both involve and invoke moral power. But *lam* is more personal than *kwang* and, importantly, is connected to significant social relations. *Kwang*, on the other hand, is more of a generalised curse and is usually directed toward unknown persons as a form of moral defence. One could say, perhaps, that *lam* is about relationality whereas *kwang* is about one's status, standing, or name; that is, *kwang* is primarily about social personhood while *lam* is about the quality of specific and important social relations. Thus, although both involve the use of moral power, *kwang* is a curse of a general nature while *lam* is the curse of another relationally close social person.

*Kwang* always involves making a statement with a specific intention; it is something said with the intent to effect change upon the world, such that what is stated will happen. *Kwang* therefore carries both moral and cosmological sanctions and consequences. It is an invocation which involves agency, intention and magic. It is 'swearing' or 'the saying of words with meaning', and is based in the knowledge that words have the power to impact the world (see Chapter 7). Thus, George, a local doctor told me

It is hard to know why if you say something now it will happen in the future, but it does. Science has no idea for this, but the Bible says words have power. When properly used, words are powerful, but if poorly used will cause many problems. So people may *kwang*... And if someone misuses those words, they are liable to hurt the community... It can cause much suffering.

Like *lam*, *kwang* words will bring death (*kelo otoo*) if they are not correctly celebrated. Some people say *kwang* is a curse made from anger, and such a description brings out both the important social-moral dimensions of *kwang* as well as its connection to the familial component of the concept of *lam*: it can be anger at oneself for something done (such as getting drunk), whereby one makes *kwang* to ensure such an act is not repeated, or it can be anger at others, such as when one makes *kwang* to

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<sup>206</sup> This is why I translate *lam* as 'curse' and not 'invoke', as Lienhardt (1961) did for the Dinka.

ensure cosmological sanctions apply in a case of social wrongdoing such as theft. Grove (1919: 176) calls this '*kwir*', a 'trial by ordeal, a taking of oaths'. Thus you can *kwang* or invoke (to use Evan-Pritchard's [1956] term) and use the moral and magical power of words to curse a wrong-doer.

*Kwang* is often said to be close to *kiir* (see below), as both are about breaching a moral code. In the case of *kwang*, this is a self-imposed moral code which may relate either to one's own behaviour: thus, something along the lines of 'I will not drink alcohol or I may die', in which someone speaks their own moral law (and perhaps doom) into being; or it may relate to the specifically contextual application of a wider sociocultural moral norm and sanction, such as if someone has been accused of a theft they did not do and say 'if I did this, let me die, but if I did not, then let the accuser die'. In the case of *kiir*, the moral code being breached is widely known and applied as a general social and cultural norm, the breaching of which is a serious offense. As it applies to a social norm, sanctions for the breach of *kiir* are automatic and require no invocation.

*Kiir* is a taboo, but it is not the taboo itself as much as the doing of the taboo, the enacting of morally or socially problematic acts. In other words, the problem with *kiir* is not the thing tabooed so much as the process of breaking that taboo. It is the process of breaching important social norms or breaking ancestral laws, of not following tradition, of endangering a social group. Crazzolaro (1938: 256) calls *kiir* an 'infringement of intimate social customs, mainly family, which require atonement'. *Kiir* is therefore always relational, having particularly strong orientations toward social, cultural and biological (re)production and continuity, and is best demonstrated through explication of its most powerful dimensions and effects: it is always *kiir* to commit incest; to insult one's mother; to cut trees in a *jok* area of forest; to refuse sex to one's husband; to have sex during menstruation or the post-partum period; to throw someone's bedding out of their hut; to threaten to kill or injure a spouse or family member (unless it is *lam*); to throw away or refuse food someone has cooked you.<sup>207</sup> These will invariably result in the impotence, infertility, sickness or death of a person or their family, especially their children.

While *kiir* is a wrongdoing by an individual but which has a relational quality affecting the lineage, family or community, *bal* is generally a wrongdoing of an individual nature – a crime, a sin, a 'spoiling' of something – something in which the cosmological sanctions and repercussions involved will likely

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<sup>207</sup> See the similar list of 'things already *kiir*' in Porter (2013: 101). Also see p'Bitek (1971: 147-149) in which the distinction made between *lam* and *kiir* is that p'Bitek calls *lam* 'the uncle's curse' and *kiir* 'the wife's curse'. Despite p'Bitek's distinction, people in Pajok were clear that someone other than an uncle could *lam* just as someone other than a wife could *kiir*. This could, perhaps, be an example of the enduring power of social organisational explanations to the structural-functionalist paradigm within which p'Bitek had been instructed.

only effect the person who commits the wrong.<sup>208</sup> Although one might consider both *kiir* and *bal* to be the cosmological consequences of 'behaviour out of place' (Douglas 2002), the distinction between them highlights how important distinctions in cultural logics pertaining to morality, power, sociality and so on are understood as being primarily the differences between social or relational and personalised or individual effects and sanctions. Thus, Abednego told me:

*Bal* is something wrong. A sin... Like to fight someone when angry. But *kiir* is not *bal*. *Kiir* is something you are doing that is not pleasing people. So they will say you have done *kiir*. Like, I cannot knock [hit] my daughter. That is *kiir*. Well, that one is *bal* also, because it is wrong. Because a father cannot slap a daughter, only the mother to slap. So they will say that one is the *kiir*, someone will get sick, it will bring bad things to her, or you, or the clan. Maybe her marriage. Because you have made *kiir*. So with *kiir*, you need to do the ritual to fix it, slaughter the animal. But for *bal*, the punishment is just given. Maybe a fine or a beating. That is the difference.

As Abednego's statement makes clear, variation between *kiir* and *bal* is seen through the punishment or recompense they each require as well as in the effects they have. As Porter (2013: 69) notes, 'it becomes clear that understanding an appropriate response to wrongdoing in Acholi must begin with an understanding of the act itself and how it is perceived in terms of its damage, not only (or even primarily) to the specific victim, but to society and social harmony more generally'. Both *bal* and *kiir* are forms of moral power insofar as they involve the mobilisation of moral sanctions and consequences. They also further highlight that while individual difficulties are problematic, problems which have effects beyond the individual to wider social and relational bonds are much more serious in nature. Thus *bal* is an individual annoyance while *kiir*, as something impinging upon families and clans, can quite literally be deadly serious. Commenting about the intrinsically dangerous relational dimensions of *kiir*, 'p'Bitek (1971: 147-148) notes that the intentional breaching of *kiir* brings an 'already highly strained relationship to a point of total rupture... [the person who is *kiir*] becoming a dangerous person to the family and the lineage group. And what was a matter within the household now assumed lineage or even clan importance'. Thus, while both *bal* and *kiir* involve moral sanctions and cosmological consequences, those of *kiir* are almost always relational in orientation and direction while those of *bal* might be said to cease with the individual person.

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<sup>208</sup> Although the concept of *bal* as crime or sin obviously have more than just the individual who commits them in mind – such as society or God – the *cosmological sanctions or consequences* are very clearly individualistic in orientation.

Other dimensions of magical power: Rogo, laa and yir

*Rogo* are magical acts, involving material manipulations but similar to a curse. p'Bitek (1971: 133) notes this can also be called '*kooro tipu*, "capturing the shadow"'.<sup>209</sup> *Rogo* are undertaken by a ritual specialist for two main reasons. The first is to enact vengeance upon someone, such as when an unknown person has stolen something and, because they are unknown, cannot be approached for recompense. In this case someone goes to an *ajwaka* to get them to *rogo* that person (thus linking *rogo* and *kwang*). The second reason is for doing of evil upon someone, the most common example I was given being 'when a wife goes to an *ajwaka* asking them for *rogo* to upset [her husband's] new marriage'. In all cases intention is involved, and *rogo* is always individualising in both source and direction: it moves from one person or situation to another without wider social or relational effects. Similar to *lam*, *rogo* involves Acholi ideas about the magic of words. Further, unlike *lam*'s inherent moral power, in *rogo* the *ajwaka*'s invocation has no necessary moral dimension: indeed, due to *rogo*'s individualising emphasis, no such dimension should be expected.

*Laa* is saliva. Cosmological power can reside in people's saliva, particularly those people with positions of social and cultural importance. Thus elders (*lodito*) and elderly women (*megi*) have powerful *laa*, as do rainmakers and many of the more nefarious cosmologically empowered meta-persons. The cosmological power of saliva is often used by older people as an everyday blessing or gesture of thanks.<sup>210</sup> This is done by spitting on their hands and rubbing them on the face or head of the person they wish to impart good fortune upon. *Laa* also has a significant place in more formal community rituals, and is a necessary component for removing both *kwang* and *kiir* as well as for initiating the power of some *jogi*. As *laa* contains some form of essential power, however, if enacted through anger or jealousy it can just as easily bring bad luck as good fortune. Significantly for a discussion of witchcraft, *laa* is not only inherent but can be mobilised for both good and evil depending upon the intention involved: antisocial use of *laa* is indicative of a *lajok* (discussed below) and is considered socially and relationally destructive.

According to many people, the power of *laa* is a form of *jok*, perhaps given by a *jok*. To others it is given by God, thus highlighting the likely effects of a more widespread demonization of tradition connected to the extensive assimilation of Christianity into sociocultural life. Originating outside the individual, *laa* as understood in this way is not necessarily part of person – as personal power, or power personified – except in how it works as the incorporation of a potentially dividual component

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<sup>209</sup> p'Bitek (1971: 133) states that the term *rog* comes 'from the Lunyoro word *okuroga*, meaning to harm somebody by the secret use of harmful substances or technique'.

<sup>210</sup> Slightly shocked the first time someone gave me *laa*, I soon became used to its widespread application, especially from *megi* (old women).

of another social entity's personhood (note that this is an analytic rather than ethnographic interpretation, and I would not want to stress the specifically dividual aspect of this analysis too strongly). In other words, *laa* is a power or a force given to someone to use by another cosmologically powerful thing. The *jok* thus involved in *laa* can be conceptualised as both a force and an entity depending upon the person discussing it.

*Yir* is bewitchment arising from jealousy or greed, often through the malevolent swallowing of saliva. p'Bitek (1971: 128) calls this 'the evil eye'. Explaining his understanding of *yir* to me one day, Obwoya said '*yir*-people do these things because they do not have what you have, so they will be angry. If they see you with something, you need to lose it. Because of jealousy, anger. Jealous people could be another word to translate it'. Again, *yir* is an individual person's inherent cosmological power but, running in families, derives from a genetic source. Nonetheless, although manifested individually, as a genetic or familial trait the power comes from a meta-personal source, originating either from a demon or a *jok*. *Yir* power is a therefore form of relational personhood derived from the incorporation of a powerful component of an external meta-person into oneself.

If someone puts *yir* on you, you need their *laa* to overcome it. However, the power of *yir* is the antithesis of the power of *laa*-as-blessing; it is a form of curse in which a person's power can attach to their saliva and that person swallows with evil intent. Intention is thus usually implied, but not always certain. *Yir* can work as a deadly and morally ambiguous levelling mechanism, generally compelling people to share with those less fortunate so as not to encourage the giving of *yir*. Like virtually all largely morally ambiguous cosmological powers in Acholi, it is individualising in both direction and origin and has little positive component. Several interlocutors told me that the people who have *yir* are close to a *latal* in classification.

#### Witches, wizards and performative power: *Latal* and *lajok*

As well as the *ajwaki* discussed above – who, as mentioned, are more spirit-mediums than witches – there are several categories of generally-human witch-like persons in Acholi. Again, as with the terms discussed above, the entities involved in Acholi witchcraft are also conceptually linked and, if the terms are not exactly interchangeable, they 'run close to each other' (as an English-speaking Acholi might say). In English-speaking Acholi vernacular, these entities are described as 'witches', 'wizards' or 'witchdoctors'. In Acholi, they are the *lajok/lojok*, *latal/lotal*, and *layat/loyat* (all singular and plural,

respectively). As I discuss the conceptually interconnected aspects of *yat* (medicine/poison) in a later section, I will not discuss the *layat* (healer/poisoner) here.<sup>211</sup>

Distinguishing between *latal* and *lajok* in early twentieth century Sudanese Acholi society, Grove (1919: 178) notes ‘the *Latal* is hardly human and... addicted to unnatural vice... [while] the *Lajok* is supposed... to have a snake in his stomach... He has no particular ceremony to go through, like the *Latal*, but can simply blight you with the evil eye [i.e. *yir*]’. Unlike *lajok*, *latal* are definitively evil. As mentioned above, the actions and desires of *latal* are similar to the bewitching of *yir*, and *latal* are magically powerful people who commit immoral acts simply from a desire to injure, harm and kill. Nonetheless, as with most anti-social or immoral acts, the root causes are again often posited as social and relational in nature: although inherently evil, the *latal* is compelled to act in this instance against this specific person or family due to feelings of jealousy.

Like the people who use the curses described above, *lajok* are also generally driven to commit antisocial acts through greed, jealousy, and frustrated desire. Further, like other generally feared or hated cosmologically powerful entities, they gain their power through the subversion of cosmological forces that some community members hold legitimately and which are supposed to be used for communal good. In the case of the *lajok*, this is achieved through undermining the blessing and healing power of *laa*, turning it into a curse (Finnström 2006b: 208-210, p’Bitek 1971: 146-153). On this issue, ‘Omworogwana’ (Fig. 36),<sup>212</sup> one of three surviving Pajok members of the 1955 Torit Mutiny,<sup>213</sup> related the following:

There are also those people, the *Lojok*. They are jealous people... When they see you have the thing they want, like the food, the animals, the children, they just swallow the spittle and you will die or get very sick... Because to put saliva on someone is a blessing but to swallow it is dangerous and can make you sick or dead. If you do that, you are *Lajok*.

As is often the case with *jok*-related things, the power of a *lajok* can be inherited by socio-biological means. In this way, although passed on genetically, at some time a *lajok*’s ancestor gained power from a *jok* and ‘cultivated it’. Thus, the *laa* through which *lajok* get their power is described as *jok*, as one might suspect. This not only suggests the *laa* of elders is also *jok* (as mentioned above) but

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<sup>211</sup> Although *layat* can mean both healer and poisoner – that is, anyone who has access to and knows how to use traditional plant-based remedies – in Pajok it is exceedingly rare to hear someone use this term in connection with a healer.

<sup>212</sup> The lineage elder of Kapa, Omworogwana is now generally known by his *mwoc* or praise name, ‘he respects/is greedy for cassava’, so called because as a youth he allegedly had an insatiable appetite for cassava.

<sup>213</sup> People in Pajok credit the Torit Mutiny as starting the First Sudanese War, thus locating the independence movement not among Dinka or Nuer further north, but rather among Equatorial peoples (including Acholi).

further problematizes understandings of *jok* as either God, a god, or any other specified entity (see Chapter 4). Significant also is how this power works: a *lajok* swallows their saliva (*mwony laa*) and the person they feel jealousy toward will be affected. In this individualised swallowing of a power which should otherwise be relationally given as a *laa* blessing for the purposes of social good, *lajok* (and *yir*, see above) could perhaps be described as those intentionally severing positive social relations.

Intention is not always important for the power of a *lajok* to act, with the logics around unintentionality demonstrated by one of the elders of Bura, Batista Ocuki (Fig. 37). Elderly but lithe and strong from years of agricultural work, Batista was ‘a man who knows things’,<sup>214</sup> widely respected for his abilities as a traditional healer and ritual specialist and someone I spoke with several times over fieldwork. During one informal conversation, Batista said

If they [*lajok*] are known to have done this [curse] to you, you must go and make them *miyo goyo laa* (give you blessing, literally ‘beat you with saliva’), to cure you. Because if they put the saliva it will cure you. And they will say *atimo pe akaka*, that they have not done this thing intentionally. They are not giving this thing to you, they are just having it for themselves, but the thought will be there, the thought will be bad, and so it just happens, automatic. Unknowing. Because that thing, that *jok*, that is within. Because the power is from that but the saliva is from you, and that *jok* is just there. And that *jok* is Satan, the Devil. Maybe it is a snake inside them, in their stomach. Because the snake is *jok*, a snake is Satan. But no one knows, because no one has seen.

Batista’s short description provides further evidence of many preceding points, including the central importance of jealousy, the fundamental connections between *jogi*, snakes and the demonic (and the linked demonstration of the contemporary hegemony of Christianity), as well as the fact that *laa* can be both a blessing and a curse and is likewise considered a form of *jok*. As highlighted in Chapter 3, there is also an essential pragmatism to the mobilisation of *laa* in this account, especially in the phrase – recurrent throughout fieldwork – that ‘no one knows, because no one has seen’. This sentence and its logical opposite could well summarise the general Acholi worldview, with such an orientation playing a vital role in Acholi engagements with the cosmological, religious, and spiritual of all types and dimensions. For example, you know about the presence of God, demons and witches from seeing the result of their actions in your life and the world in general.

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<sup>214</sup> As well as his knowledge of herbal remedies and potions, this might (but likely not) also mean an *ajwaka*.

## A stormy afternoon in Panto

As I mentioned when I introduced Kaliman Toyi in Chapter 4, Obwoya and I made a concerted effort to meet and speak with as many of Pajok's ritual experts as we could, often on multiple occasions.<sup>215</sup> Of all these ritual experts, Constantino Otim was very definitely one of my favourites (Fig. 38). Stooped and almost crippled with old age, although he walks with the use of two mismatched hospital crutches, once I encountered him high up on top of a ladder, shirtless, patching the rotting grass roof of a mud-hut. Constantino embodies the very essence of what it means to be an Acholi Christian in contemporary Pajok: a devout Christian as well as a healer (*layat*), rainmaker (*Rwot Kot*) and the *lagwoko* (guardian) of the Panto lineage *jok*, he is Panto representative on the *Kal Kwaro* (council of elders), one of the oldest men in Pajok, a former colonial soldier who fought in the 1955 Torit Mutiny, and an always friendly and helpful person who always stopped whatever he was doing any time I asked him to sit and talk with me. Constantino seems to know a little bit about everything. He is also very deaf, and as he does not speak English, on the occasion I narrate below his wife and son helped Obwoya explain and translate my questions. This made the interview process difficult and halting, at times mediated by up to three intermediaries. Because of this, it seems more 'real' to re-present what follows as I ultimately heard it – through the mediation of Obwoya – rather than as myself speaking directly to Constantino (such as I have presented most other material).

'Since *kare kwaro macon* ('the olden time of the ancestors'), his family have had the *tek kwaro me Acholi* (the ancestral traditions of the Acholi), the *yat* (medicines) for the pain and problems. And now he has those things. Medicines for: if you step on the poison; if someone gives you poison through drink or food; if feeling the back pain; if having the eye problems, especially if someone has been looking at you with the bad eyes (*wang rac*) and has given you cataracts;<sup>216</sup> for the impotence, the barrenness. He has all these.

The way of taking is he will give you to drink. That is some of them. Others, if in pain or step on poison, then he must cut you and rub it into the skin. The reason why you drink is those medicines must go straight to the brain. So fastest if drinking. The reason why cutting is you want the blood and the medicine to mix. Then black blood will come out and you will be fine. If you drink and you have the problem, then automatically you will vomit out the badness, the poison. And if you have pain from the poison, then you will feel better.

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<sup>215</sup> As each lineage needs at least one, and as there are twenty three lineages, there are many men with such positions in Pajok. Some of these are more important than others while others are much more difficult to find.

<sup>216</sup> This person is a witch-like individual of the *yir* type, who p'Bitek (1971: 128) translates as someone who has 'the psychic power of the evil eye'.

The medicines are plants, and they have had those plants since before his grandfather. They keep them in this compound. Mostly he uses the flowers, or the leaves. But sometimes during *oro* (the dry season) he uses the roots. And you just use it wet (i.e. fresh). Not to dry. Because it is somewhat like an onion, so keep it wet. Do not powder even. The *yat twol*, the one for the snakes, they used to have but not having now, because everyone is using foreign medicine (*yat munu*), and for that you must go to the hospital’.

At this point, Constantino’s son broke in, speaking English: ‘Many people trust the hospital for most medicines now, but we are talking about the old times, the time of the grandfathers’.

‘Yes, yes’, the old woman added, ‘and if other people in the community have been giving you *yat twol* (snake medicine), then maybe they are deceiving you, giving you different things. So be careful. They might have given you the poison. And you cannot take without finding out! We will give you some *yat twol* to take with you, to keep you safe. Because where you are staying, that is near the bush and there are many snakes!’

With that, she called over her son’s wife, who had been watching our small meeting from the doorway of a nearby *ot* while de-husking maize, muttered something about *yat twol* I did not fully comprehend, and sent her on her way.

She continued, ‘the medicine for the poison is just a general one. If you step on the poison, so as not to kill you. But it does not work for snakes. That one is different. And you do not need the special knowledge for *yat twol*, because in the old times, many people had. Because many snakes’.<sup>217</sup>

Constantino started to speak again, so Obwoya translated ‘the medicine in hospital can help with snakes but the one he was talking about is not in the hospital. Only the old people have. And there is no difference in the names between medicine and poison, by the way. It is a general name. So you need to explain what you are talking about. All of them are just *yat*. Those that help are *yat*, those that hurt are *yat* also. And the poisoners have their own medicines, they also plant the same plants, go to the bush for the same plants. So it seems as if the same plants can be used for helping and hurting. All are *yat*. If you are given the poison, just come to him and he will help. But the plants he has are his own. In his garden. Same tree. Some helping, some destroying, but otherwise the same. And there are now some poisons that cannot be treated, like those of the white man. If put in the food, will die for sure, just like an animal. And the medicine for the termites, that is dangerous also. Will just die straight away’.

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<sup>217</sup> *Yat twol* can refer to both an antidote and a deterrent, which are two different ‘medicines’. Thus the *yat twol* described here by Constantino is the antidote while that spoken of by his wife, Aber, is the deterrent.

Constantino's son entered the discussion again at this point, saying 'the people who use these bad medicines these days, they are women, most common. They do their things in the forest, or by the river (i.e. in the wild, the bush). They will do the ritual and the snake will come and then they catch the snake and take the poison and kill people. That is the most common. And I have been told, but I am not sure, that when they call the snake to them they must go with the *ajaya* and the alcohol. Then after drinking the alcohol, the snake will be drunk and easy to kill. But not just the alcohol, must shake the *ajaya* and do the things I do not know to bring the snake. That is what they say'.<sup>218</sup>

At this, Constantino said 'even if you are not sick but are just worried about poison, if you take the medicine anyway, then it cannot hurt you but only help. Because that is its nature. And then if you take now, it will help later if given poison. Even in one year, or five years. If take now will help at that time. But still come to him, because no way of you knowing how much medicine you have in your body, how much poison. And if you take the one they put in alcohol or food, then if you do not go to someone with that skill [of medicine] for sure you will die. Your heart (*cwiny*) will shrivel and go black'.<sup>219</sup>

At this point, we were coming toward the end of the day and the dark slate-grey storm clouds which had been building above the mountains to the east began moving overhead, threatening the usual late afternoon downpour of this time of year. Having one last question, I asked Constantino what the difference was between him, or what he did, and an *ajwaka* or a *layat*. This was something Obwoya and I had spoken about beforehand, as several people had mentioned that a healer and a poisoner are often the same person. Certainly, this would mirror similar Acholi understandings about cosmological power such as manifests in the person of the *ajwaka*; namely, as someone who can mediate with meta-persons as diviner and healer as well as someone who can cause misfortune or death. When I first broached this question with Obwoya, he was concerned with its implications, worried it would either offend Constantino or, worse, alarm him into thinking we had discovered some hidden secret – as Obwoya said, 'what do we do if that thing you ask him is true? Because then he will know that we know, and he will not keep it like that' – thus inadvertently making us his target. To overcome his anxiety, I reminded Obwoya that last time we had met with Constantino, not only had we had given him sugar and paracetamol for his back pain,<sup>220</sup> but he had also asked us who had told about him, saying in the end we were right to visit him on these matters and we could ask him

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<sup>218</sup> It should be pointed out that this description of calling snakes is remarkably similar to most descriptions of *ajwaki* rituals: dancing, shaking *ajaya* gourd rattles, and the ritual use of alcohol. p'Bitek (1971: 139-140) gives an almost identical account of snake calling.

<sup>219</sup> Although usually translated as 'heart', *cwiny* is the liver, the centre of the body, and the site of emotional, physical, and moral well-being.

<sup>220</sup> 'Sugar makes you strong', Pajok Acholi are fond of saying.

whatever we wanted to know. 'Plus', I said, 'if it all goes wrong, we just say that it is *munu* ignorance that made me ask it. That has worked before!' Laughing, Obwoya agreed.

Laughter greeted our question, too. The old woman, Aber, was particularly amused. 'But you have already eaten with us!' she said, 'were you not afraid of the food?' This brought more laughter from everyone, tears to the eyes of Obwoya, and a loud coughing fit to Constantino. Overhead, the thunderclouds boomed their own appreciative accompaniment. After Constantino recovered, he began answering the question: 'He is very happy we came to ask him this thing', Obwoya said, 'because it shows we are after the real answers (*lagam adaa*), asking the difficult questions (*peny matek*). He said the difference between these people was a person who had the feeling for killing someone is a bad person while the person who has the feeling for helping is not. They are good, because they want you to live for longer. The difference between the *ajwaka* and him is the *ajwaka* cannot be compared to him because they are just doing it to get money from people. They cannot treat you. They tell you someone trying to kill you, and then tell you to give money to make them stop. But he is not an *ajwaka*, because he is giving the *yat* only to help. Sometimes they do not even give him money or a chicken or nothing. But the *ajwaka*, you must always pay!<sup>221</sup>

When our conversation with Constantino came to an end, the young woman who had earlier spoken with Aber returned. As we said our goodbyes, an obligatory component of sociality, Aber gave me a package the size of a small novel loosely wrapped in banana leaves. 'Take this with you', she said, 'it is our gift, to keep you safe'. I thanked her, and carefully prised open one leaf, exposing the succulent stalks of a plant I can only describe as resembling aloe. '*Yat twol* [snake medicine]', she said. 'Hang it in your *ot* [hut]. Put one over the door, the other near your bed. This will keep the snakes away. They do not like the smell and so will not enter'. Again I thanked her for the thoughtful gift: as the renovated hut Marie and I occupied had been a goat house in a previous incarnation, we had several snake-related scares in the preceding twelve months; enough to mean we no longer placed any items on the ground under which a snake could hide. Finally, my methodological, epistemological, and ethical approach means I must note that, after installing the *yat twol* as directed, we never again experienced a snake-related encounter.

## Medicine, poison and relational indeterminacy

The last thing this chapter discusses is *yat*. It is in *yat* that agency, intention, relationality and witchcraft link most strongly to morality and healing. *Yat* is a word with multiple meanings. It is simultaneously

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<sup>221</sup> It is common for Christians of all denominations to make similar assertions when speaking about *ajwaki*.

both medicine and poison, living tree and witchcraft substance (see also Ravalde 2014). It is that which heals and that which kills.<sup>222</sup> Whenever I asked Obwoya how he knew which interpretation to use when translating, he always said the meaning is determined by the context: ‘You just know’, he would say, ‘because of what else they are saying’. This context, I suggest, is created by who is working with *yat* in which situation, why, and to what effect. In other words, it is determined by the intentions involved and the relations mobilised: one person may go to a ritual specialist to get a cure for illness or impotence; another an antidote for poison or to ward off snakes; yet a third might go with the intention to injure someone. Indeed, as Obwoya noted more than once after meeting with people told us about traditional medicines, ‘I think this man knows more than he is saying: he tells us about the antidote but how does he know the antidote without knowing the poison?’ Because such people have access to and knowledge of powerful magical items other community members do not, they are both respected (*woro*) and feared (*lworo*).<sup>223</sup>

*Loyat* (‘poisoners’ or literally ‘people who use *yat*’) are a difficult and ambiguous category to translate or classify. This is because, in Pajok, the term now predominantly describes poisoners. Nonetheless, historically – and a lesser extent today – the term also referred to healers or people who used *yat* to remove problems. Thus, those who use *yat* in either capacity need to be encompassed by any proper terminological definition, and it may be the wider Christian demonization of tradition has led to the concept’s mainly negative contemporary dimensions. However, as they are the dominant focus of the term in contemporary Pajok, it are those who use poison to injure and kill that this section highlights.

Poisoners wish to harm people because they suffer from *cwiny marac* (‘a bad or wicked liver/heart’) or *cwiny macol* (‘a black or dark liver/heart’) and are susceptible to *nyeko* (‘jealousy’ or ‘envy’) and *woro* (‘greed’ or ‘selfishness’). Poison is given in one of three ways. First and least common are ‘atmospheric poisons’ placed in the victim’s compound, often the grass thatch of their hut. These tend to bring misfortune rather than death, although such misfortune may well be the death of animals. Their existence must be found by a ritual search of the compound. The second type is contact poison which makes the victim fall ill when touched. These poisons are usually found in one of two places: on the locking mechanism on a hut door, the intention being to poison someone unlocking it; or across a path the intended victim is known to frequent.<sup>224</sup> Although both these are more ‘magical potion’ than poison, they have very real and damaging effects. Most commonly, however, poison is ingested through consuming food or drink, often alcohol.

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<sup>222</sup> p’Bitek (1971: 137) notes that *yat* as poison is also called *awola*, and a poisoner *lawol* (p’Bitek 1971: 142).

<sup>223</sup> See Stroeken (2012: 122) for a similar point among the Sukuma of Tanzania.

<sup>224</sup> The same pattern is found in both Allen and Storm (2012) and in Stroeken (2012).

In the eyes of many in Pajok, one of the community's deadliest problems is the presence of unknown but malignant poisoners.<sup>225</sup> Defining poisoning as 'sensations of pain and intrusion', Stroeken (2012: 132) emphasises that poisoning occurrences in Tanzania are best understood as the individual experience of cultural articulations about perversion within social relations: that is, that experiences of poisoning combine and collapse the relational, structural and experiential positions of insider and outsider, highlighting inherent ambiguities. It is the same in Pajok, where *loyat* are known to live and kill. These *loyat*, however, are usually foreigners, outsiders who benefit from the Pajok community but whose presence is damaging to it. If Acholi they invariably come from Uganda or those South Sudanese clans bordering Madi; if absolute foreigners, they are Kuku or Madi.<sup>226</sup> They are certainly not from Pajok. Indeed, they are sometimes the same group of outsiders who can change into animal form,<sup>227</sup> further amalgamating the foreign with the strange and unnatural, as well as with ideas of both bodily and social insecurity. Most poison is also said to come from outside the community, mainly Uganda.

Likewise, in Pajok, poisoners are also almost always women. As in much else, many men perceive women as dangerous outsiders in need of control.<sup>228</sup> However, both men and women say it is women who poison, generally because of normative gendered conceptualisations that women are jealous, with poison often being linked to difficulties inherent within polygynous marriages. Therefore, hegemonic discourses common in Pajok state it is not because of men that women poison, nor because of structural conditions that favour men, nor is poison a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1987) allowing woman's resistance towards these structures. Instead, it is narrated as an intrinsic condition of femaleness, something dangerous to social reproduction and needing control.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Poison obtained from snakes is particularly feared, and possessing part of a snake demonstrates intention to harm through the application of poisonous magic or knowledge. This is deemed so problematic that the discovery of a large, butchered snake near the AIC compound in Caigon *Boma* toward the end of fieldwork resulted in a public election to determine the identities of the likely poisoners and who would thus be punished (Storer, Reid & O'Byrne forthcoming). This event is remarkably similar to recent witchcraft accusations among Ugandans in Gulu (Allen 2015a, 2015c) as well as neighbouring Madi (Allen & Reid 2015).

<sup>226</sup> See also p'Bitek (1971: 140).

<sup>227</sup> *Dano me loki* or 'people who change shape' are also known to exist in Pajok. Grove (1919: 144) noted that such a person – whom he calls 'the *Jongu* ("man-eating person"?)' – is someone 'who has the power of turning himself into a leopard and so of going and killing his enemies. This power runs in families and there is a whole village of these people at Opari'. Opari is a north-western South Sudanese Acholi community bordering the Madi ethnic group and the place most people from Pajok name as the home of shapechangers. For further ethnographic examples of shapechangers, see: Baines (2010), Bere (1973), Betelsen (2014), Deng (1974), Girling (1960), Jackson (1989), Nordstrom (2004), Stewart and Strathern (2004), Strathern, Stewart and Whitehead (2006), West (2007), White (2000), Whitehead (2004), and Whitehead and Finnström (2013a, 2013b).

<sup>228</sup> Women's connection to poison also features strongly in the accounts of Allen and Storm (2012), Jackson (1989), p'Bitek (1971), and Stroeken (2012).

<sup>229</sup> See similar accounts in Green (1983), Middleton (1960), and Porter (2012, 2013).

Within Pajok, any sudden or unexpected death may be suspected as poisoning, and *yat* is the predominant witchcraft-related activity in contemporary Pajok discourse, both in individual conversations – I was often cautioned about who I took food or drink with, a situation usually framed as the danger of engaging in unknown relations without knowledge of another’s intention – as well as at largescale social gatherings. Community leaders also concede poisoners live within the community. For example, warnings are invariably issued at funerals demanding ‘anyone who brought something with them’ (an allusion to *yat*) respect the deceased and not harm attendees. Eating with unknown people hence risks poisoning, and poisoning in either public or private does not just happen but is caused, primarily because of the actions of ill-intentioned others. However, the specific other and their precise relation to the victim may remain unknown, especially if they attack at a public event like a funeral. All that can be said is they are someone contextually if not necessarily relationally near.<sup>230</sup>

It could be theorised that Acholi cosmological ideas relating to inside and outside also feature in relation to breaches of bodily integrity, and thus how poison works. In other words, poison is dangerous not only for its social dimensions but also its intrusive features: it is the shift from outside substance to integrated substance which forms the harmful element of poisoning, with poison becoming more dangerous the more it is internalised. This is may be why ingestion kills more often than physical touch, which in turn is more dangerous than what I have called ‘atmospheric’ poison. Moreover, as an additional feature of the inside/outside binary, the more ‘outside’ the origin of the poison, the more potent it is: whether from another family or clan (in the case of female users), from Uganda, or even of *munu* origin such as insecticide (which is the most dangerous of all). This would seem to concur with p’Bitek (1971: 140), who notes that in the cases of both *jok* and *yat*, those which originate from distant locations were more dangerous and more feared than those originating nearby. Such a suggestion, however, needs further research to substantiate.

At funerals and other such public occasions, food and alcohol is plentiful and of high quality, and people from around the community come together across lineal, ethnic, gender, and interpersonal divisions. As in Pajok, so Myhre noted for witchcraft in Tanzania, where funerals result in

A multiplicity of social relationships... levelled and reduced to proximity and contact, enabling bewitchment to occur through any of them... Furthermore, this form of bewitchment works by means of powerful substances, such as meat, milk, and beer, which are constitutive of these relationships. Witchcraft is not a distant phenomenon

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<sup>230</sup> Nonetheless, due to the primary reasons a poisoner is thought to act – anger, envy, greed, jealousy – the actual poisoner involved in any incident is always *assumed* to be relationally near. After all, as I was often told, ‘why else would they have such feelings?’

of foreign origin, but a social fact that involves an excessive proximity (Myhre 2014: 17; see also Englund 2007: 306).<sup>231</sup>

Further, and highlighting the inherent danger as well as diabolical nature of a poisoner's activities is a cosmological conceptualisation with a wide reaching ethnographic basis: this is the insidiousness of putting aside one's ethics and attacking the community for benefits that accrue only to the individual; of doing lasting damage to one's group for the purposes of temporary material gain; of selling one's soul to make a 'pact with the Devil' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Meyer 1999; Niehaus 1993, 2005; Taussig 1980). In all such social circumstances, bewitchment is dangerous not because of the specific people or relations involved but rather because *all* relations become open to transformation and transgression. The same problems can be seen in Myhre's (2014) account, above. In other words, it is not because of the specific nature of structural relations but rather the collapse of the structuring patterns within *all* relations which is significant; not relations *as such* which are dangerous but rather their *indeterminacy*. That is, and following Piot (1999: 13), for Acholi it is 'the inability to account for the complexity of meanings' surrounding everyday relations which makes witchcraft and poisoning possible and which give them their distinctiveness while, at the same time, these same complexities of meaning also making the precise dimensions of everyday relations and their breach difficult to distinguish. In this way, as Stroeken (2012: 38) observed, when the possibility of bewitchment amounts to constant existential questioning about the quality and nature of one's social relations (and thus personhood), such an existence becomes 'dominated by an invisible moral power, a life reduced'.

### Intention, blame, responsibility

In my discussion so far I have highlighted convergences around relationality and intention in customary Acholi conceptualisations of witchcraft. However, such understandings are not only connected with customary cosmological orientations but are part of deeper Acholi structural logics. In the Acholi world as described by residents of Pajok, there is no such thing as a coincidence.<sup>232</sup> Things always happen for a reason, usually the behind-the-scenes machinations of another person (human or metahuman). Writing about similar understandings among the Zande, Evans-Pritchard (1972; see also Horton 1967a, 1967b, 1997) hypothesised such 'secondary evaluations' of causality would be common among African

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<sup>231</sup> Although, in Pajok, this is largely conceptualised as an excessive proximity of the foreign or outside.

<sup>232</sup> If one was to relate Holbraad's (2010: 79) 'mock Kantian' proposition to the case of Acholi cosmologies, then if 'one might say that in coincidence the cosmos is revealed in itself, behind the matrix of cosmology', as Holbraad asserts, then in Acholi there can be no cosmic revelation, except the revelation of cosmology itself. This might be why diviners (*ajwaki*) and magic (of many kinds) are so important: if coincidences are 'the language of the cosmos' (Holbraad 2010: 80), then in Acholi the cosmos is essentially mute.

peoples. Locally, Pajok Acholi call this '*lubo*', tracing or following, and it involves the generalised need to find 'the root cause' of an event and attribute blame accordingly. This can range from interpersonal conflict (and the wider social determination of who should be considered the 'true' genitor of any dispute), through local justice mechanisms (where a court is more likely to investigate the relational tensions underlying an issue than 'objective facts' about any specific event), to the realm of traditional ritual (which assess and rectify how social norms were breached or meta-persons angered). In Gellian terms (Gell 1998; see Chapter 7), an event in Acholi is always an index of the existence of an agent.

#### *Local logics of intention, blame and responsibility*

In Acholi, someone can effect change or act upon the world without meaning to, thus changing the objective conditions of the world even if lacking the intention to do so. Likewise, especially due to the moral regulations involved in relations with and duties toward ancestors, *jogi* or other meta-persons, cosmological consequences can result from simply not doing something you should have – such as maintaining a lineal shrine – or, conversely, doing something you should not have done, like chopping firewood in a particular location. It does not matter whether you know about or are aware of the particular sanctions or taboos involved: neither ignorance nor lack of action or belief about such obligations will stop cosmological sanction.

If someone has cosmological power then, as an almost embodied or psychic reaction, they can cause harm through their unintentional disposition towards others. Something can happen without a person's reflection upon or thought about their actions. As related above, there are several types of cosmological moral sanction involving feelings like envy, in which someone makes others sick simply through an unconscious or unknowing jealousy of them or the specific conditions of their life. Indeed, the power attributed to envy and jealousy is so strong that 'ill will or envy on the part of even private individuals with no supernatural powers will bring misfortune on its subject' (Grove 1919: 175). As Stroeken (2012: x) notes, 'one may despise the jealous but one cannot exclude the possibility that their despicable emotion has a moral reason'. Thus, given that it is possible for nearly anyone in the community to cause misfortune through the moral power of their jealousy, a powerful person with these feelings can be completely unaware of their emotions and still do untold harm to other people, their families, or their possessions.

Likewise, people may also have such powers and use them intentionally. Such persons are certainly known to exist within Acholi witchcraft. In cases involving planned intent to harm, then ritual actions are more difficult and the spiritual outcomes resulting worse. I suggest this is because of the anti-social nature of such acts and the refusal of both personhood and sociality involved. 'The kind of

harm... caused', writes Porter (2013: 255), 'social, familial and individual... differ[s] depending upon the circumstances, and therefore an appropriate remedy would need to take such circumstances into account'. In the case of some forms of particularly malignant witchcraft or sorcery – like poisoning – the relations negated demonstrate the inherent non-personhood of the evildoer. Such understandings show a logic whereby intentional harm – particularly of the cosmological variety – is understood to directly and purposefully breach important moral stipulations and thresholds, thus questioning the very foundation of sociality and social harmony (Porter 2012, 2013).

#### *Evangelical understandings of intention, blame and responsibility*

Such pre-Christian conceptualisations of agency, blame, cause and effect toward responsibility continue among the contemporary Pajok community, particularly in how illness and misfortune are understood. This remains true whether the person attributing blame is evangelical or Catholic, a pastor or an *ajwaka*. There is a need to find out who is responsible for misfortune, as without discovering the underlying (and always relational) cause, ritual action cannot be taken and the misfortune will continue (Piot 1999). For evangelicals, such attributions are often framed as the workings of evil spirits, what might be called 'the demonization of causality'. Thus, instead of the bad feelings of a paternal ancestor, a maternal uncle, or an in-marrying woman – collectively the most problematic relations in a person's life – evangelicals see the workings of the Devil. This evil influence manifests either as sin and temptation at an internalised individual level, or the workings of demonically-inclined humans or meta-persons at the wider social and relational levels.

Often, such attributions of blame occur simultaneously, with the demonic thought to encourage people to sin by falling into temptation. Either way, the attribution of causality and responsibility is the same and largely mirrors customary processes: events are understood to have external causal factors, these causes are determined to be agents, and those agents have usually made conscious decisions to interfere in the lives and lifeworlds of a particular person or group: it is this which makes them problematic or evil. The main difference between the customary and the Christian here is that, like many other components of the 'open' Acholi cosmology, the meta-persons who are the ultimate arbiters of Acholi cosmology in this specific structure of the conjuncture have here been hierarchically superseded by the tripartite Godhead. Nonetheless, the underlying social, relational, ontological and cosmological systems remain. What has taken place is that in the ongoing meetings between these two cosmological systems, the open and horizontal system of the 'tribal' Acholi has been incorporated within the closed, hierarchical, and ultimately hegemonic Christian system (Handelman 2008, 2012, 2014; Handelman & Lindquist 2011a, 2011b). In doing so, only minimal violence has taken place: the

meta-persons remain, they are simply demonised, a not-too-difficult transformation given their prior inherent ambiguities.

It should be noted, however, that such understandings are definitely those of 'the common person': as could likely be assumed, pastors and church leaders tend to a somewhat different perspective. Indeed, I imagine many of them might read the preceding paragraphs and disagree somewhat with the points made and conclusions drawn. For them, although still oriented to the workings of evil, cause, effect and responsibility are much more individualised in locus. That is, although sin and temptation are still the work and influence of the demonic, sinning requires individual choice. As the head teacher of the COC Bible School said, "Satan made me do this!" That is what the people say. But it is them that has that desire! It is their sin'. Church leaders generally determine such attributions to be worldly rather than heavenly in nature. That is, that people should not locating responsibility outside themselves in an external social other but rather within themselves as sinners whose primary relationships should be with God. Dislocation of responsibility is considered dishonest because, in the final evaluation of the ultimate judgement which every human being must endure at the end of days, salvation is impossible without confession and repentance. In relational terms, as salvation requires placing one's self in 'correct' relations with God, Christ and the church, sinners are those who maintain relations with the Devil.

### **Conclusion: Witchcraft, morality and power**

To conclude, several components come together to show how witchcraft and magic are understood as connected to medicine and morality in Acholi South Sudan. As I suggested at the outset we must investigate what indigenous understandings of cause, effect, agency, and intentionality tell us about local manifestations of witchcraft and sorcery. It is my argument that otherwise unexplainable events clarify Acholi ideas about cause and effect and their connection to local notions of medicine, poison and misfortune.

According to Tambiah (1985: 84), although 'Evan-Pritchard's conclusion was that Zande rites were most "mystical" when the diseases they dealt with were acute and chronic' it is of utmost importance 'not to forget one of Evan-Pritchard's most pregnant observations: the Zande belief in witchcraft does not exclude "empirical cause and effect", but, it provides a social and cultural method of acting upon the world'. In acting upon the world, then, witchcraft and magic are not a form of rationalisation or empirical description – a 'primitive science', so to speak – but forms of agency. In other words, they effect transformation through affecting empirical conditions and imparting changes upon the world

and the event, persons, relations and things which comprise it.<sup>233</sup> In such a conceptualisation, like rumour (see Chapter 7), a Gellian analysis of agency and witchcraft demands that witchcraft – as the specific practice of witches – should itself be understood as an agent. Acholi witchcraft is therefore a form of social actor which just so happens to look like a magical act or entity but which causes events to happen and thus cannot be manifest or understood without grasping the definitive context within which it acts or the effects that it has. In this, Stroeken (2012: 147) concurs, arguing that many of the difficulties within earlier analyses of witchcraft is that, rather than the experience of witchcraft, they focus on and attempt to define ‘the witch’ and why they act. A more profitable line of inquiry, Stroeken suggests, is to understand the witch, their practice, and people’s experience of those practices as all distinct, as multiple ‘products of cultural creativity’. That is, the witch and the practice of the witch need to be understood as distinct and, thus, as independently both having agency.

Thus, as Abednego put it, ‘if they (*lojok*) feel jealous and do that thing (swallow saliva), then the *jok* will just come and make the person sick’. Consider the order of the process here: the *lojok* feels jealousy, he – it is usually a man – swallows his saliva, the *jok* comes, and the target becomes sick. There are several aspects to be highlighted here. Firstly, the importance of jealousy but the lack of any necessary notion of intent. Secondly, that performing a magical act brings *jok*. That is, *jok* comes through performing a magical act. Further, as with all the Acholi rituals I am aware of, the acts are more important than words (although, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, words are powerful in a different way). Hence, we might say actions are ritually powerful while words have everyday or social power.

In Pajok at least, it is considered outside the Acholi worldview to intentionally harm fellow community members, something that ‘never happened’ until colonialism and modernity.<sup>234</sup> Thus, evil actions and intentions are the work of outsiders within the community – however these are defined, whether foreigners, women or witches – and, by denying internal social conflict, reiterates the central importance of an Acholi cultural logic of social harmony (Porter 2012, 2013). Moreover, this worldview conceptualises true evil as being situated in the non-humanness (and thus non-personhood) of people who would intentionally commit such acts.

Indeed, I have argued that the intentionality of social actors and the indeterminacy of social relations are important considerations in understanding the inherent morality and relationality of Acholi witchcraft. That is, that what is significant to Acholi conceptualisations of witchcraft are not the specific actions or actors involved but rather the meanings these actions are given: intention to refuse,

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<sup>233</sup> Although these changes can obviously be subtle and dramatic to different degrees in different contexts.

<sup>234</sup> I suggest such understandings about an essentially conflict-free past is an aspect of the romanticised Acholi golden age, *kare macon*, that Porter (2015b) has argued idealises a pre-colonial Acholi world situated before the conflicts of the twentieth century.

disrupt, or destroy individual and social lives and worlds. And as I have also suggested, what makes some witchcraft evil and immoral within Acholi are the intentions at their heart (as opposed to amoral or potentially beneficial magical acts). Intention is therefore intimately linked with ideas of immorality, ideas in turn connected to local notions of humanity, sociality and relationality. Problematic witchcraft therefore involves the intentional denial of sociality and the transgressive refusal of relationality.

Another important consideration is the social or individualised direction, focus or use of witchcraft-like power, as demonstrated by *laa's* interconnected blessing/curse dimensions. In its curse manifestation, swallowing *laa* equates to the individualised use of a powerful and efficacious substance which, when directed in a social manner, is a form of blessing.<sup>235</sup> In other words, *laa* is positive when used communally or socially – that is, relationally, in that it imparts a powerful component part of one person onto another, imbuing them with the sacred dimensions of its owner. Such uses build relations and break curses. However, when *laa* is retained, using cosmological power towards individualised rather than social or relational ends is almost always a problem, as well as 'bad' and immoral. Indeed, to generalise from this observation, one can say that while the social use of cosmological power is moral and beneficial, its individualised use is negative and often the very definition of evil. Thus *yat* is both medicine and poison, *laa* both blessing and curse, and a *tipu* either *kwaro* or *cen* (see Chapter 4). Moral power in Acholi could perhaps be defined as personal power intentionally manifested for social reasons while evil might be defined as doing things selfishly, without social or relational intention or compulsion.

However, I suggest what is of most relevance in Acholi witchcraft are the *effects*: what actually happened, how, who to, and where. Thus, and mirroring my discussion of Acholi 'lived pragmatism' in Chapter 3, Acholi conceptualisations of agency, intention and witchcraft necessarily focus upon what has actually happened, what the real effects of this are, and what these effects say about the social, political, and spiritual worlds and their interactions. Ultimately, therefore, Acholi engagements with and views toward the spirit world are essentially and perhaps primarily a pragmatic or utilitarian in orientation; they are based within a worldview of action and reaction, cause and effect, and alignments towards events which involve responses designed to determine cause and achieve mitigation rather than make predictions.

Just as in the Acholi system, so too in Christianity: having consequences, all actions are *moral* actions. Both systems therefore involve a morality of action as well as than a morality of persons. Moreover, the two systems seem to cohere in similar ways. After all, as Rio and Eriksen (2014b: 10) have argued, 'an ontology of witchcraft as a constitutional power combines with the Christian axiom that the

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<sup>235</sup> For more in-depth discussion of *laa* in Acholi thought, see Finnström (2006b, 2008).

individual body is the seat of good and bad and that the crucial site of morality is contained internally in the person'. In other words, both Acholi and evangelical forms of agency and personhood are relational just as both involve ideas about the morality of intent and the rationality of cause and effect. We can therefore define both systems as systems of or about morality or moral power (Stroeken 2012), with the crucial component being issues of cause and effect (and especially their moral effectiveness on other members of a social and thus moral community). Such a conceptualisation concurs with the description of moral relationality which Grove (1919: 175-177) determined to underpin Acholi sociality. Both the Acholi and evangelical cosmological systems are therefore *moral* systems, systems within which right and wrong are primarily construed in terms of outcome or effect. As such, both systems are inherently relational, in that the meaning of morality is only gained through intersubjective action.

With this in mind, I propose there is value in taking a new analytical perspective toward witchcraft. Therefore I want to conclude this chapter by suggesting that, rather than explaining witchcraft through the usual concepts or contexts (modernity, slavery, the 'occult economy', for example), it is equally likely witchcraft explains these very phenomena: that is, that these phenomena gain at least some of their distinctiveness from the very situations in which they are locally engaged. In this way, we should endeavour as much as possible to follow local idioms and logics of explanation and, if the locality to be examined is anything like that of Acholi South Sudan, make witchcraft itself the locus of our explanatory frameworks. That is, rather than assume witchcraft is something requiring explanation we should use witchcraft *itself* as an explanatory category or paradigm. Of course there may be family resemblances between different cases of witchcraft in different places, but as Ranger (2007: 274) has argued, there is no a priori reason why widely divergent ethnographic facts and circumstances should be decontextualized in order to fit academic paradigms. The specificities, Ranger notes, are important and have much explanatory value.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: WAR, WITCHES, AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF RUMOURS

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### A call in the night

Monday 16th December 2013 started just like any other. Marie and I woke up, prepared ourselves for the day, and opened the small tin door of our round mudbrick and grass-thatched hut to allow in the already-blinding dawn light. This was followed not long after by a stream of friendly and inquisitive children. After greeting our family, we went and sat under the shadow of the great old *olum* fig tree that dominated the compound, glad already for its protective shade. A tight circle of brightly coloured plastic chairs was waiting for us, as was a small wooden table covered with cups, a box of tea bags, and the dark sugar required for any 'real' African tea. There were also an assortment of morning snacks: small, sweet bananas; sticks of fried bread called *mugadi*; and half a jar of peanut butter left behind by the American missionaries who had preached at the annual Bible workshop held in the God's Tender Mercy compound a few months earlier (see Chapter 5).

David, our host, was also waiting. After the usual morning greetings, David wondered if we had heard the news from Juba. The wife of his cousin-brother had called during the night.<sup>236</sup> Gunfire had broken out across the city. She did not know who the fighting was between or how bad it was, but people were saying it had started near the barracks and involved soldiers. She was worried and frightened. Although gunfire was common in Juba, this felt different. She was sure something bad was happening.

For the next few hours, as David tried calling friends and family in Juba – to no avail, as the MTN phone network was either down or overloaded – Marie and I attempted to get news from the internet, a task proving as pointless as David's phone calls.

Finally giving up, David and I decided to walk down into Pajok centre, to speak with people who might have contacts in Juba, and to try to discover what was happening. All we found were rumours.

### Introduction: On rumours and rumourscapes

So far in this thesis I have been considering the connections between evangelical and indigenous notions of agency, cosmology, morality and personhood in Acholi South Sudan, and especially how these relate to equivalencies between customary and Christian cosmological systems. This chapter

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<sup>236</sup> The Acholi word for brother, *omera*, is applied to all lineal males of the same generation (thus, father's sons as well as father's brothers' sons). The term 'cousin-brother' is the standard Acholi English translation of *omera* when it applies beyond the nuclear family (father's sons).

moves away from considering the construction of personhood in Pajok to investigate the indigenous construction of narrative persons. In other words, this chapter is dedicated to narrative personhood: firstly, the local conceptualisation of words-as-persons in their own right, and secondly, analysis of the very real social lives of these narrative agents, that is, how these narratives become agents and what they do with that agency. Importantly, I will demonstrate that these narrative actors have agency and personhood and, further, that this agency and personhood is connected to indigenous notions and ideologies surrounding morality and moral power. These are agents, then, who gain their power and personhood from the moral truths they articulate. Moreover, I will argue that rumour can be conceptualised as a particular type of agent: a witch. That is, that rumour acts like and embodies the same powers and relations as witchcraft, highlighting the fundamentally moral and relational character of both magical and narrative actors (see Chapter 6).

In this chapter I reproduce local commentary upon many of contemporary Pajok's most critical everyday events. Such narratives function as crucial elements in local processes of meaning making taking place with the outbreak of South Sudan's most recent – and ongoing – violent conflict in December 2013. This conflict, which has come to dominate news and narration about the country, has caused significant damage to lives and lifeworlds, forcing everyone in the world's newest country to question the parameters of their lives and existence, as well as the very future of South Sudan itself.<sup>237</sup>

News and rumours about the conflict and its primary actors have a distinctly moral character. Moreover, as articulations of events and actions conceptualised through shared moral and cultural frameworks, rumours about the conflict are simultaneously the social dissemination and moral evaluation of truths about the war, the world, and life in general (see also Bajracharya 2015). These rumours are questions and statements about the fundamental makeup of worlds (past, present and future) as well as the persons who reside within them (human, metahuman or narrative). Therefore, as much as being a lived pragmatic response to a situation of existential crisis beyond personal or communal control (see Chapter 3), the rumours I narrate here are distinctly political and agentic in composition: they are statements about the world at the same time as they evaluate and attempt to change it.

Finnström (2008: 189; see also Leonardi & Santschi 2016) noted that, due to an ongoing context of deep structural, interpersonal and state-driven violence on both sides of the Ugandan-South Sudanese

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<sup>237</sup> Given the extremely concerning political and security situations of contemporary South Sudan, as well as the now-common 'disappearances' and murders of outspoken critics of the current war and/or the government, I have purposefully removed as much identifying material as possible from this chapter. Inspired by Malkki (1995), although the rumours I detail are presented as aggregates or generalisations removed from their particular speaker or context, this makes them no less important, relevant or real.

border, many contemporary Acholi live in conditions of fundamental existential uncertainty. Much as Bajracharya (2015: 362) discovered about the everyday connections between violence, rumour and meaning making in Nepal, I too was 'struck by the various and dissonant affective registers through which people around me seemed to experience the terms of... violence'. Further, Kapferer (2011: 79-80) has argued that in situations of existential crisis, people are driven to grasp for any certainty or meaning. Thus, within a context mixing violence with fundamental uncertainty, I suggest that in Pajok, stories and gossip, news and rumours, memory and imagination come together to create something which, inspired by Appadurai (1996), I call a *rumourscape*: a dynamic and creative narrative environment within which local actors attempt to negotiate ontological insecurity, create meaningful understandings, and reorient themselves within and towards the world.

For Appadurai (1996: 33), 'the use of the suffix *scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes... [that] are not objectively given relations... but rather deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors'. Inspired by this, I propose rumourscapes, like the rest of Appadurai's scapes, 'are the building blocks of...imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups' (Appadurai 1996: 33). I suggest rumours can be added alongside the other five dimensions of global cultural forms which Appadurai (1996: 32) delineates: ethnoscapes, financescapes, ideoscapes, mediascapes and technoscapes.<sup>238</sup> A rumourscape is thus the aggregated yet rapidly changing assemblage of narratives currently used to relate a series of temporally, spatially, and interpersonally connected events, from which different persons and communities build meaningful understandings of the otherwise unexplainable. Despite the fact that a rumourscape may be comprised of news, gossip, media accounts or so on from multiple (and sometimes competing or contradictory) sources, the inclusion of the word 'rumour' within the concept signposts the distinctively *ad hoc* nature of these assemblages and their methods of transmission. Although a rumourscape is an array of usually empirically unverifiable accounts laden with explanatory value and burdened with historical, moral and causal assumptions and determinations, they are often the narrative landscapes from which meaning is made, cause and effect described and defined, and ultimate truths decided. A rumourscape creates and allows an environment for the attempted negotiation of ontological insecurity and brings forth meaningful understandings in the face of crisis, producing order from chaos and reorienting existential alignments within and towards the world.

In my use of the rumourscape concept I hope to draw attention to something not captured by Appadurai's interlocking scapes: indigenously embedded moral evaluations of the everyday, situated,

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<sup>238</sup> Although not framed in the same way, this conceptualisation maps closely to that given in Bonhomme (2012).

and ongoing interaction between the local and the global, the minimal and the maximal, the internal and the external. After all, as Stewart and Strathern (2004: 182) have argued, 'rumour weaves together... the local, the national, and the global'. Rumourscapes, then, are the mediation of Appadurai's scapes (comprised of regional and global cultural flows) through locally situated cultural and cosmo-ontological frames of reckoning, within which they are given moral evaluation. Rumourscapes are therefore anti-hegemonic refractions of Appadurai's deterritorialised and largely hegemonic landscapes back through the specific persons and communities within whom they get their primary and final meanings and from and for whom they are both determined and determining. The concept of the rumourscape is thus a specific attempt to localise or re-territorialise that which I believe Appadurai unnecessarily deterritorialised: forms of everyday resistance (Scott 1987) which, due to the hegemonic conditions through which they come to life and spread, often ultimately 'confirm rather than confront the experienced domination and the political order of the day' (Finnström 2008: 173).

Several key elements recur in the Pajok rumourscape, elements allowing insight not only into the construction and maintenance of specific rumours (as well as the rumourscape itself) but also important processes in the socio-cultural construction of rumours-as-agents. As Appadurai (1996: 31) notes, in an increasingly transnational world, 'imagination [is] a social practice... now central to all forms of agency'. Within the alternate ontologies allowed by these imaginative narrative worlds, individual stories become important social actors, providing essential orienting dimensions in the active and inventive production of local meanings. More than this, however, within any rumourscape certain stories are given the power of fact or truth, gaining an ontological certainty outside the context of their communication. Hence, the rumourscape in Pajok shows words to be indigenous mechanisms of productive creativity in the everyday (re)production of local cosmo-ontological certainties and meanings. Thus, the war-oriented rumours that circulated within Pajok in 2013 and 2014 must be conceptualised as social actors which help create and structure local coherencies. It is the dynamic process of creating these narrative actors I trace here.

An important caveat is required: I have no interest in evaluating the so-called 'truth' of the rumours I discuss. Not only are such evaluations largely irrelevant and ethnocentric, as well as impossible to determine, but I understand truth as a contextual and cultural construct determined by everyday moral relevance rather than any 'objective' criteria. Indeed, as Finnström (2008: 180, emphasis added; see also Bonhomme 2012; Kapferer 2002; Stewart & Strathern 2004; White 2000) has argued, such 'stories are worth telling and listening to because *they are relevant and therefore true in the moral sense rather than in any objective sense*'. Or, as Stroeken (2012: 63) has put it, 'the truth of words is less important than their effect'. Linked to this is a defence of the terms I use: although it is common to make an analytical distinction between one or more of fact, gossip, narrative, news, rumour, and

truth (for example, see Drake 1989; Shibutani 1966; Stewart & Strathern 2004; Strathern, Stewart & Whitehead 2006), in what follows I move back and forth between ‘narrative’, ‘rumour’ and ‘story’ without necessarily distinguishing between them. Such a situation of ontological multiplicity and indeterminacy is virtually necessitated by my ethnographic data, especially as I seek to capture and do justice to experiential worlds rather than make some larger truth claim or create yet another academic typology.

## The agency of words

Acholi in Pajok make a distinction between *lok anii* (gossip or rumours), *lok goba* (lies), and *lok yoo* (‘words of the road’, an everyday term for gossip, rumours). These are contrasted with *lok adaa* or true words, which in turn is connected to *lok maleng/maber* (holy or good words, also the Word of God) and compared against *lok macol/marac* (dark or bad words, also demonic words). Although some of these terms can be used somewhat interchangeably in the right context, in this chapter I concentrate on those aspects of the narrative world falling under the terms *lok anii*, *lok goba* and *lok yoo*. This is because – more or less – they all refer to the same elements of the Acholi social world. To give a brief overview of local conceptualisations of these terms, I turn to Abednego, who summarised them in the following way:

All these, they are the things which are only rumours, just nothing, have no point. The things which you only hear on the road, only passing somebody so just say anything, not even the truth. They are the same thing. All the same category, all lying. These things, nobody can trust. You can only trust if you have seen it. If someone hears something from the telephone and then repeating, that is *goba*. The third person will then say it but never seen it. And some people will talk about the thing that never happened, but still people believing, because someone saying. So that is *lok yoo*, *lok anii*. *Lok goba* also.

I was initially puzzled by Pajok residents’ orientations toward rumours. ‘Why believe this particular story?’ I would ask people, especially when there was no evidence of support or when the evidence available suggested an alternate interpretation. Specifically, and what I found most problematic at the time, why believe a story when it was (or so I might think) unambiguously fictional? People usually had a simple explanation: ‘why would people say these things if they were not true? Why would the story come up in so many conversations? Why would it keep being told?’ Similar to what White (2000; see also Stewart & Strathern 2004) notes as common throughout Africa, truth seemed based on the

fact people repeatedly heard the same rumours from many people they knew and trusted. And in environments of chronic uncertainty and widespread corruption such as war, words from trusted sources carry power. Almost magical power.

Furthermore, in Acholi, words do have magical powers. Finnström (2008: 216) and p'Bitek (1971) have already noted as much among Ugandan Acholi, with p'Bitek (1971: 153) saying that 'the curse and the blessing seemed to have their own psychic powers'. As I show in the remainder of this chapter, such an understanding was repeatedly demonstrated during my South Sudanese fieldwork. In one example, for a long time people refused to speak with me about magical persons whose existence in the community was known and undisputed.<sup>239</sup> Later, even when people did trust me, many were still reticent talking about such figures, noting 'they know when you are talking about them'; that 'speaking about such people makes them real'; or that 'they will hear you asking these questions and then tomorrow you will just wake up dead'. Such articulations must be understood within a cultural context where local notions of cause, effect, agency and misfortune are linked to the destructive power of jealousy, the inherent and often unintentional nature of witchcraft, the connections between curses and community problems, and the moral and magical power of speech (Chapter 6). It is specifically in such a sociocultural and cosmo-ontological space that rumours obtain their social and agentive lives and the social life of rumours is ontologically realised.

I want to highlight that the impact of these narrative actors is not mechanistic but processual, that is, despite the fact that people can and often do act due specifically to the components of a rumourscape, this is never *necessarily* so. Therefore, although I highlight the specific agency and power of words, this should in no way be understood as a reduction of the agency of people or, better yet, persons: after all, as I will demonstrate, words or rumours can be conceptualised as persons just as much as humans or spirits can. Indeed, if anything, one could argue that focusing on the ability of human persons to form and birth these differently constituted social actors actually increases our understanding of human agency. In other words, in highlighting the agency of rumours I simply seek to do due justice to the full range of actors and social persons in the Acholi world: instead of replacing or minimising human agency, I want to demonstrate how words or rumours are more than just social actors within a wide and varied social field; that because they are things causing events to happen (Gell 1998), people interact with them in multiple and varied ways.

Such an argument requires an understanding of agency allowing for the ontological possibility of nonhuman or even nonsentient entities as social actors. In this, and as Jackson (1989) and Piot (1999)

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<sup>239</sup> Like *dano me loki* (shapechangers), *lojok* (witches/wizards), *loyat* (poisoners) and even, initially, *ajwaki* (spirit-mediums).

has proposed for elsewhere in Africa, I highlight the African possibilities of an analysis building upon insights about the relational nature of social life, agency, and personhood as developed in Melanesian ethnographies (Gell 1998; Strathern 1988; Wagner 1991). Thus, I understand the agency of words through a Gellian perspective, whereby agency is defined as ‘a culturally prescribed framework for thinking about causation, when what happens...is believed to happen because of an “intention” lodged in the person or thing which initiates the causal sequence’ (Gell, 1998: 17). An agent is therefore anything culturally understood to “cause events to happen” in their vicinity’ (Gell, 1998: 16). Importantly, an intention to cause happenings is not important. Just as importantly, an agent in this perspective does not need to be human, sentient or even a thing. Rather, because agency is understood through effects – that which is caused to happen – an agent is anything which, embedded in webs of relationality, causes events to happen. An agent therefore does not need to exist except in the mind of the person engaging in the process which Gell (1998: 13) terms ‘the abduction of agency’. After all, as Gell (1998: 123) notes, ‘it does not matter, in ascribing “social agent” status, what a thing (or a person) “is” in itself; what matters is where it stands in a network of social relations’.

Such a view of agency sees agents as social actors engaging in relations eliciting responses from other social actors. In this case, rather than simply being stories which people tell about the world, such an understanding positions rumours as social beings – or persons, as Gell notes – that just happen to share similarities with stories. Such an understanding of agency overcomes the problem of how non-corporeal things like words can be agents. An equally important problem is exactly *how* rumours, comprised solely of words, become detached from the communicative context and *become* actors. Indeed, one may argue that although it is one thing to propose the anthropomorphism of non-human physical objects as social entities with agentive power, it is an entirely different proposition to suggest the same thing about a series of words or a story. After all, if words can be said to exist outside of the moment of communication, where exactly is it that they exist? Is it possible for speech acts to exist outside the mind or memory of the speaker or hearer and, if so, how do they move from speech or memory to personhood or agency? In tackling this, I build upon a long line of anthropological ancestors who have written about the inherent magic of the spoken word, ranging from Malinowski (2015) and Mauss (2001) through Evans-Pritchard (1972) and Horton (1967b) to Tambiah (1985, 1990), Sahlins (1987), Gell (1998) and Finnström (2008).

Most analysts see rumour, like talk generally, as constituting rather than simply reflecting social realities: they are ‘stories [which] help people understand incomprehensible events’ (White 2000: 30) and help ‘resolve the confusions that result from experience’ (Stewart & Strathern 2004: 83). Thus, they are fundamental in determining meaning. As Stewart and Strathern (2004: 198) observe, ‘rumour and gossip are prime vehicles of interpretation’ which do not ‘simply pass on news [but]... give it its

narrative shape and meaning, stimulating action'. However, as Finnström (2008: 168) notes, 'as most rumours cannot be confirmed, they add to the uncertainty of everyday life'. I suggest it is precisely this inherent uncertainty which gives the rumourscape its complicating persona, allowing it to blur and collapse multiple temporalities and events instantaneously, thus effectively referencing conflicts and existential crises not only in the present, but also from the past and in the future simultaneously. In other words, as a form of speech producing action, rumours help to constitute realities and worlds.

The argument I present departs from Leach's articulation that although ritual 'is a complex of words and actions,... *the uttering of the word itself* is a ritual [i.e. magical] act' (Leach 1966: 407, emphasis added): in other words, although magic and ritual usually involve both words and actions, not only is speaking an action in itself but the uttering of words can be considered an act of magical power. The magic in this act is the intersubjective point that, once spoken, some words tend to hang around, being born and reborn through social repetition, quickly becoming outside the control or intention of the person who speaks them. Speech, in other words, takes on its own life (Finnström 2008; Tambiah 1985). Furthermore, as Finnström (2008: 216) argues, such narratives 'cannot be seen as the mere utterance of words. Rather they [are] performed within the framework of the local moral world'. They are, therefore, constitutive 'part[s] of this framework, forcing people to construct their own truths as they try to achieve some sense of governing their own fate' (Finnström 2008: 167). Therefore, by actively engaging with local Acholi understandings of words-as-agents I suggest we look not just at what rumours do, but what they are and how they act. This is because there are more to such rumours than just the political situations of previous authors' discussions. Indeed, Stroeken (2012: 24) notes that 'stories and rumours, just like beliefs, can lead a life of their own and after a while motivate actions'. In Gellian (1998) terms, they become an index for the abduction of agency. That is, they become agents.

Tambiah (1985: 28) has argued, 'language... has an independent existence and the power to influence reality', while Horton (1967b: 157) noted that 'a central characteristic of nearly all the traditional African world-views we know of is an assumption about the power of words, uttered under appropriate circumstances, to bring into being the events or states they stand for'. It is from this point – of words being endowed with the ability to effect change upon the world while existing independent of speaker or context – that my argument proceeds. As Courtney Handman (2014: 161-162) also observes among Guhu-Samane communities in Papua New Guinea, language has 'power that does not seem to be contained by the speaker [them self]'. The very act of speaking may thus be said to create new and different realities, realities which are, in some essential ways, fundamentally different to those preceding them. In a social world like Acholi South Sudan, where the magical power of utterances have ontological, cosmological, and moral relevance and power (Finnström 2008; p'Bitek

1971), it should not be surprising to find words having agency independent of their communicative context.

## Into the rumourscape

### Part one: The meaning(s) of national violence

When David and I went down into town the day the conflict began, the news was already spreading around the community, as quickly as the fires Acholi farmers use to clear their fields in the dry season. Equally reminiscent of those fires, it was difficult to make out where the stories had begun or what effects they might have. Despite not containing any real information about the likely effects the conflict might have on the community, they were already leading people to suggest dramatic actions such as once again crossing the border into Uganda and becoming refugees, or taking up weapons in defence of themselves and their families. Nonetheless, the lack of such information did not stop these rumours from being repeated in conversation all across the town. Most stories originated outside Pajok, from friends and family in Juba, and the information they contained was consistently rich in details which I found surprisingly comprehensive given the scale of the violence described and atrocities attested to. Nonetheless, details like the precise conversations involved between key actors in the conflict were invariably considered accurate and quoted as evidence for points of wider moral significance, such as why either the government or the rebels were to blame for the violence or how the country had become so morally and financially corrupt in the first place.

This is the first of two sections I devote to the component persons of the rumourscape, in which I present an overview of the interconnected narratives that developed in the immediate aftermath of 16 December 2013. There are several key elements that recur repeatedly, elements which provide important insight not only into the (re)production of individual stories and the rumourscape itself, but also important processes in the socio-cultural construction of rumours-as-agents as well as the power of rumours in the local production of meaning.

This war started, so the rumourscape tells us, because of two men, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar. Kiir was – and remains – the President of South Sudan. A member of the Dinka ethnicity, the country's largest, he has been the leader of the SPLM/A since the death John Garang de Mabior in July 2005.<sup>240</sup> Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer, was the country's Vice President from the time of independence in July 2011 until his sudden dismissal in the middle of 2013. This dismissal allegedly happened because Kiir

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<sup>240</sup> The SPLM as a movement or party is the political wing of the SPLM/A while the SPLA is the army or military.

feared Machar was trying to take over the leadership. On top of this, the weekend of 14-15 December was the occasion for the SPLM General Assembly, at which it was said Machar tried to challenge the legitimacy and constitutionality of Kiir's leadership and attempt to have him removed, or to at least have his powers constrained. At the General Assembly, however, Machar and his supporters were refused the chance to speak and, in anger, they left, not to return. Such is the inter-personal dislike and ethnic and political wrangling that ostensibly not only started but continues the crisis.

Thus, the rumourscape was born out of mutual antagonism: Kiir and Machar were at odds. Everyone knew Machar would challenge Kiir's leadership. This was why he was fired. The stories relate that, on the day in question, Machar and his closest supporters left Juba. This was considered an ominous sign, as it meant 'something bad was going to happen: either they [Machar and his supporters] knew fighting was going to happen' – meaning they had already planned for violence if they failed in their challenge to Kiir – or, worried for their lives given Kiir's recent dictatorial practices, 'they knew they would be hunted down'. Either way, Machar's removal did not bode well. Sometime before midnight on Sunday December 15, fighting broke out at the Juba barracks, quickly escalating along an all-too-familiar ethnic dimension.

So, a history of increasingly conflict-ridden interpersonal, political and interethnic relations, the ousting of the Vice-President and his withdrawal from the capital was followed by an outbreak of ethnicised violence within the army. That was the night of December 15. Once fighting began, however, it quickly escalated, and rumours followed suit. As the violence spread across the city and eventually to the far corners of the country, so too did narratives about what happened after the fighting had begun, who was targeting who, and the cause and extent of the atrocities involved, all of which hinged upon the increasingly important trope of ethnic warfare couched in the idioms of corruption, greed, jealousy and revenge.

People said the fighting immediately spread throughout Juba, with whole sections being destroyed. The rumourscape highlighted that, at the outbreak of violence, it was only Nuer areas affected. It told of targeted attacks by the SPLA upon particular citizen populations, in Juba and elsewhere. A dominant story narrated that Dinka, government troops or the SPLA were systematically 'gathering up and killing all the Nuer in Juba, just like cattle'.<sup>241</sup> People were stopped in the street and spoken to in Dinka. Those who did not respond or who spoke with an accent were killed on the spot. Others went around Nuer areas, burning whole blocks of wooden shacks, entering homes, and raping and killing everyone they found: whether men, women, babies or children. Several times I was shown grainy videos of people being burnt alive or driven over with military vehicles. People spoke of family members trapped inside

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<sup>241</sup> These groups are all interchangeably spoken about as, and generally considered as being, the same entity.

partially destroyed buildings, injured and starving but unable to move from fear. Such actions were narrated as being ‘the Dinka desire to take vengeance’ for events of the Second Sudanese War, especially the 1991 Bor Massacre.<sup>242</sup>

Within a few days of the conflict breaking out, there was news, and new stories, about fighting in other places in the country. Indeed, by day three it was said Dinka civilians were spontaneously taking up arms and attacking non-Dinka throughout South Sudan. Furthermore, armies of Dinka civilians were said to be mobilising in the Dinka heartland of Bahr-el-Ghazal, either to carry the war to Nuer regions or to attempt a Dinka takeover of the entire country. Targets mentioned included not only Bor, Malakal, Pibor and Wau – places that soon became synonymous with terrible violence – but Torit, Nimule, and other places closer to Pajok. These are not Dinka or Nuer areas, people noted, and should be safely outside the conflict’s ethnic dimensions. The rumourscape suggested there were only two reasons fighting would happen in such places: because people there did not support the Dinka-dominated government, an element playing on memories of the initial Equatorian refusal to support the SPLA during the early days of Anyanya II (see also Leonardi 2011; McEvoy & Murray 2008; Schomerus 2007, 2008a, 2008b) or – more worrying, because it played into widespread anti-Dinka stereotypes whose existence proved the rumourscape’s *a priori* truth – because Dinka had decided to remove all non-Dinka from the country and take it for themselves.

Narratives such as this are tied to global circulations among non-Dinka South Sudanese of stories and stereotypes that speak about Dinka perceptions of Dinka power and exceptionalism. For example, the term ‘Dinkocracy’ is a commonly used trope among non-Dinka diaspora members when discussing the supposed Dinka-oriented nepotism of South Sudan political and economic elites. The basic idea of ‘Dinkocracy’ is posited on two components: firstly, that the Dinka majority within the country’s economic, military and political elites engage in nepotistic practices designed to ensure their continuing ethnic dominance; and secondly, that dominant ethnic traits of Dinka revolve around a desire for social dominance at all costs and an inherent quickness to anger and violence toward anyone opposing or disagreeing with them.

The Dinka, so it is believed, see themselves as the ‘true’ rulers or owners of South Sudan. Therefore, the rumourscape says, they wanted to control the whole country, keeping its land and riches for themselves. The rationale was explained by one person like this:

So, when there is fighting, no one knows what is happening and some people look for any way they can to get rich or take vengeance on their neighbours. They will use

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<sup>242</sup> This is the name given to the massacre of over 2000 Dinka civilians by Riek Machar’s SPLA-Nasir at Bor on 15 November 1991.

that fighting to kill people, steal from them, blaming it on the fighting, saying it was the soldiers who killed those people or saying those people attacked them so they killed them in self-defence. So that is what the Dinka are doing there [in Juba].

A further element of this rumour is that former President Garang was a Dinka, and so is current President Kiir, and so, people say, are most of the powerful people in the army and the government. Beyond this, however, the rumourscape also mentioned the Biblical passage of Isaiah 18, well-known in South Sudan.<sup>243</sup> People say Dinka believe this passage prophesies that, following a great war, Dinka will eventually rule South Sudan as their own country.<sup>244</sup> Such narratives thus explain not only the inter-communal violence typical of all South Sudan's recent wars, but also the widespread interpersonal violence which made contemporary Juba so insecure even before the recent conflict.

The effects of these sort of rumours were an extreme and at times almost palpable disquiet towards Dinka and especially the SPLA, a feeling that was most obvious during those rare occasions when SPLA contingents had to drive through Pajok to deliver supplies to the nearby barracks at Owiny-ki-bul. At these times, although the town's streets were quiet, people gathered watchfully in small groups under the protective shade of shopfront verandas. 'Do not let them see you', I was often told. 'They will demand to know what a *munu* is doing in Pajok when the war is on. They might think you are a spy!' This sense that the army could not be trusted was perhaps best exemplified when the SPLM had a membership drive in early 2014. At this time, people within the community showed such interest in

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<sup>243</sup> The significance of this passage to Dinka communities is also noted by Hutchinson (1996, 2001), Leonardi (2011), and Lienhardt (1961).

<sup>244</sup> The New King James Version of this passage reads:

v1: Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, Which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,

v2: Which sends ambassadors by sea, Even in vessels of reed on the waters, saying, "Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth of skin, To a people terrible from their beginning onward, A nation powerful and treading down, Whose land the rivers divide."

v3: All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth: When he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see it; And when he blows a trumpet, you hear it.

v4: For so the Lord said to me, "I will take My rest, And I will look from My dwelling place Like clear heat in sunshine, Like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."

v5: For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect And the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks And take away and cut down the branches.

v6: They will be left together for the mountain birds of prey And for the beasts of the earth; The birds of prey will summer on them, And all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.

v7: In that time a present will be brought to the Lord of hosts From a people tall and smooth of skin, And from a people terrible from their beginning onward, A nation powerful and treading down, Whose land the rivers divide—To the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, To Mount Zion.

Verse 1 is considered to refer to southern Sudan: Biblically, Ethiopia referred to the Kushite empire, the people furthest south in the Biblically known world and an empire based along the upper Nile River. South Sudan is considered to be the land beyond this. Likewise, the people mentioned in v2 and v7 are said to be the those Dinka believe refers to themselves (a tall, thin, smooth-skinned people of great warriors whose lands bestride the Nile River) while what follows is God's promise to them: a country of their own with His blessing, once they present themselves to Him, and only after the destructive results of the great war mentioned in v5 and v6.

becoming 'a Party member' that Pajok and Magwi were both said to run out of membership cards in the first day of what was expected to be a week-long event. I was intrigued by this turn of events: many of the people who I knew had signed up to become an SPLM member were avidly apolitical, if not even largely against the current state of the party and its leadership. Nonetheless, when asked about their reasons for joining a party they did not support, these people generally responded in typical pragmatic Acholi fashion: 'If there is ever a problem, then the army will come and they will look at this list first. If you are not a member, then what are you? If you do not want to support the government they will think you are a rebel!' And that, the rumourscape said, was a death sentence.

Part two: Local meanings, systemic chaos

In the days following the outbreak of war, it was natural people would make sense of the conflict in reference to their own lives, experiences, and expectations. However, as those first days wore on and it became apparent the conflict would probably not come to Pajok in the immediate future, locals spent less time watching news broadcasts, listening to the radio, or phoning friends and family in Juba. Anyway, by Christmas the community was abuzz as family members living in Juba returned as much to escape insecurity as to take part in seasonal communal festivities. People soon began preparing gardens and finishing building projects which needed completing before the rains began again in March. Life seemed to return to normal. You could almost forget there was war only a hundred miles away.

Nonetheless, anytime something out of the ordinary happened or the status of the conflict changed, the stories of days, weeks or months before began reappearing: the hidden actors of the rumourscape began to resurface, and, despite some variation in content, they returned as familiar narrative and existential themes. The rebirth of the rumourscape in this way reproduced the argument of Stewart and Strathern (2004: 7), who note 'rumours follow the patterns of imputed jealousies, hostilities, and resentments... [and] keep mostly to the shadows or lurk in the background of social life, ready to reveal themselves in times of crisis'. Therefore, in this second narrative section, I describe those elements which originated months after the conflict began, between February and August 2014. Many of the fundamental themes from the initial phase of conflict continued to structure the narratives of this period also, and as well as the new rumours I highlight below, most of the rumours given above continued to move around the community.

A story prevalent after several rebel victories in February involved the SPLA specifically attempting to recruit Equatorians into the army.<sup>245</sup> This story said the SPLA was purposefully enlisting more Equatorians so all ethnicities would be involved in government forces, thereby ensuring their loyalty. ‘After all’, I was told, ‘if you had your sons and brothers in one army, you would not join the other, would you? Because that would mean you would need to fight them, and kill them, and that would be a terrible curse upon your family’. Beyond the cosmological sanctions resulting from a man killing a family member, Pajok residents highlighted the entire country would now be implicated in an anti-rebel alliance. At a time when it was thought the primarily Nuer rebels might be winning, they would assume all other ethnicities were against them, making these other ethnic groups viable targets of retaliation.

Yet another story concerned Dinka control of the armed forces. In this rumour – which I first heard in mid-March 2014, although it remained prevalent throughout the year – all non-Dinka were being removed from SPLA commands and replaced with ‘more reliable’ Dinka soldiers. This narrative said the plan was to concentrate weapons in Dinka hands, effectively creating a Dinka-led ethnic and military elite. There might be several reasons for this. The first was the simple disarmament of potentially non-loyal forces. The more insidious rationale which was seemingly preferred by the rumourscape was non-Dinka were not only being disarmed but specifically heavy weapons were being redeployed. Once possessing the tanks and artillery, Dinka would control the most deadly weapons. Linking these actions to the rumour related in the previous paragraph, this narrative said that once other ethnicities had been used as cannon fodder to defeat the Nuer rebels, Dinka would turn these weapons on their former allies, taking South Sudan for themselves. This rumour is obviously linked to an earlier point about ‘Dinkocracy’, which posits greed for money and power as a defining marker of Dinka ethnicity. Such themes are as common in the rumourscape as among the diaspora.

Not everything in the rumourscape involved Dinka, the government or the SPLA, however. Some spoke to other, different yet connected problems of life amid a civil war. Uganda’s involvement in the conflict was particularly important, especially given regional geopolitics and ongoing land disputes between communities across the border (Hopwood 2015; Leonardi & Santschi 2016; O’Byrne 2015e; Vaughan, Schomerus, & De Vries 2013). One story highlights how Ugandan forces ‘saved the government’ in the early days of the war and suggests Uganda ‘knew what was going to happen’. ‘After all’, I was

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<sup>245</sup> According to Schomerus (2008b: 79; see also Allen 1991a: 78), *Equatoria* refers to ‘the entire region now covered by the contemporary states of Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria’. Much like the more specific ethnic term *Acholi*, the designation *Equatoria* originated ‘under 19th century British–Egyptian rule and included areas of northern Uganda’. Important for the rumourscape is the fact that, unlike many other parts of the country, Equatoria is home to multiple ethnic groups, none of whom are really numerically or politically dominant.

rhetorically asked on multiple occasions, ‘how else did they [the Ugandans] know they needed to have their army ready to help Kiir if they did not already know that war was coming?’ The immoral complicity of the South Sudanese and Ugandan governments is apparent here, specifically the much disliked figures of Kiir and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. Another powerful rumour links the conflict to widespread corruption among these countries’ political and military elites. It is said politicians and the military – who are the same people in both Uganda and South Sudan, after all – use the war to smuggle money out of the country. Although long accustomed to theft of aid packages and customs or oil revenues, as well as personal uses of government budgets, the diversion of the new conflict apparently allows safer removal of what has been stolen. Indeed, some versions of this story suggest the war was primarily started simply to allow the unfettered removal of stolen resources. Such elements not only highlight the fact that responsibility for corruption lies at all levels in both the South Sudanese and Ugandan political-military establishments, but simultaneously implies that at least some people in each country knew about the war before it started. In this way, not only are elites in both countries known to be greedy and corrupt, but they are maliciously so, perhaps starting a war for personal gain.

A second Ugandan rumour relates to long standing issues regarding border demarcation, land use, and resource extraction, arguing the only reason Ugandan troops were involved is because of the greediness of the Ugandan political and military elite for access to and control over South Sudanese resources. As noted above, and as I have written elsewhere (O’Byrne 2015e), issues surrounding the demarcation and use of these borderlands were a source of growing concern in both countries, and inter-communal violence had been threatened by both sides if matters were not soon resolved. Lest this is considered too similar to a conspiracy theory, Finnström (2008), Schomerus (2012), Schomerus and Titeca (2012), and Hopwood (2015) all highlight the Ugandan military’s illegal extractive practices in neighbouring countries, providing ample evidence that such activities took place in southern Sudan during Anyanya II. Thus, tropes about violent, widespread, and endemic government and military corruption and complicity relating to Dinka and the SPLA are replicated in narratives about rebels and Ugandans. Similar assumptions are staple components throughout the rumourscape, even after March 2014, when the violence seemed to stabilise within the country’s northern and eastern regions. Indeed, I later discovered that, not long after I had left Pajok, the rumourscape’s troubling conjunctions between corruption, insecurity and marginalisation had manifest in a series of violent events resulting from mounting tensions over the border and issues of its demarcation. Again, just as with previous incidents in 2012 and 2013, Ugandan farmers were said to be crossing the border, grazing their animals in South Sudanese fields, and purposefully destroying gardens. Again they were said to be supported by the Ugandan military (the UPDF, or Ugandan Peoples’ Defence Force), who’s

commanders wanted the resources of the borderlands for their own purposes. The Pajok community could not stand idly by and watch their precious land and resources plundered. Just as in 2012 and 2013, Pajok youth countered by burning down huts and slaughtering the animals of Ugandan families living near the border. These actions were followed during August 2015 by an UPDF invasion of the borderlands region, a manoeuvre which involved gun and possibly mortar attacks on civilians, the displacement of hundreds and the total closure of the border to trade (Catholic Radio Network 2015a, 2015c, 2015d; Eye Radio 2015a, 2015b). Eastern Equatoria State Local Government and Law Enforcement Minister Lokai reported the dispute began 'after Ugandan government graded a road into South Sudan territory, compelling the community to defend the area' (Catholic Radio Network 2015b). The actions of the Ugandan military and construction companies likely only reconfirmed the rumourscape as well as the Pajok community's greatest fears: that Uganda was stealing South Sudanese land and resources, and that this was being done with the tacit approval of the South Sudanese government.

As can be seen, the connections between corruption and the theft of money and other resources runs strongly throughout the rumourscape, with the governments and militaries of both countries being widely considered tools of autocratic and oppressive political supremacy. I therefore suggest an important component of the rumourscape is South Sudanese people's growing concern about their increasing marginalisation from power, wealth, and democracy in the new state (Ferguson 1999; O'Byrne 2015e).<sup>246</sup> In a context of existential uncertainty or the loss of political agency, excluded from the workings of democracy and the state, rejected from the machinations of money and power, and denied representation, progress or development, the rumourscape becomes an active engagement with the political process, allowing a space within which someone can retake their agency and reaffirm their personhood and subjectivity (see also Finnström 2008; Stewart & Strathern 2004).

Feelings of marginalisation are widespread in Pajok. Discourses about the social, cultural, political, economic and geographical marginalisation of Pajok are extensively used in community members' everyday interactions, and residents feel deeply marginalised in relation to other peoples and places in South Sudan, especially Magwi (as County capital) and the Dinka (as an ethnopolitical elite). As Ferguson (1999) notes, the promise of modernity brings expectations that usually not only go unactualised but are very often actually impossible to meet at all. Thus, community members feel forgotten by developmental and government actors as well as the political and economic processes

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<sup>246</sup> It is interesting to note the connections here between rumour and conversion to PECC forms of Christianity: speaking of Robbins (2009a) analysis of Pentecostal conversion among the Urapmin, Hann (2014) suggests 'that religions that offer a strong notion of transcendence (salvation in another world) have a natural appeal to geographically remote peoples marginalised by secular development trends'.

of the new South Sudan, relegated to the margins, liminal and ignored. This has a definite effect on how Pajok residents engage with the political process at both the local and national levels, as well as with each other.

However, although the meaning-making function is an important aspect of the Pajok rumourscape, it should not be the sole component of consideration. As I argue in Chapter 8, just as conceptualisations of witchcraft stories based solely in articulations of the occult economy are limited in scope, so too are those implicitly functionalist understandings of rumour which limit themselves to one or both their meaning-making or political functions. As the above discussion suggests, these are no doubt important. However, if such rumours are attempts to become part of the political process (as, for example, Finnström [2008: 190] suggests), then the people who mobilise the rumours are probably as likely to expect them to actively engage in working upon the world as (re)present it. And it is this inherent expectation of the active and ontologically engaged social and political life of rumours that shows why rumours must be understood as agents.

For me, one of the most obvious examples of how elements of the Pajok rumourscape had a direct impact upon the community was a series of meetings that were held during the middle of 2014. Over the course of the meetings, the conflict was always the dominant concern, and the position of the community in relation to the conflict was continually discussed. According to rumourscape at this time, pro-rebel supporters had started trying to recruit new adherents to their campaign from among the young, disaffected males who comprised much of the population of the South Sudanese-dominated refugee camps in Uganda, some of whom have been residing in the camps since the previous war (i.e., since the mid-to-late 1980s). The camp specifically targeted for this recruitment drive was said to be Kiryandongo in central Uganda.

This targeting of Kiryandongo posed a special problem for Pajok residents, as historically Kiryandongo has not only been numerically dominated by Acholi but is particularly connected to Pajok: because of the history of the Sudanese Wars and the size of the Pajok community relative to other South Sudanese Acholi groups, Kiryandongo was where the majority of Pajok's refugee-background community settled prior to the CPA in 2005 (Kaiser 2000, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010). A number of the community continue to maintain families, properties, or businesses there. This historical connection means many of the young men allegedly recruited by the rebels would likely have Pajok connections or heritage.

This historical connection and its potentially violent future implications worried the community immensely. Thus the series of meetings. In the end, despite personal political tendencies and the fact that some community members made highly emotive threats toward other Pajok residents – some of

these threats were directed at anyone who would let their kin or family join the rebel faction and bring down the violent retribution of the army upon the community, while others were directed toward anyone who might want to stop them from doing so – the community seemed nearly united in deciding that the best course of action was to continue to remain pointedly outside of the conflict but sympathetic to the current, and as many people noted, democratically elected government. Public statements were made and a group of representatives were sent to the County capital in Magwi to reassure the County Commissioner of the community's position. Likewise, anyone with contacts or kin still remaining in Kiryandongo were directed to advise them to ignore any request to join the rebel force.

### Discussion: The social and sorcerous life of rumours

Many authors suggest rumours are used as explanatory devices to interpret and understand otherwise inadequate reports about people and events (Allport & Postman 1947; Drake 1989; Finnström 2008; Stewart & Strathern 2004; Tambiah 1990). This may often be true. Nonetheless, such evaluations miss much which is most interesting or important about Pajok's contemporary rumourscape. Therefore, I have argued that the rumours composing the Pajok rumourscape should be understood as social agents with their own socially embedded lives.

Following Tambiah (1985: 2), for who 'human beings anywhere and everywhere are simultaneously in their actions involved in two modalities; the modality of causality and the modality of performative acts', I suggest rumour is precisely where these two modalities meet: they are performative acts which are not only caused but which in turn are themselves causes leading to, as their effects, new acts and performances. Moreover, I argued earlier that the very act of speaking creates new realities fundamentally different to those preceding them. In this way, words engage in forms of ontopoiesis and cosmogenesis which demand to be understood as manifestations of magical power by researchers and locals alike. Furthermore, it is my contention that rumours are a particular type of magical and causal actor, one which, if not precisely a witch, certainly resembles witchcraft in both its actions and effects. And the very fact that the power of a rumour resides within itself – as part of its intrinsic qualities as a spoken, disembodied thing – compels analysis to proceed along a line of flight from rumours to witchcraft; from being-words to the becoming-sorcerer (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Therefore, due to the inherent similarities between the actions and effects of both witchcraft and rumour, I suggest it may be analytically useful to conceptualise the effects of rumour in similar ways to those of witches.

The link between rumours and witchcraft has been noted several times (Allen 2015a, 2015c; Bleek 1976; Bonhomme 2012; Moore & Sanders 2001b; Stewart & Strathern 2004; Strathern, Stewart & Whitehead 2006; White 2000). Although coming to similar conclusions from different epistemological and theoretical positions to myself, Stewart and Strathern (2004: 91; citing Moore & Sanders 2001b: 12) explicitly link rumour to witchcraft, noting ‘rumour, like witchcraft itself,... enters into the multiple worlds of modernity not only as a factor “contiguous” with social changes but also “constitutive of modernity” itself’. In this way, not only is witchcraft a fundamental component of modernity, as many sources claim (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1997; Geschiere 1997; Moore & Sanders 2001a, 2001b), but so too are narrative and rumour (also see White [2000]).

This is an important observation. However, beyond the avowed links between witchcraft, rumours, politics and modernity, I suggest that – like witchcraft (see Chapters 6 and 8) – rumours are primarily social-relational or intersubjective in nature (Handman 2014; Jackson 1998, 2002; Voloshinov 1986). Namely, rumour is about the personal experience and evaluation of everyday social relations. In writing about such personal evaluations of everyday relationality, Jackson (2002: 141, cited in Finnström 2008: 173) argues that ‘the source of a suspicion that something or someone, even fate, is conspiring against you... is intersubjective’. That is, it is ‘the cumulative outcome of a felt lack of recognition, of material equality, of power, and of knowledge, in one’s relations to others’. In other words, the social, political, economic and relational are all intimately interwoven.

Indeed, Strathern, Stewart and Whitehead (2006: 17) argue that ‘it is quite evident that the production of rumour goes hand in hand with the reproduction of social and political relationships’, while social psychologists Allport and Postman (1947: 169) have argued, ‘rumours... saturate our social relationships’. All these statements could just as easily be applied to witchcraft as to the stories one tells oneself about others. However, as Stewart and Strathern (2004: 4) caution, it is important to note that both magic and rumour reflect wider sociocultural processes of trying to ‘come to terms with, or negotiate, [uncertain] social situations’. Indeed, as Jackson notes throughout his *oeuvre*, the intersubjective is not only found but constituted in precisely such social negotiations.

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, witchcraft is, if anything, intersubjective. So too are rumours. That is, they are found in, defined by, and experienced through one’s social and personal relations with others. After all, as Handman (2014: 162; see also Voloshinov 1986) has noted, ‘all language is necessarily intersubjective’. And as also demonstrated in the last chapter, witchcraft in Pajok is nearly always about interpersonal relations refracted through the lens of a person’s subjective assessment of their lack ‘of recognition,... material equality, [or] power’ (Jackson 2002: 141). Further, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the essence of the Pajok rumourscape is making and

interpreting subjectively evaluated statements about social, political and economic marginalisation. More than this, however, these statements can act – and, powerfully so – without intention or consciousness. Such faculties are inherent within their very being; that is, in being an inherent embodiment of power to effect the world simply through Being, rumour demonstrates witch-like powers.

Stewart and Strathern (2004: 29) suggest rumour ‘act[s] as a kind of witchcraft by projecting guilt on others in ways that may cause them harm’. As I have just argued, such an understanding is relevant to the interconnections and similarities between witchcraft and rumour in Pajok, as well as to how the intersubjective elements of daily life connect to conflict and cosmology. Further, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, in such situations, rumour-persons are created also. Therefore, what I particularly want to highlight is the ways in which the conceptual connections between rumour and witchcraft might be concurrently understood as relating to notions of personhood and relationality, and especially the immanent potential for – as relational impulses towards (Chua 2015) – the distributed nature of *both* a specific (rumour or witchcraft) element of personhood *and* the relations involved in the mobilisation of these. By this I mean that voicing a rumour can be seen as an act which simultaneously imparts pieces of two persons into the social situation – the speaker-as-person and the rumour-as-person. These are received by the hearing/relating other and, through their incorporation of that rumour into their lifeworld, a situation is created within which the rumour changes not only the specific relations involved but also all three persons (speaker, rumour, and hearer). Without wanting to force the point, it might be said that we have a social-relational context within which simply conversing may have dividualising impulses, such as what Handman (2014: 164) describes for contemporary Guhu-Samane communities. Moreover, given the intrinsic power which Bialecki (2011), Coleman (2000; 2015) and Keane (2006) have all suggested discursive statements hold among evangelicals, it is possible evangelical Acholi even more than their peers will allow the ontological possibility of relational word-persons. In fact, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, this may even be considered the basis of some of their most important elicitations of relationality from the Divine.

### Some concluding thoughts: Narratives, conflicts, temporalities

In conclusion, I now want to connect some of the recurring ideas of existential uncertainty, narrative persons and rumours to the novel temporalities involved in trying to speak about and understand, let alone delineate, the beginnings and ends of conflict at any scale. As should be appreciated, the rumourscape blurs and complicates the assumptions and distinctions held by many outsiders about

the histories of the conflicts the people of Pajok have experienced: not only are at least four different wars subsumed within each other (the two Sudanese wars of Anyanya I and Anyanya II, the conflict in northern Uganda, and the current violence which is the subject of the rumours I presented herein), but separate conflicts in differing countries and at different times are fused into narratives which tell of oppression and destruction occurring and reoccurring across international and temporal boundaries. Such narrative manoeuvres – simultaneously both unifying and discontinuous – force the observer to question both how time is marked as well as how pasts, presents, and futures are delineated, throwing into focus often unstated and even unconsidered assumptions about temporal flows and the march of history.

This should not be a surprising conclusion: as Vigh (2008; see also Whitehead and Finnström 2013a, 2013b) has suggested, when violence is a continual existential potentiality, what is far more surprising than such temporal and contextual complications are arbitrary and decontextualized statements demanding that ‘this war began here’ or ‘this violence ended then’. Indeed, as Nordstrom (2004; see also Whitehead 2013) has argued, the ‘when’ of war is as analytically problematic as the ‘where’, ‘how’ or ‘who’ of war. For example, evidence from South Sudan suggests it is in the ongoing historical and contemporary interactions between local conditions, national elites, and supposedly modern and progressive outside actors which not only caused but actually continues the current war, as well as allowing the extremities of violence for which it has become known. Thus, by using the Pajok rumourscape to focus our analytical gaze on the complex and blurred interconnections between the ends and beginnings and re-beginnings and further ends of violence in this region, not only do the actors involved and the roles and functions of memory and agency stand out as more complicated than first imagined, but the imaginative work taking place reiterates the poignancy of Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) observation that the quest for meaning is fundamental to the human condition.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: COSMIC FLOWS AND DEMONIC SYSTEMS THEORIES

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### A fortuitous memory

The light was fading quickly as dusk descended over the seemingly endless fields of maize, and I was walking slowly back home, taking my time to digest the long and somewhat rambling discussion about demons, witchcraft, and similar phenomena I had just had with Joseph. It was September, the height of the rainy season, and although Marie and I had already been living in Pajok for over a year, I had the distinct feeling I was only now getting a sense of what I had travelled there to discover: the similarities, differences, and entanglements between local and Christian cosmologies.

Deep in thought, the hand tugging at my arm brought me to an abrupt halt. Startled, I turned to find Joseph's daughter Golda beckoning me. '*Bin, Ryan*'. Come.

Joseph's compound was only a few hundred metres away, and together Golda and I retraced our steps as I wondered what I or Joseph had forgotten.

Jumping to his feet as he saw us, Joseph again greeted me warmly, although I had left only minutes before. '*Omera* (brother), I forgot! It came to me just now as you left, that is why I sent the child. We must go and speak with brother Saul in Magwi.<sup>247</sup> He has been underwater, he will know the answers to all your questions! We must call him and arrange a meeting'.

Assenting, we tried to call Saul, but to no avail. As usual, the MTN phone network proved less than reliable. Agreeing that Joseph should continue to try to make contact, I left him some money for the phone calls and went home, perplexed as to what this might mean.

Late the next day, Joseph stopped by our compound. He said he had been unable to contact Saul. Undeterred, I thanked him for his effort. The same scene was repeated several days later, and then after church in a further two weeks. Knowing Marie and I were leaving in November, Joseph was becoming distraught, convinced the only way I would learn the truth about demons was through meeting Saul.

'Calm down, brother', I told Joseph when we spoke after church. 'If it is God's will, it will happen. If not, it does not matter. I will learn these things from someone else'. With that, Joseph left.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Unlike most names used herein, Saul is a pseudonym. Not only had I forgotten to ask Saul if I should use his real name – as other people insisted I did – but, in this instance, I consider a pseudonym appropriate.

<sup>248</sup> Joseph later he told me what I had said made him happy, that I had 'spoken truly', and that this was a sign I was in God's favour and had been brought to Pajok for a reason. He also said it was my attitude that had allowed the meeting with Saul to happen, as it was a way of God testing us, to see how much we trusted Him.

## Introduction: Flows of evil, narratives of movement

The end of the world is nigh. Every Christian knows this. Under the water, there are demon cities. This is increasingly common knowledge among evangelicals across Sub-Saharan Africa, including in Acholi speaking South Sudan (Allen 2015a, 2015b). Indeed, you only need attend to the wickedness of the world to see how these two facts are connected. This is because, in return for the souls of the innocent, satanic powers flow up from the underwater cities of the demon world to those people on earth who sell their families for success in the world above. In this way, evil is repaid with status, power and wealth.

This chapter is about such cosmic movements, of manifold and largely invisible flows of persons, power and wealth between not only different times and places but also multiple dimensions. It is about the real and the unreal, the dead and the undead. This chapter, therefore, is an exploration of the incorporation of non-Acholi cosmologies – both Christian and non-Christian – within local cosmological frameworks. In particular, I emphasise demonic, vampire or zombie-like paradigms that reflect local interpretations of global flows of power and evil echoing findings elsewhere in elsewhere in Africa, particularly within the occult economies literature.<sup>249</sup>

I will argue that although the incorporation of these elements reference and make sense of – as well as truth claims about – global networks of cosmologies, monies, morality and power, such narratives are as much about what is happening within local communities as they are the incorporation of those communities within the global system. After all, as Sahlins (1987, 1993) and others have argued, all entanglements with global actors and processes take place within local worlds, under local conditions, and through local conceptualisations. . Or, as Horton (1975a: 221) has put it, ‘it stares one in the face that the crucial variables [in processes of change] are not the external influences (Islam, Christianity), but the pre-existing thought-patterns and values, and the pre-existing socioeconomic matrix’. Likewise, it is imperative to emphasise that the narratives referenced are as much about the spiritual or cosmological as they are the material or economic: in the minds and lives of my interlocutors, at least, it is precisely the religious dimensions of such experiences that are not only the most real but also the most important. The rest – the money, power, technologies and so on – are the details bringing the religious to life.

Thus, I will demonstrate that, in Pajok, the globalisation of both morality and cosmology underpinning and empowering evangelical Christianity is refracted in the incorporation of non-Christian and non-

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<sup>249</sup> See for example: Allen (2015a, 2015b), Ashworth (2000, 2005), Bonhomme (2012), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), Geschiere (1997), Moore and Sanders (2001a, 2001b), Niehaus (2005, 2012), Niehaus, Mohlala and Shokane (2001), Shaw (2002), West (2008), and White (1997, 2000).

Acholi elements within and alongside local evangelical frameworks, problematizing not only Christian cosmologies and moralities but assumptions about exactly what is continuous and what ruptured within such entanglements. In other words, I will establish that in Pajok it is not only custom and culture but Christianity itself undergoing radically disjunctive transformations.

Therefore, in this paper I link local demonic narratives to aspects of the occult economy, demonstrating that, at least partially, they are local manifestations of wider attempts to understand those mutually reinforcing processes known as colonialism, globalisation, modernisation and so on. However, as well as the commonly stated economic elements to African narratives about zombie workers and demon pacts (Behrend 2009, 2011; Betelsen 2014; Moore & Sanders 2001b; Shaw 2002; Stewart & Strathern 2004), my analysis will highlight how local systems of meaning incorporate wider regional and global cosmological figures, practices, and understandings like underwater demon worlds (Allen 2015a, 2015b; Bonhomme 2012; Eni 1987) or evangelical notions of spiritual warfare (DeBernardi 1999; Hackman 2015; Rio 2010; Robbins 2003, 2004). In this way, although I link local demonic narratives to global processes, my analysis goes beyond those studies which seem to begin and end with the occult economy or its local material effects. Indeed, I suggest there is more to be understood about such narratives than the local production of meanings about globalisation: what is lost in such analyses is the importance of the very spiritual elements making these supposedly economic phenomena stand out in the first place. In fact, one could argue that the preponderance and limits of such interpretations reflect a recurring flaw in western academia and sociocultural life: the marginalisation of the cosmological, religious, or spiritual to the privilege of the politico-economic.

Therefore, in linking local processes to global occurrences, I demonstrate how global incursions become locally meaningful. This is done through the autobiographical account of one man – Saul, a pastor in the AIC church in Magwi – who has been under water (*te pii*) to the land of demons (*lobo catani*). What is significant about this account is not the thematic content (which shares commonalities with similar narratives across Africa) but rather that it recounts the narrator's own experience. As Knut Christian Myhre (2014: 14) has noted, 'such stories are nearly always of a handed-down character and concern and involve someone else than the person recounting them'. As far as I am aware, the first-hand nature of this story makes it unique within the African ethnographic record. For this reason alone it is a worthy addition to the literature.<sup>250</sup>

However, as Finnström (2015: S228) argues, 'people's stories, based on their journeys in life, [are] not necessarily linear or with any clear direction. Lives are often messed up; so are their chronicles'. The

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<sup>250</sup> For an equally unique exposition of 'supernatural' practices, see Jackson's (1989) accounts of self-confessed shapechangers among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone.

same can be said of the autobiography which Saul told me: a complex temporal rhizome-web I had to disentangle within the telos of my own cultural background before I came anywhere near its comprehension. Indeed, of everything I encountered 'in the field', the content and narration of Saul's autobiography was that which challenged me most, fiercely demonstrating my epistemological and methodological limits. It took weeks of agonising self-reflection to come to terms with the fact that, in 'comprehending' this account, I had necessarily done violence to both Saul and the narrative realities presented (Jackson 2002). However, while reading Finnström's (2015) article '*War Stories and Troubled Peace*' during early drafts of this thesis, the violent truths of my epistemic hegemony came flooding out of the black-and-white typeset pages. As Finnström (2015: S223) notes therein, 'when the agency of the storyteller... is restricted to a dominant and linear discourse, alternative and more complex experiences and sociopolitical realities are obscured'.

Saul's account raises several epistemological and methodological issues: How are we to make sense of this narrative? How can we comprehend experiences in which our subjects move not only between time and place but different dimensions of thought and existence? How can we conceptualise global flows of wealth and power without understanding cosmological flows of evil, especially as these simultaneously narrate vast colonising networks of monies, moralities and power? As the act of narration 'is always steeped in relations of power... an anthropological ambition must be to find ways to account for the agency of the protagonist of the story or the storyteller herself' (Finnström 2015: S225). I have therefore attempted to re-complexify Saul's story in such a way as to make it as coherent as possible for the reader while still doing justice to Saul's experiences and interpretative agency. Moreover, in a further reflexive attempt to reinscribe Saul's agency, as well as to engage in my own politics of storytelling (Jackson 2002), I refuse the academic tendency to negate ontological multiplicity and, as an ethical and political move as much as an epistemological or theoretical one, steadfastly encourage the reader to 'take things as they are' (Jackson 1996). However, for the sake of narrative simplification and engagement, I have taken license to structure Saul's biography more like an extended vignette than an interview. Thus rendered, his story jumps between first, second and third person accounts. Following Holbraad (2012), one might call this as much a form of 'ontography' as ethnography.

However, wary that my presentation of Saul's biography might be thought to exoticise or trivialise the world and worldview of an African man – and, by inference, Africans and Africa in general – it is not only Africans but also missionaries who talk about demons this way. In fact, inspiration to begin inquiry into *te pii* started from comments made by visiting American missionaries rather than local South Sudanese residents. It is also important to note here that *te pii* is both a new and an old construct: it is old in a broader regional comparative sense in which, across Africa, large bodies of water are

connected to powerful spiritual forces.<sup>251</sup> On the other hand, the exact dimensions of this specific manifestation of *te pii* is something relatively new within the Acholi South Sudanese world, at least – likely only since the 1990s – although it is now somewhat standard across the wider region, especially among evangelicals.<sup>252</sup>

## A meeting in Magwi

The next time I saw Joseph, he was beaming with glee and bursting to tell me the good news: he had accidentally come across Saul in the market that afternoon and arranged for a meeting later that week.

‘Saul is a pastor now, Joseph’, Joseph told me, calling me by our shared name and speaking English as he always did, ‘but once, in Uganda during the war, he was one with the demons.’<sup>253</sup> He has been under the water. He was given their power. He made the promises. He knows all their secrets’.

On the day in question, Joseph and I left early in the morning, riding Joseph’s dilapidated and decidedly unsafe Indian *bodaboda* (motorcycle) the 40 kilometres from Pajok to Saul’s home in Magwi. We arrived at his compound, a rather ambiguously demarcated collection of mud huts surrounded by trees, and found Saul waiting for us. Joining him were two paternal uncles, a scattering of children desperate to see the *munu*, and Reverend Yofes, the oldest and most respected member of the AIC in Magwi County. The presence of Yofes surprised me, as he had been ill for several months.

After the obligatory greetings, small talk and food, we eventually settled down on to the matter at hand.<sup>254</sup>

‘Brother Joseph tells me you want to know about under the water, about demons?’ Saul began. ‘If this is true, then I can tell you. I know these things, I have been there. Let us begin’.

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<sup>251</sup> For example, Burton (1982: 478). See also Evans-Pritchard (1945, 1951, 1956), Kenny (1977), Lienhardt (1954, 1961), Seligman (1925), Seligman and Seligman (1932), and Zahan (1979).

<sup>252</sup> For example, see Allen (2015a, 2015b), Bonhomme (2012), Eni (1987), Kenny (1977), White (2000).

<sup>253</sup> This statement could mean either Saul was an *ajwaka* (spirit medium) or he was possessed or in some other relationship with demonic forces. Unfortunately, excited by the news, I never asked for clarification, although context suggests it is most likely simply a relationship based on the exchange of souls for wealth.

<sup>254</sup> For Acholi, the greatest sign of sociality and friendship is the sharing of food, which is always given to guests, no matter how fleeting their visit. The refusal either to give food or eat that which is offered is not only the height of ill manners but a denial of sociality, and can even be understood as a refusal to accept the humanity of the other party. In this way, the refusal of food is sometimes taken either as the proof of sorcerous intent or an accusation of witchcraft.

While Joseph did his best to translate as Saul moved backwards and forwards between Acholi and English, what Saul recounted remains the most amazing biographical account I have ever heard. This is what he said.<sup>255</sup>

Going underwater on dragon boats

‘During the last war’,<sup>256</sup> Saul began, ‘I was a fish seller in Uganda. I had a friend and together we would catch fish to sell. My friend came to me one day, and we began drinking very heavily. Then we fell asleep, outside, right where we had been sitting. During the night, I woke up and found my friend missing. He did not return until morning, saying we did not have enough money, that we needed more but he knew how to get it’.

But to get it they had to go on a boat. On that boat there were some eggs Saul’s friend said were for catching very big fish but only worked in the middle of the river. They went out on the water but when they got to the middle, suddenly a very heavy wind started blowing.

‘When the wind came’, Saul said, ‘we found we were not in a boat but in a *matatu* (a minivan taxi).<sup>257</sup> The driver was just a like a normal person but with the head of a snake. The taxi was full of people but no-one was talking, everyone was silent. And the water had come up over the taxi. We were not on top of the water but under it and the taxi was driving through it like on a road.

The reason there were the eggs was because it was not a real boat. It was a demon, a snake. When you enter, the taxi goes underwater. And the eggs are the head, the boat is the body’.

Under the water there are demon cities

‘Under the water’, Saul related, ‘there was a place like a bus park and the environment was just like above. There were buildings, plants, people. But it was silent. No meeting people, no greeting; just going into offices’.

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<sup>255</sup> As Saul spoke for over three hours, and as much of what he said was repeated, I have edited his narrative significantly so as to help both with comprehension as well as the constraints of space. Nonetheless, I have attempted to retain anything seeming important, when in doubt choosing to keep something rather than edit too strongly. I have also tried to maintain a sense of the personal idiosyncrasies of Saul’s speech.

<sup>256</sup> Anyanya II, or the Second Sudanese War (1983-2005).

<sup>257</sup> Capable of seating 15 or so people and ubiquitous around central and eastern Africa, a *matatu* (also called a taxi) is a van with 3 or 4 rows of seats that runs both urban and rural routes and is similar to a local bus service.

Some people came to meet Saul and his friend and take them to the Demon King (*Rwot Jok Madit*).<sup>258</sup> Those people spoke to Saul's friend, wanting to know why they came to that place. His friend said they needed money. And so they started asking them many questions: 'What is your plan? To be rich? What for? When do you want the money? What will you do with it?'

But when they went under the water, Saul was not planning anything, so he asked for the money to be given when he returned to South Sudan. Because of this, they told him to go to Mombasa, to get his power there. First, however, they needed 60 cattle.

At this point, the old pastor who had been listening silently, Yofes, entered the discussion:

If you want money, you need to give a cow. But a cow is a human being! So they take your family so you can get rich or powerful. Especially if a hard worker! Because they take the life out of you but you are not dead, just your spirit taken. Like dead but being alive. They get dead people to work for them. Digging, planting, fishing.

'Yes!' cried Saul. 'The community are fearful of them. They bring the sickness, death, unlawful behaviour. And the bodies under the water multiply. Today there is one, two. Then tomorrow ten! And the war now in Juba (South Sudan's capital), that is because politicians go to The King Underwater, because they want the money, the power.'

And underwater is like the surface, like going to an office in the city. There are demons directing you, showing you where to go, but no talking. Just showing. And it is very big: many buildings, many people. There are many women down there. Beautiful women. And it is men in the offices, but the women are the messengers. When the men want something, a person, they get the women to bring. The men are the directors, the women are messengers. Like in an office.

And the offices are like government offices. So they send you to one office, then another. If you need money, go to that office. If you need something else, go to another. The women take you. They say "get an application", so the women take you. Then another for the stamp'.

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<sup>258</sup> The term 'Demon King' was the term used by Joseph during translation. The Acholi term '*Rwot*' should probably be translated as 'chief' or better 'political leader', although it is applied to any person of high political status, whether king, chief, governor or – historically – colonial officer.

### Globalising the demonic contract

After this, Saul said, 'I left and went to Mombasa, but the journey was easy, like moving on air. To travel to Mombasa you go underwater on the dragon boat, not above ground. When you reach it, you do not go to the real city, only to the underwater Mombasa where the demons are, not above.

When I reached Mombasa, I was given many powers: the power of free transport, to move without problem. Never again to pay. Another was the contacts on the phone so I could call the demons if I wanted something or needed someone to die'.

And when Saul went got to Mombasa, they looked at him, gave him a permit, and sent him to India.

'They told me my money needed to come from India. And they sent me there because when they asked what I needed, I said riches, but not now. Later. So the demons knew I would win many people for them. The ones given power in Mombasa want to be rich now, but not me. So I was sent to India. Because power in my future. And so they gave me the power of thunder and lightning, to bring people to them. Because whenever people gather, they will die in large numbers when you burst it on them. And that is why they sent me to see the King of All the Demons in India'.

### Technologies of evil

'The Demon King (*Rwot Jok Madit*) was there in India', Saul said, 'a very beautiful woman, an Indian woman. I was taken to meet her. And when I reached the Master King, money was given to me. The Master King asked me when I would start my plans. I said wait two years and then I would start. Then they demanded more cattle. But like Yofes told you, when they talk about cattle they mean people, human beings. And when I made the promise the Master King gave me a magic screen. Just like a computer. You use it to see people. Anywhere, even America. So then, if you want anything, you look into the screen and it will be sent to you. Automatic. And they gave me a hedgehog,<sup>259</sup> to stay with me and hold my power.

The main city of demons is in India. The Generals, the President, the business men, they all go there to get power. You know, many things people sell are made in India. They all say "India" on them, and the people who sell them are powerful! They were sent to India also! The ones with the small shops, they have only been to Mombasa. But the big shops, the ones with all the things made in India and China, they are the ones who were sent to India. That is how you know.

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<sup>259</sup> This was likely a porcupine – an animal exemplary in its anomaly (Douglas 2002) – but hedgehog was how it was translated.

There is nothing stronger than the Demons of India. They are the only ones with that screen, and so they are powerful. It gives whatever you want, kills whoever you want. Even people in America! And the hedgehog, that is a special weapon. You take that, you pull the hair from it and throw it at people. On the screen is the picture of who you want to destroy. Then you take the hair of the hedgehog and throw it at the picture and they will die. And then the underwater agents will take them, to work. That is why they give people that power.

You know, there was a motorcycle accident here last week. People walking on the road were killed! That was at night, so done by the demons. And that was done because the local shopkeeper has been to Mombasa. Because the demons need to take what was promised. So the people underwater sent their agents to come and take those people. They possess them and take them back with them.<sup>260</sup>

And the demons there, they look just like Indians. The women all have long hair and wear clothes on their heads. The men are all very fat. The buildings are all very big and beautiful, shiny and metal and glass, just like in America. And there are many vehicles. What is here on earth is also under the sea’.

#### *Powers, demonic and divine*

Then, when the Sudanese war finished in 2005, Saul returned to South Sudan. He said:

‘I had promised to start my work at that time, but now did not want to. So the people underwater, they started to really disturb me. Especially after 2009, when I got married, they really disturb me very bad. They came me with the snake and made me to eat it. Eating it is eating the flesh of people underwater. And I ate, but without knowing. And so they disturb me very bad.

Another time, someone was lost in the bush. People wanted to look for her, but because I did not help they were going to fine me. When I refused to pay, they started fighting me. So I drank some alcohol and was given the power by the demons to scatter them. Many came to fight me, but I picked it up a motorcycle and threw it at them and they ran away.

That happened after I ate the flesh. That is the power [of that flesh]. That is why I fought those people’.

‘Another time’, Saul said, ‘I broke the law of the demons so they planned to destroy my wife. But my wife was a Believer, a True Christian who went to church. I had never even been inside a church! But then the missionaries came and I asked the missionaries to pray for me and burn the demon things.

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<sup>260</sup> A narrative within a similar ‘transnational genre’ (White 2000) is given by Piot (1999: 196) for the Kabre of northern Togo where, it is rumoured, witches ‘roam the national roadways and cause many of the deadly accidents’.

So they came and started to pray. Immediately the demons came and possessed me and threw me down so I was crying and shaking. Then two women appeared and took me up in the air to the top of a mountain. They fight me and beat me and gave me dried flies and forced me to eat them. After this, they said I had much work still to do for them, so they took me back to the bottom of the mountain.

And when I returned home I found many people. But I did not talk to anyone, did not say anything. Just went to eat, alone, no sharing. But a pastor started praying and cursed the demon that possessed me. And they took all the things I had been given and burned them, even the hedgehog!

Now, because I have broken the promise with them, demons always come to me, to take me and throw me down. But I fight them with prayer. Prayer is my weapon'.

#### Promises broken, relationships ended

'Why did I end my promise with them?' Saul responded to my question. 'First, I was not having that desire. Two, when you eat the snake, that is the flesh of the demon. That was a problem, because they started disturbing me. Three, I was thrown down with sickness. So I wanted to end the relationship, because there was no reason for it. Lastly, I fought the demons over money. They came and put money inside the hut and when I went to take it, they burnt it down. I nearly died, but escaped, and then they attacked me, breaking my leg. That was it, the end of the relationship. Because they give and then they take away, because they need to take back the things they are giving. It is all lies, just to trick.

And this injury you see on my shoulder?' said Saul, moving his shirt aside to show me a ragged looking scar, 'that was the work of the demons. And here on my leg, this was the demons. Because I was not accepting them they made my motorcycle crash.

How do I know it was demons that caused that accident? Because everywhere I go I see pictures of snakes. Just there in front of me. But when I sing the name of Jesus Christ they go away. So at the time of the crash, this thing came first. I saw a picture of the snake in front of my eyes, and then the crash. That is how they take people! That is how I know.

These demons will never stop disturbing. My wife had three children killed in pregnancy. The fourth time she nearly died. But I turned to Jesus and now we have children, because I am a True Christian'.

## Discussion

### Basic ethnographic points

Before moving on to the basis of my argument, there are several important ethnographic facts and observations I want to quickly highlight. First is the frequent references to snake-like creatures. Perhaps the most obvious and relevant snake connection is Genesis Three (the Biblical 'Fall from Grace'), the moment in which a demonic snake tricks Adam and Eve into breaking their covenant with God, allowing sin to enter the world. This is a defining moment of humanity's long search for salvation, the pre-requisite required for a Biblically-condoned future apocalypse, and a defining feature of evangelical Christianity. It is also a story well-known and oft-repeated among evangelicals in Acholi South Sudan.

Moreover, snakes have a strong conceptual connection to poison, sorcery, witchcraft, or other aspects of the spiritual world among many African groups (Dalfovo 1998; Doom & Vlassenroot 1999; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Grove 1919; La Fontaine 1959; Lienhardt 1961; Middleton 1960, 1965; Seligman & Seligman 1932). Indeed, Girling (1960: 73) notes that, among the Acholi of Uganda, pregnant women are always particularly wary of snakes, 'in which *jok* is always present'. Further, stories of the magical power of snakes abound in Pajok, and snakes are linked to several important ancestral or lineage shrines: the Atebi river is said to be inhabited by several *jogi* which often appear as large, dark snakes and, on top of this, one community elder told me the *jok* residing at the sacred riverine shrine of *Worojok* 'comes as a snake' during ritual performances.<sup>261</sup>

The narrative presence of alcohol and greed are also important, as each is a significant trope in local interpretations of badness, temptation, and evil intent. For African evangelicals, alcohol is the root of all contemporary social evil, a problem especially prevalent among those tempted by the devil and a direct cause of violence, adultery, and child marriage.<sup>262</sup> It comes up in two important places in Saul's story, each of which relates to gaining or using demonic powers. Likewise, Acholi cultural articulations frame greed (*woro*) as a particularly problematic social issue, not only a major problem in local and national politics (see Chapter 7) but also the rationale behind most nefarious witch-like deeds (Chapter 6; O'Byrne 2015a).

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<sup>261</sup> *Worojok* means 'greed of [the] *jok*', indicating this *jok* has an appetite only satiated through 'eating children', a practice long been abandoned. Interestingly, the children he spoke of were specifically those having umbilical hernias, the sacrifice of whom is something which p'Bitek (1971: 133) also connects to assuaging powerful *jogi*.

<sup>262</sup> What an Acholi is likely to call 'defilement', see Leonardi *et al.* (2010) and Porter (2016).

As Jackson (2002) argues with reference to the holocaust, actively engaging in barbaric practices resulting in the brutalisation and effective dehumanisation of another person is ultimately just as dehumanising for the perpetrator as for their victim. In this way, the occult economy of *te pii* not only dehumanises those ‘sold’ but those doing the selling. Such an interpretation is further reinforced by accounts – common among evangelical locals and missionaries – linking non-Christians and ‘traditional culture’ (sic) with underwater as well as other allegedly demonic (and definitely culturally perverted) activities like cannibalism, child sacrifice, homosexuality, incest, and paedophilia. Again, this replicates discursive traditions across Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Green 1983; Moore & Sanders 2001a, 2001b; Shaw 2002; Stewart & Strathern 2004; Strathern, Stewart & Whitehead 2006), some of which very definitely ascribe such practices to the presence of Europeans or the colonial state (Betelsen 2014; Middleton 1965; White 2000).<sup>263</sup>

Likewise, there is a definite opposition throughout Saul’s narrative between two cosmological domains, both of which are simultaneously ephemeral and solid: that of the sky is a place of thunder and lightning, battle and decision, while underwater is a place of silence and waiting. Both domains are composed of a certain immateriality – water, wind, sky – and both are marked by ideals and images of passage and movement. Both are, however, also definitively solid: *te pii* has buildings, trees, and glass while action in the sky is concretised in the rocky surfaces of nearby mountaintops. These domains replicate the limits of the wider Acholi cosmos discussed in Chapter 3 and not only contrast with each other but with the domain of humans, the place of people and definite solidity, where mobility is difficult. Thus, the souls of cattle-people stay with or inside them until the moment they are ‘sacrificed’ and their soul taken to work for, and one might say join with, the demonic – simultaneously connecting *te pii* through South African zombies (Ashforth 2000, 2005; Niehaus 1993, 2005; Niehaus, Mohlala & Shokane 2001) to the partibility of Melanesian persons (Strathern 1988; Wagner 1991). The earth thus opposes *te pii*, where spirits detach parts of themselves as power and money and move both vertically (between worlds) and horizontally (both globally and in scale) in disembodied yet still personified forms.

Similarly noteworthy are recurring references to the interlinked themes of silence and a lack of proper greetings. As Porter (2012, 2016) emphasises, greetings are vital to Acholi interpretations of a ‘correct’

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<sup>263</sup> A comment from Kenny (1977: 721; see also Johnston 1902: 693) of interest relating to the trope of *te pii* is that cannibalism and witchcraft are historically associated with the island residents of Lake Victoria, people who mainlanders regard as having great magical powers to both heal and kill and who, in turn believe in the evil cannibalistic tendencies of inhabitants in other mysterious parts of the same lake. The spirits of the lake – which manifest especially as pythons to allow movement through the water – are said to require human sacrifice to allow boats to pass unharmed. The similarities between these historical ideas about Lake Victoria and *te pii* are remarkable.

social world: an inability to offer correct greetings is a sign of either madness or evil intent, equivalent to the denial of sociality and, effectively, both humanity and personhood. Furthermore, in Saul's refusal to talk to the crowd there is the socially problematic denial of greeting. This was compounded by his desire to eat by himself and his refusal to offer food to those gathered.<sup>264</sup> The denial of food and greetings alongside demonstrations of greed are important defining points in his relationships both with his demonic partners and his community: it is only after he has simultaneously mixed proof of greediness with denial of sociality that the church finally steps in and removes his possession.

#### *The occult economy of the demonic system*

Just as De Waal (2015) notes for the human world above, there is a hierarchy of nations underwater. Eerily reminiscent of Wallerstein's world systems theory (Wallerstein 2004, 2011), demonic power flows alongside global flows of wealth, from the powerful nations of the global centre through the intermediary transition zones to the communities and countries of the peripheries. In the demonic manifestation of the world system, India is the centre of power and dominance. From here evil flows concurrently with goods and money, through the ancient Islamic trade city of Mombasa, to the waiting markets of the African hinterland, where life is cheap and people have nothing to sell but their spiritual labour.

It is an empirical fact many of the larger shops in this region sell a variety of imported goods, many of which originate from India and China. Likewise, the owners of these shops often own a house and a car and have greater access to money and high status consumer goods. They are the local success stories of the world system. Further to this, just as these shop owners are considered to have necessarily engaged in the occult economy to have attained their wealth, so too are other local and national political and economic elite deemed to engage in similarly nefarious activities. 'How else do these people get so much power or money?' friends rhetorically asked on more than one occasion. Once more, such ponderings are common across Africa (Ashforth 2005; Bonhomme 2012; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2005; Niehaus, Mohlala & Shokane 2001).

*Te pii* (underwater) is not only a demonic realm but a resolutely contemporary alterity of evil. The underwater and asocial demon world not only resembles but is a perverse refraction of the social world of humans above: there are offices, taxi parks, workers. Bureaucracy reigns, and correctly

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<sup>264</sup> This desire, indicative of Europeans and related to greed, is considered one of the worst possible behavioural traits, and much effort is spent dissuading children from such predilections (Finnström 2008: 15; Onyango-Odongo 1976: 60).

completed paperwork is demanded before money is exchanged for souls. Just as in local government offices, people are herded like animals from one department office to the next. Nothing is easy.

Social relations are similarly replicated, where the faceless and uncaring bureaucracy of the world below is populated by the demonic. Elements of the occult economy are as critical to these conceptualisations of the demonic as they are elsewhere in Africa (Ashforth 2005; Bonhomme 2012; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2005; Niehaus, Mohlala & Shokane 2001). People are referred to as cattle, their souls traded like animals and, once sold, they are made to work like animals also, with such cattle-people becoming lifeless while the money given in exchange and taken back to the surface takes on a fully (re)productive life of its own. Later, the wealth created by the labours of these spiritless bodies will again be transported back above to the land of the living to procure more 'cattle' for the demonic herd. And so the system continues.

Unlike similar demonic transactions elsewhere (Nash 1993; Taussig 1980), however, I never heard an Acholi say demonic wealth cannot be saved or used for (re)productive purposes: indeed, it seems the lure of demonic wealth is precisely that it *does* increase and provide interest. Thus, in the demonic transactions of this part of Africa, wealth very definitely breeds power, status and more wealth. This, in fact, is part of its dangerous and seductive evil.

There are a number of things to note about the powers available as part of a demonic pact, especially how such a pact relates to a local life lived in a globally connected world. For example, movement is free and easy, directly contradicting the everyday realities of contemporary South Sudan, and the apparent freedom of the demon pact not only becomes socially stratifying but repeats symbolic connections between wealth and witchcraft common across Africa. Indeed, the only people who can generally move freely are businessmen, foreigners and politicians, all of whom are locally understood as potentially connected to otherworldly as well as earthly sources of money and power.

Such global flows of power and profit include those cultural flows Appadurai (1996: 33) has called 'technoscapes': 'a global configuration ... ever fluid, of technology, and the fact that technology ... now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries'. In the global configuration of demonic technoscapes, computers and mobile phones figure strongly, allowing the high speed boundary crossings Appadurai notes. Importantly, however, these boundaries are not just spatial – between Africa and India, America and South Sudan – or cultural (Appadurai's 'ideoscapes'), but also ontological and cosmological – that is, between life, death and dimensions above and below. In the terms of Douglas (2002), such ambiguities make these technologies inherently dangerous. In central Africa, mobile phones are not only regarded as a somewhat cheap and practical means of communication but, like computers, also allow communication between above and below, the human

and the demonic. Similarly, they may be used by witches to capture the voices of their prey, trapping their victims inside (Bonhomme 2012).

Furthermore, the computerised technology at the heart of the demonic technoscape is precisely that locally unavailable yet prevalent among the global elite. In fact, in the electronic desert of central Africa, possession of such magical machines might not only be the ultimate manifestation of worldly success but even definitive proof of demonic liaison. Indeed, as Bonhomme (2012: 223-224, emphasis added) has suggested for elsewhere in Africa,

The enchantment of mobile phones does not proceed from a lack of understanding of modern technology but, on the contrary, emerges from an acute perception of its potentialities. *Phones are witchcraft technology by design* ... [and] thus exemplify the occult suspicions that surround, in the popular imagination, the alliance between new communication technologies and global capitalism.

#### *Occult economies and demonic gifts*

As highlighted earlier, the Christian equivalence between snakes and the demonic is mirrored locally, and snake-demons deliberately appear to Saul to cause him or his family harm. This is the price for reneging on a transaction with the demonic, just as the lives of his unborn children might be understood as the price demanded for the deals he made underwater. As the anthropological literature has well established, with a gift comes an obligation of repayment (Appadurai 1988, 1994; Laidlaw 2000; Parry 1986; Sahlins 1974, 1997; Schrift 2014). This is its 'hau', the very nature or spirit of the gift (Mauss 1990). After all, as Mary Douglas (1990: ix) famously stated, 'there are no free gifts'. Such is the price of dealing with the devil, a perfect example of what Bonhomme (2012: 221) has called 'a dramatic illustration of the crisis of the gift in contemporary Africa' and others have called 'the dark side of social exchange' (Godbout 1998: 558). Indeed, as de Boeck (2005: 208) has likewise argued, when it comes to demonic transactions across Africa, 'underneath the visible gift lurks an invisible pattern which corrupts regular patterns of exchange'.

Just as with accounts of satanic dealings in the ethnographic literature,<sup>265</sup> Acholi evangelicals are quick to recount stories in which naïve but greedy individuals make a pact with the Devil and later regret that decision. As Bonhomme (2012: 220-221) has argued, in Africa, where witchcraft and perverted gifts are intimately interconnected, exchanges are often 'sacrifices disguised as gifts. ... Instead of

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<sup>265</sup> For example, McCreery (1995), Meyer (1999), Nash (1993) and Taussig (1980).

being the beneficiary of a gift, the recipient turns out to serve as an exchange value to pay a debt ... a total reversal of the logic'.

The rationale of an unholy alliance in which kin are sacrificed for wealth appears to be at the heart of the demonic gift in Africa. This rationale also appears in Saul's account, but with two crucial twists: not only is the debt paid with the lives of his unborn children, bringing home the insidious and untrustworthy ambiguities inherent in such dealings, but when he ends his relationship with the demonic, the debt transforms into one requiring the life of the pledge-breaker himself. As Piot (1999: 69-70) has highlighted, 'any gift establishes a relationship – of difference and of hierarchy – between two persons. As such, giving is always tied up with control... The other is in your debt'. And, Stroeken (2012: x) notes, such 'debt can mean death'.

One thing I therefore want to emphasise links the ending of Saul's underwater relationship with his refusal of money – the demonic gift – as symbolic of his simultaneous refusal both of demonic power over him and his continuing relationship with the demonic. This is a refusal not only of the power, wealth and status Saul will (perhaps only temporarily) gain as a consumer of the demonic gift but also a refusal of the power of the gift itself: that spirit which embodies and enlivens the gift and which forms the basis of its implied obligation to partake in ongoing exchange relations. In this way, Saul's denial of money is both a denial of the very basis of demonic sociality and a recognition of the inherent deception of demonic aid. Stripped of the thin pretence of altruistic assistance, all that remains of such evil is the definitive presentation of their true essence: lying, deceiving, attacking, and killing. In a final point, as Piot (1999) pointed out for the Kabre of highland Togo, in Acholi there is a significant difference between legitimate and illegitimate exchanges: legitimate exchange establishes relations – and thus persons – which promote or produce society and culture; however, illegitimate exchanges like those with demons or witches are ultimately only destructive.

### **Conclusion: Becoming-demonic and salvation through relations**

Demonic underwater stories like Saul's tell us not only about how global cultural flows of money or power or so on are locally conceptualised, but about how such flows are managed and understood in the everyday. Furthermore, from such narratives we learn about disparate sociocultural and historical processes. These include such things as the evangelisation of local cosmological systems, entities, and practices; the globalisation of not only money and power but also cosmologies, religions, and their associated meanings and moralities; and indigenous attempts at understanding the wider processes taking place in the meeting of the local and the global, within which local peoples, places, practices

and events are always enfolded and entrapped. In other words, such narratives prove one discursive location for the playing out of the processes involved in Sahlins' (1987: xiv) concept of 'the structure of the conjuncture', as well as for any local idiosyncrasies involved in such meetings.

Although this Chapter has generally moved away from a discussion of the cosmological dimensions of Acholi and Christian personhood to focus instead upon how morality is tied to local cosmological orientations more broadly, it is nonetheless still important to highlight the ways in which impulses toward relational or individual personhood occur. This is especially true when a definitive impulse toward relationalism occurs within even such an obviously individualistic narrative as Saul's, with its decisive Christian teleology and framing. Thus, to give just one clear example, Saul speaks of being deceived into eating snake flesh. However, he is at pains to point out this is not simply the flesh of a snake but also the flesh of demons themselves, and it is through consuming this flesh he gains extraordinary powers. As Saul explained when questioned later, this is 'because those demons were now inside me. I did not want them but was tricked. And now full of the demons. That is why that power'. Thus it was through incorporating parts of demonic selves – the eating of the sacrificed snake flesh – that Saul became not only powerful, but demonic (in the sense of 'demon-like'). That is, he shared in elements of demonic personhood.

One global system crucial to Saul's narrative is evangelical Christianity and, being an evangelical pastor, it comes as little surprise Christian understandings of salvation and the demonic are so important. In Saul's account the appearance of Christianity and the resulting demonstration not only of the efficacy of prayer but also the power of good over evil are obvious and foundational, as they are in every discussion I have heard about the demonic underworld. As I laid out in Chapter 5, although the power and mission of the AIC is aimed at personal salvation through the neutralisation of demonic influence, it is neither a healing or possession church, nor does it teach the prosperity gospel. Instead, this is a church of evangelical millennialism, of preaching the Gospel so that you and others may get saved: as Saul says, 'I fight them with prayer. Prayer is my weapon'. Such ideas of spiritual warfare are now common among evangelical discourses across the African continent, as exemplified by publications ranging in scope from the many small-scale local pamphlets that relate information about demonic powers to Emmanuel Eni's (1987) *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*,<sup>266</sup> perhaps the most widespread and influential of all and a book mentioned to me as compulsory reading on these issues by several church leaders across the region.

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<sup>266</sup> This is the autobiographical account of how a former 'demon worshipper' escaped the clutches of evil to become an evangelical minister. It was mentioned by several church leaders as compulsory reading on this issue.

Furthermore, just as idealised notions of salvation are important elements within evangelical Christianity, evangelical accounts of the demonic are likewise imbued with salvational discourses. Those persons engaging with the demonic are in need of teaching, of being brought to God through the power of prayer and the Gospel, of being saved in this life so they can be saved in the next. Just as it is in Saul's autobiography, themes of personal salvation and overcoming sin are generally central to evangelical conversion stories (Englund 2003; Eriksen 2009; Meyer 2004), a pattern repeated across Acholi. And as is common in the conversion narratives of all the Acholi and American evangelicals with whom I spoke, Saul's conversion narrative prominently features impulses towards both relational and individual understandings of personhood: on one hand, not only did incorporated elements of snake-demons lead to Saul's possession but it was the gifts of prayers from missionaries' and his 'True Christian' wife that allowed Saul to reject the demonic, become Christian, and thus get saved; on the other hand, it was the individualising tendencies toward greed and selfishness which led him to the demonic in the first place, just as it was the deadly and anti-social nature of his alliance which furnished him his power while simultaneously denying any possibility of a 'personal relationship with God' – the ultimate arbiter of eternal salvation.

## CHAPTER NINE: LINES OF FLIGHT (TOWARDS A CONCLUSION)

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### Introduction: Christian cosmologies in Acholi South Sudan

I have argued that, despite the religious and moral transformations in the Pajok religious field resulting from evangelical Christianity, some pre-Christian Acholi cosmological orientations and logics continue. I have further argued that local manifestations of evangelical Christianity share some basic features with these pre-Christian cosmologies and that, due to these similarities, evangelical Christianity may have actually reinforced some of these basic logics and orientations in Acholi South Sudan. Moreover, I have suggested that despite the several discontinuities that have taken place due to the advent of evangelical Christianity in the region – most especially in the dimension and direction of morality and moral power – continuities in experience and enduring relationally-oriented understandings of sociality and personhood mean cosmological or cultural rupture is neither certain nor predictable.

One of my primary arguments has been that it is because of the enduring importance of basic moral necessities that customary cosmo-ontological orientations are still so relevant: as these orientations speak to and act upon issues of everyday existential and moral consequence (such as conflict, poverty and witchcraft), the continuing relevance of a system specifically dealing with these issues still has experiential and structural salience. Thus, although the meta-persons who are populate the Acholi cosmology may have been hierarchically superseded by the Christian Divinity for many Pajok residents – and certainly most evangelicals – the important component pieces of the underlying cosmo-ontological and relational systems remain.

Sin and its repercussions are fundamental features of evangelical cosmologies, and the life of every evangelical is fraught with the constant negotiation not only of their own sin but that of the world in which they live. Sin is the primary means of breaking with God and thus destroying an evangelical's hope of salvation and eternal life. A certain contradiction seems to be central to this cosmology, however, as it implicitly necessitates a God who plans for at least some evil, as well as the bodily and spiritual downfall of at least some persons so as to forward those plans. As Mayblin (2012: 245) has noted, 'what Christian injunctions mean in principle and how they work in practice is often a source of simultaneous consternation and fascination and can lead to tension, and a profound existential sense of moral paradox and angst'. Indeed, Schrempp (2012) has noted that the advent of sin is the central and defining feature not only of the Bible but of the entire Christian faith. This is demonstrated by the fundamental role of stories like those of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) or Cain and Abe (Genesis 4), both of which are narratives about humanity's separation from God and descent into evil, but each of

which is also necessary for the greater teleological narrative of the Christian cosmo-ontological system: without the Fall of Man, there is no need for Salvation through Christ.

Therefore, the inherent negotiation of sin required to live a Christian life not only helps structure and define evangelical persons and personhood but is also a public demonstration of embodied Christian morality. For an evangelical, all actions have consequences, consequences which might be deeply cosmological but are always profoundly moral. Likewise, so do actions within customary Acholi cosmologies, where instead of God it is the ancestors and similar meta-persons who are watching and weighing up actions, inactions and injuries. Both systems are therefore deeply moral, involving as they do culturally specific notions of agency, intent and the rationality of cause and effect. As Blanes (2014: 1) has argued, 'both Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians and traditionalists engage in similar and competing, correlated and mutually defined ideas of invisible agency, associated to... the prediction or explanation of causality in social life'. Following Stroeken (2012), we can therefore define both systems as being about morality or moral power. Furthermore, as I have shown, because the moral norms, orderings and values of both systems can only exist and gain meaning through intersubjective encounters with other persons and meta-persons, both systems are also necessarily inherently relational.

### Ontological continuity, moral discontinuity

Although I have highlighted the continuity of personhood throughout evangelical conversion processes, I have also stated throughout that not all aspects of conversion are about enduring pre-Christian paradigms, in personhood or any aspect of existence. Indeed, although there are some deep similarities within customary and Christian cosmological, cultural and religious forms, there are also radical disjunctures between them. Many of these discontinuities are precisely those one would expect if – as I have proposed for evangelical conversions in Acholi South Sudan – becoming Christian is about the moral frameworks required for coming to terms with the radically disjunctive nature of contemporary experience: while 'the old ways' are about maintaining everyday sociality within the community as well as positive relations with important former members (like the *kwaro*), the ways of Christianity are about the moral negotiation of the promises and problems of the new world (and new world ordering systems). Whereas custom is about community and a cosmology of the local, Christianity is about the global and a cosmology of the infinite.

Therefore, arguing that customary cosmologies and *dini* or 'monotheistic religion' have entirely different orientations toward life, the universe and everything (Adams 1995), Russell (1966: 6,

emphasis added) states that 'Christianity came *as a new category of experience*': it is a different form of moral power, charged with dealing with different problems of human ontological and social experience. Thus Russell (1966: 10) also notes that, being communal and everyday in nature, 'clan ritual was concerned with... the clan... *Dini* was not'. However, despite such divergent experiences and the oft-stated requirements for evangelicals to 'break with the past' (Meyer 1998), in Pajok the problems of everyday social experience mean that cosmological and moral systems oriented towards these difficulties have enduring power and salience.

Although during my time in Pajok I often heard talk of *ajwaki*, *jogi*, *kwaro* and so on – especially from evangelicals, for whom the conscious refusal of these things is so important – I rarely heard anyone speak of *dini* unless explicitly asked about it. Instead, when speaking of church or religion, Acholi in Pajok tend to speak about *kanista* (congregation), *lega* (prayer) or *myel* (dancing). These are all terms which mobilise ideas of shared similarity based in existing understandings of relationality rather than divergent individualised experience. The widespread use of these and similar terms position much of the evangelical practice in Pajok closer to continuities between pre- and post-conversion religious experiences rather than any sharp rupture from those orientations. Indeed, the fact 'the clan [and thus the community] cannot continue to function without the effort and the good will of the living and the dead' (Russell 1966: 16) may be one reason for the endurance of customary cosmologies within an increasingly Christian world. And there are two things in everyday Pajok which I think even the most ardent evangelical would say are nearly as important as their own personal salvation: the continuity – and ideally salvation – of their community and lineage (the 'clan' in Russell's terminology).

In this, it seems the situation in Pajok – and likely elsewhere in the Acholi world – might support the views about the underlying reasons behind African conversion put forward by Horton (1971, 1975a, 1975b). Speaking about conversions to both Christianity and Islam across Africa, Horton (1971: 104) states that 'the beliefs and practices of the so-called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional cosmology to other, non-missionary, factors of the modern situation'. In this way, both world religions are simply catalysts for processes of 'which were "in the air" anyway' (Horton 1971: 104), that is, as responses 'to the successive interpretative challenges posed by modern social change' (Horton 1971: 106) – responses which, 'given the appropriate economic and social background conditions, would most likely have occurred in some recognizable form even in the absence of the world religions' (Horton 1975a: 234).

However, despite the significance of locally important differences between microcosmic and macrocosmic sociocultural orientations that Horton notes – and, indeed, I believe my analysis demonstrates the veracity of his argument that cosmo-ontological systems across Africa tend to

prioritise ‘a concern with explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events’(Horton 1971: 95; see also Horton 1975a, 1975b) context – in his unwavering emphasis on the primacy of an intellectual basis for religion, Horton merely replicates the same academic tendency to minimise the religious against which my entire research proceeded: religion becomes nothing but the cultural infrastructure resting upon and justifying the much more ‘real’ politico-economic base. For Horton, then, the changes brought about or demonstrated by Christianity and Islam – and by implication, religion in general – are all largely incidental to entanglements with those processes of globalisation he terms ‘the various impersonal theoretical systems which commonly fall under the heading of “Western Materialism”’ (Horton 1971: 106).

Nonetheless, despite the intellectual problems introduced by such reductive reasoning, it still seems that the essence of Horton’s claim is based on an important and widespread ethnographic observation: that, what made – and continues to make, I think – the missionising endeavour so successful is that it ‘came with the promise of a new source of strength which would enable people to live in and cope with a new world’ (Horton 1971: 97). That is, not only do ‘new situations demand new magic’ (Evans-Pritchard 1972: 513; see also Bonhomme 2012: 226; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 284; White 2000: 22) but new experiences demand new horizons to help comprehend and totalise them (Abramson & Holbraad 2012: 38).

I therefore suggest that the differences between Christian and customary Acholi cosmologies in Pajok are perhaps more scalar than systematic, more circumstantial than general. That is, they provide alternate but not hierarchically ordered orientations to the prime confusions, contradictions and difficulties of the lived experience of the average person. Similar things have been previously noted in relation to Acholi cosmologies: being ‘intra-grated’ (Handelman 2008),<sup>267</sup> they horizontally expand and rhizomatically mimic and multiply to encompass and understand new experiences from beyond Acholi lifeworlds. Thus, *jogi* manifest as aircraft, diseases, weapons, even (but of course) Christian meta-persons (p’Bitek 1971: 114-116). However, as localised manifestations of wider processes of modernity, globalisation and the colonial – relational arenas and modes of action at different scales to everyday experience – and despite indigenous attempts to understand them otherwise, the processes which these manifestations reference have largely remained beyond or outside the Acholi cosmological order. Accordingly, alongside the customary (a mode of moral experience working within and upon the everyday and the known), there is almost a logical necessity for the simultaneous

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<sup>267</sup> By this, Handelman (2012: 67) means ‘they are quite continuous within themselves,... organising through multiple domains or planes rather than more discrete, clearly hierarchical levels [and] may have no closure at all, no external boundaries’. They are not encompassed (Dumont 1980, 1992). Also see Handelman (2014).

incorporation of Christianity as a cosmo-ontology which can explain and work upon these new and distant aspects of worldly existence.<sup>268</sup>

## The Acholi sacred

It has been argued by several scholars that Nilotic indigenous cosmologies are similar to Old Testament Judeo-Christianity (Burton 1978, 1985; Deng 1972, 1980; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Lienhardt 1961, 1982). Indeed, Burton (1985: 367) simply argues that ‘from the local [Dinka] perspective, Christian texts appeared as an alternative and foreign version of religious truths already familiar’. Likewise, as noted in Chapter 3, the constitution of the Acholi cosmos resembles that of the Acholi person and vice versa. The earth as *lobo* is the central unifying feature, just as the Acholi person is. This anthropocentric earth is defined as that which is social and known, as is the Acholi social person. The social world of harmonious relationality is encompassed by *wilobo* above, just as the social person is encompassed by surrounding persons (community, lineage and so on) and meta-persons. Finally, the encompassing above both contains and is defined by the bodies from which it is composed while these same composing bodies are integral to and yet simultaneously dependent and independent parts of it. It is the same for the Acholi person, who form component parts of an independent social world and help to define that world yet, at the same time, are dependent upon the world and its other component persons for their social and personal constitution. Thus, the Acholi cosmos is relationally composed just as Acholi persons and societies are and, moreover, the cosmos is conceived of as mutually *inter-dependent* horizontally defined parts just as Acholi persons and societies are. In other words, although the firmament and the community encompass the Acholi world and person, these are not hierarchical encompassments such as Dumont (1980, 1992) established for Indian society but rather dialectical moebius-like encompassments within which all parts are mutually defining and constituting, such as Handelman (2012) noted is common in the cosmologies of small-scale societies (Handelman 2012).<sup>269</sup>

The meta-persons populating the Acholi cosmos are essentially ambiguous in nature, being embedded in the world and responsive to actions and interactions with human persons likewise residing in the same ontological realm. Like the cosmos and people’s orientations toward it, they are pragmatically

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<sup>268</sup> Indeed, Robbins (2004) has argued that one primary reason the Urapmin adopted Pentecostal Christianity is precisely because of their recent history of incorporation within the oppressive and alienating processes of globalisation. The result, Robbins suggests, was widespread humiliation and social transformation, frames of experience and emotion almost entirely destructive to local moral frameworks and requiring the communal reconfiguration of morality, a reconfiguration which took place through the lens of millennial Christianity.

<sup>269</sup> According to Handelman (2012: 67), ‘moebius dynamics are neither hierarchical nor structural... There is no “make a distinction” that creates sides, creates a binary... that enabled, for example, Hegel’s theory of dialectic, and Louis Dumont’s theory of holism as encompassment’.

inclined, generally only demanding what can reasonably be given or imposing sanctions when sociocultural norms have been breached. Thus, and mirroring wider Acholi conceptualisations of agency, intention and witchcraft, Acholi meta-persons necessarily focus upon actual individual, social, and relational happenings, articulated primarily through interpersonal – that is, intersubjective and thereby relational – morality.

Ultimately, just as with Acholi cosmological entanglements in general, although Acholi meta-persons are essentially pragmatic in orientation, this is a pragmatism refracted, mobilised and understood through the lens of cosmological morality. As Ogot (1961: 129-130) has argued

To the Nilote, the universe is a subjective world consisting of forces of varied magnitude constantly impinging on one another... Instead of the dual principles of good and evil... the Nilotes believe only in one moral order dominated by principles of *Jok*. Any action which promotes these principles is good and an action which violates them is bad.

Thus, everyday Acholi cosmologies are fundamentally about the negotiation of everyday morality. As such, even if not defined and described in terms of a good/evil binary, the Acholi cosmos and its meta-persons necessarily engage with the helpful and harmful dimensions of existence. These are demonstrated, for example, through the impulses toward good or tendencies toward bad I have described here, inclinations which are also bodily, communally, personally, or socially helpful or harmful. In this way, the moral negotiation of Acholi social life reminds the observer of Durkheim's distinction between 'auspicious' and 'inauspicious' forms of the sacred.

Durkheim (1995) highlights the importance of distinguishing between two distinct, competing yet complementary aspects of the sacred, 'the auspicious' and the 'inauspicious'. These dimensions of religious force are the pure and the impure, 'the beneficent guardians of the physical and moral order, dispensers of life and health and all the qualities that men value' (Durkheim 1995: 509) and 'the evil and impure powers, those productive of disorders, causes of death and sickness, instigators of sacrilege' (Durkheim 1995: 409). However, although the component things of each form of the sacred ritually or religiously 'oppose each other' (Ruel 1998: 111), they 'are not two separate classes, but... varieties of the same class, which includes all sacred things' (Durkheim 1995: 411). That is, they are the same inclinations, processes or things manifesting differently.

As regards Acholi, Durkheim's sacred provides a useful heuristic tool, allowing insight into the complementary yet contrasting cosmologies at play in the region as well as how these have transformed with widespread Christian conversion. Customary Acholi religion is very much defined

along the moral distinctions found in the Durkheimian sacred, and as I have highlighted throughout, many of the everyday and ongoing negotiations required from persons embedded within this system are about balancing these distinctions through mobilisation or rejection of the powers of meta-persons like *kwaro* and *jogi*. Likewise, the experiential convergences implicit within Durkheim's sacred allows for sympathetic analysis of the inherent heteroglossia of Acholi witchcraft discussed in Chapter 6. So, magical manifestations like *laa*, *rogo*, *yat* and so on are not considered different types of thing but rather similar expressions or processes of underlying systems of thought actioned differently. As I indicated in Chapter 4, the same might be said about *jok* or *jok*-like experiences and meta-persons.

Therefore, the convergence of the auspicious/inauspicious within the Acholi sacred is an important distinction as regards local incorporations of Christianity, allowing us to see and treat both good and evil as fundamental and roughly analogical forms of the same sacred realm. Rather than assuming knowledge about the character or quality of persons, relations or things, the elision of the good-evil dichotomy demands investigation of the specifically contextually and processual (re)production of auspicious/inauspicious distinctions. In Pajok, such distinctions refract relationality, the main differences being either in the qualities of moralities engaged with or denied or the effects these engagements have upon the person, the community, and the world. The point of convergence of the dissonant but harmonious lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) of the Christian and the demonic can therefore be seen in their corresponding articulations and configurations of morality and moral power.

## The nature of gifts and persons

In Deleuzian terms, I suggest that in Pajok there is no final Christian person, no Christian *being*. There are only Christian becomings (becomings-Christian, as Deleuze and Guattari [1987] have might put it): the forever movement of persons towards Christian-ness, along lines of flight not quite of their own choosing. I think most contemporary researchers of Christianity anywhere would agree here. Indeed, Dumont (1992), Mosko (2010, 2015) and Robbins (2015) have all suggested as much, with Dumont arguing that although

Something of modern individualism is present with the first Christians... [it] is not exactly individualism as we know it. Actually, the old form and the new are separated by a transformation so radical and so complex that it took at least seventeen centuries of Christian history to be completed, *if indeed it is not still continuing in our times* (Dumont 1992: 94, emphasis added; see also Mosko 2010, 2015a, 2015b).

Therefore, although the processes involved in becoming Christian (or engaging in any other social action) may look final, these are temporary instances rather than completed identities. There are always social and moral tensions involved, just as there are always desacralizing activities to take part in. The particular inclinations or impulses involved in any instance may – and often do – change in different contexts, with the specific orientations prioritised often mirroring the social and relational needs of the time.

Becoming Christian means swapping one social contract for another; the supposedly demonic pact of custom for a personal relationship with Christ. The spirit of the gift which both demands sociality and impels relational personhood means that the spirits of the world – *jogi, tipu*, the demonic – are replaced by the Holy Spirit. In this existential exchange, the temptations of the Devil (which become the sins of the human) are surrendered to God through the mediating figure of Christ, to be replaced with the promise of salvation and everlasting life – a different kind and quality of temptation. No-one can bargain with the gods, let alone God, and everything in and of the world is already ‘owned’ by the Divine; nonetheless, compelling God (via Christ) into a relationship with a sinner may be as close to balanced reciprocity with the Divine that humankind can achieve (Sahlins 1974).

I have argued that analytic understandings of Acholi personhood should be reconfigured to highlight relationality. As Acholi tend to think of themselves caught in webs of social significance, their social, lineal, and thus individual characters and persons are composed through this relationality. Although mentioned earlier, it bears repeating here: Acholi society can, I think, be described as one defined by how any one person or group relates to any other person or group in such a way that the most useful and important connections are considered in terms of relationships based on kin, clan, and lineage. Along these lines Chua (2015) provides an interesting model of Bidayuh Christian personhood which, I think, would make a useful basis for wider cross-cultural comparison. Her description certainly rings true with my understandings about Acholi articulations of persons and personhood. The Bidayuh person has ‘two distinct, though not unconnected components: an autonomous, indivisible moral core and ever-shifting tangle of relations around it... Neither a clear cut dividual or individual, the person must thus engage in a constant process of navigation and negotiation between such in/dividualist impulses and motivations’ (Chua 2015: 347). Of interest in such a comparative exercise is the fact that Acholi ethnographers to this point have almost entirely neglected the domains of personhood, relationality and sociality, seemingly taking these fundamental parts of human life as non-problematic. However, as I have demonstrated throughout, this is not the case: especially with widespread conversions to evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, the ongoing and everyday negotiation of these seemingly given aspects of life is demonstrably *not* concretised or determined, instead being continually (re)shaped through intersubjective encounters with other persons and meta-persons.

Thus, in Chapters 3 and 5 I illustrated how evangelicals base their personal relationships with God and other persons (Christian and non-Christian, living and non-living) in gift and kinship metaphors.<sup>270</sup> If, as Lambek (2015: 397) has argued, ‘the gift [is] essentially how we make and partake of relations in a purely social sense irrespective of kinship and mediated by object or acts’, I have demonstrated that although evangelical personhood may be largely conceptualised individually – such as through a singular person’s relationship with the Divine – it is realised relationally through purposeful and directed exchanges with others, particularly God. Moreover, I have shown that such forms of gift-based relationality help to (re)produce and maintain forms of evangelical personhood similar to those Melanesian ethnographers have called *dividuality* (Strathern 1988) or *fractality* (Wagner 1991) but which following Jackson (1989), Piot (1999) and Robbins (2015) I have preferred to call ‘relationality’ or ‘relational personhood’. Exchange forms an integral dimension of Acholi evangelicals’ relationships with Christian meta-persons. And, among evangelical Acholi as among the Bidayuh Christians of Borneo, ‘persons are not quite partible, but they are always potentially transformable *through* relations – often objectified in different forms, such as gifts, food, and thoughts – that they share with others. Such relationally enacted transformations are constitutive of persons’ social form or identity’ (Chua 2015: 346; Strathern 1988).

### Words, witches and demons

Bajracharya (2015: 374) has argued that exclusive focus on ‘links between orchestrated rumours and acts of articulated communal violence privileges a perspective that the ethnographic record does not always substantiate... It offers too much agency to directed intentions and clear consequences, and too little to the conditions of terror... experienced in relation to rumour and violence’. Similarly, I argue, it offers too little agency to words themselves. Thus, Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrated that the agency and power of words mean that, not only should rumours be seen as resembling witches, but witchcraft, like rumour, should itself be conceived of as an agent. I argued that, following local Acholi logics, the narrative and imaginative constructions which are rumours should be conceptualised as words-as-persons in their own right while, likewise, the magical power inherent in witchcraft practices and the ways these affect the world demand their consideration as social actors beyond the ‘witch’ who expresses them. Witchcraft and rumour should therefore both be conceptualised as specific

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<sup>270</sup> I should note here that the same processes occur through the mobilisation of food metaphors, metaphors which, as Porter (2013: 169-170) shows, are used to talk about sex and many other aspects of the relationality that forms the basis of Acholi social and cultural life. Perhaps, then, food functions as Acholi meta-metaphors. Further research should investigate how metaphors in Acholi are conceived, mobilised and made meaningful.

forms of social actor, each of whom have remarkable and powerful similarities beyond the static and ontologically reductive contexts which claim to define them.

Thus, although witchcraft is often analysed as a function of specific structural relations (gender, kinship and so on), in Pajok it is a function of the potentialities inherent within all social relations. Just as Myhre (2014: 19) argued for evangelicals in northern Tanzania, witchcraft in Acholi 'is not something that can be overcome or transcended, but an ever-present potential as the limit of social relations'. Relational indeterminacy is therefore crucial to the manifestation of witchcraft-connected feelings: what is significant in the expression of truly malignant magic is not the specific actions or actors involved but rather the attempt at deciphering the meanings or intentions of the action. A similar situation applies to rumour, whereby a person can speak without fully considering their words and these can still lead to changes in the world: this is probably the minimal understanding of the intersubjective truth of words-as-social-agents, a point expanded in Chapter 7 especially. Intention, rumour and witchcraft are therefore all intimately linked with ideas of morality, sociality and relationality.

Without saying either rumour or witchcraft is real or not – after all, this is not my concern – both have definitively real effects. In both situations, the agency and personhood of these imaginative actors are connected to similarly shared equivalencies between them as well as their connections to ideologies of morality and moral power within local cosmology. Both these agents have inherent witch-like powers – indeed, following Evans-Pritchard (1972), this inherency is what helps define their witchiness – likewise, both gain their powers as well as their personhood from the moral and social truths they articulate (Stroeken 2012). Thus, not only do rumours function in ways resembling witches, but witchcraft (as the powers or practices of witches) has the ability to act, function, and effect change like other social agents: people are equally as responsive to the craft of the witch as they are to the witch themselves.

Rumours and witchcraft are also both predominantly intersubjective in nature, gaining their power and personhood from the social contexts which they narrate and critique and within which they move. They are therefore both about communal and personal experiences and evaluations of everyday sociality. I have suggested Acholi witchcraft is intrinsically relational in orientation.<sup>271</sup> After all, as Rio (2014: 321-322) has argued, witchcraft activity 'must be recognised as a moment of intense cosmological potency... emerg[ing] as a transgressive force that operates... by overflowing social relations'. In this way, witchcraft does not breach social categories so much as bleed through them.

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<sup>271</sup> For similar basic conclusions originating from elsewhere in both Africa and Melanesia, see Englund (2007), Lambek (2015), Myhre (2014), Rio and Eriksen (2014b).

The agency and action of the witch (and their practices, and rumour) thus have the inherent potentiality to disrupt and overflow structures and forces as well as break down social worlds and cosmo-ontologies simultaneously.

Among the various tropes at play in Acholi demon narratives, one dominant and recurring theme at play in Saul's narrative is the denial of everyday social membership. As Porter (2012, 2013, 2016) has argued, one cannot understand the Acholi worldview without appreciating the importance of a logic of social harmony, an indigenous functionalism whereby the needs of collective solidarity are prioritised over those of the individual. The demonically inclined, however, engage in activities diametrically opposing social harmony. Instead of prioritising the collectivity, they focus on the self. Rather than engaging in actions which are helpful or redistributive, they exhibit greed, envy, or jealousy. Instead of practicing activities which are known to generate complementary sociality, their actions depend on practices known to destroy relationality. As Rio (2014: 328) has put it, these meta-persons become 'a personification of social forces,... an opening into a potent and dangerous realm that underlies all relations of the social world... [and are] caused by moral failure'. In a cosmological ordering system like the Acholi, with its strong binary logics of social and biological (re)production and destruction (O'Byrne 2015b, 2015c), those engaging with demons are clearly oriented toward annihilation rather than productivity. They are inherently socially disharmonious.

Similar to that discussed in Chapter 7, the demonic narrative given in Chapter 8 builds on a widespread 'transnational genre' (White 2000) circulating across Africa since colonial times.<sup>272</sup> What *te pii* has added to the explanatory and moral dimensions of this transnational genre, however, is a millennial and teleological focus: not only do these immoral things happen and need explaining, but they do so within the linear trajectory of the approaching Armageddon of which their very presence is substantive proof.

Likewise, one might argue that there has been a simultaneous demonization and Christianisation of the cosmological and narrative fields not only in Pajok, but across Acholi and even Africa more broadly. Folklore, myths, rumours and stories that once told of other things have now been significantly reoriented toward a Christian mind-set and worldview, narrating the evils of humanity rather than asociality, or telling of the corruption and sin of the world rather than of how to live within it (Soto 2009). In these Christianised narratives, previously ambiguous or non-human meta-persons generally become evil, the powers they are deemed capable being reconfigured as proof of witchcraft and the existence of demons, manifesting not only the crisis of the sinning human but also Christianity itself.

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<sup>272</sup> See, for example, Betelsen (2014), Bonhomme (2012), Comaroff and Comaroff (1993, 1999), Englund (2007), Myhre (2014), Niehaus (2005), and Stewart and Strathern (2004).

However, MacCarthy (2014: 8) has argued that 'If witchcraft is inherently anti-social, corrupting... inverting or subverting social rules... Christianity reshapes cultural conceptions of personhood, space, and time, and provides an epistemic frame in which witchcraft is always perceived as a survival of the past in the present'. In this way, Christianity is not only a radically different experience and discontinuous system of moral ordering but also explicitly provides for epistemic and ontological continuity. Indeed, due to the ways in which Christianity allows witchcraft and other elements of a now-demonised cosmological system to remain fundamental parts of the Christian's everyday lifeworld, it could even be argued Christianity is in fact surprisingly and even radically *continuous* (despite the resilient immorality of many witchcraft practices, whether refracted through a customary or a demonic lens). This is because the primary moral problems which each system is directed towards are not only of different scales but, in fact, of divergent relational, spatial and temporal orientations. In this way, both the customary and the Christian are moral cosmologies of everyday experience, where the cosmology of moral power which each concretises and mobilises is concerned with different parts of that experience. This conceptualisation of directed moral power allows us to understand how, while conversion can seem to lead to such radical moral differences, the domains of cosmology, ontology and relationality remain relatively stable.

### Disjuncture and difference in the global moral cosmology

I have argued herein that examination of Acholi understandings of witchcraft and dead meta-persons – especially *tipu*, of both the good or auspicious *kwaro*-type as well as the bad or inauspicious *cen* variety – provides great analytical insight into the constitution of Acholi personhood. Indeed, similar defining characteristics can be seen between both domains. Although most Acholi meta-persons are inherently ambiguous with potential for both good and evil, help and harm, in the cases of witchcraft and the dead the difference between auspicious and inauspicious action falls along lines of relationality and sociality. In such a schema, the inauspicious is that which involves the denial, perversion or repudiation of 'normal' everyday relationality and, thus, the denial not only of shared sociality and humanity (where relevant) but also personhood. The inauspicious is individualising and temporary or present focused rather than being, like the auspicious, oriented toward the communal, familial or social as well as the past, present and future simultaneously. The inauspicious also denies temporality rather than collapsing it, as auspicious members of the Acholi cosmos do. Likewise, as the inauspicious also prioritises the individual to the detriment of the communal, it lies outside Acholi normative logics of morality and social harmony (Porter 2013).

Without saying they share inherent similarities, the Acholi inauspicious therefore bears at least a passing resemblance to the form of evangelical Christianity the literature suggests manifests elsewhere in the world: individualising; refusing the central relational bonds defining the social world; and, in refusing a temporal orientation in which important meta-persons collapse past, present and future, instead prefers a decidedly future oriented telos. Although these resemblances are likely superficial and almost certainly do not determine how or why evangelical persons are seemingly construed differently among Acholi South Sudanese than elsewhere, the similarities are interesting nonetheless and may, moreover, have at least some role to play in the *preferred* type of persons or relations evangelical Acholi South Sudanese engage with. Thus, as I have argued, if moral power (Stroeken 2012) in Acholi is that used for communal or social reasons and amoral or immoral power mobilised for individual purposes without recourse to the social or relational, then evangelical Christianity must be similarly configured to also be ascribed with positive morality. Such a reconfiguration toward the local might move its Pajok manifestations away from the individualising focus and relation-denying impulses predominating elsewhere. Indeed, the requirement of such a reconfiguration may account for some of the ways evangelicals in Pajok are decidedly social and relational in focus: as I showed in Chapter 5, determined to work for the salvation of their kin and community as well as themselves. After all, as Englund (2003: 107) has argued, ‘Pentecostals... can pursue salvation only through relationships’. I see no reason why these relationships need necessarily be directed solely toward the Divine or the demonic.

As demonstrated in Chapter 8, understandings of evil among evangelicals in Acholi South Sudan position the world and demonic impulses as perverse refractions of everyday life, including sociality. Evil is an alterity replicating those non-human (as in individualising and non-social) relations seeming to dominate the worlds of bureaucracy, capitalism, government, urbanisation and similar aspects of globalisation. To likewise replicate similar orientations – as evangelical Christianity is said to do elsewhere – might then position evangelical cosmologies firmly within the realms of the anti-social, evil or non-human. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 5, this is one reason people in Pajok are reticent to join or even allow Pentecostal churches a foothold within the community: as the worship practices of such denominations replicate possession by either customary or demonic meta-persons, such churches are considered demonic in nature, perverse refractions of ‘True Christianity’. Moreover, these Pentecostal refractions are perverse precisely because they willingly incorporate demonic persons within the alleged believer. They thus involve the willing establishment of demonic relationality and personhood, itself a perverse refraction of sociality to both Acholi (which involve a relational person based in willing sociality with *auspicious* rather than inauspicious meta-persons) and

local evangelical manifestations (which involve a relational person based in willing sociality with the Divine).

Robbins (2015: 181), following Dumont (1992: 35), has suggested that 'because of the difficulty of fully realising individualism in this world, Christians tend to define this world as a whole as a less valued level than the world beyond it'. Such a phrasing concerns me as, at least in Pajok, it seems several levels of abstraction beyond a reading the ethnographic data lends itself to. As should be apparent from the quotes given in Chapter 5 about the 'cursed' or 'demonic' state of the earthly world, it is not a lack of individualism which makes Pajok evangelicals value this world less than the next: indeed, if anything, it may be too much individualism which is the problem (in the guise of individually falling prey to the demonic temptations of one's self or others).

The structure of the conjuncture (Sahlins 1987) between customary and evangelical Christian cosmologies in Acholi South Sudan has thereby led not only to a disjunctive transformation of local worlds (and the concomitant moralities required to live within and deal with those worlds), but also the simultaneous disjunctive transformation of evangelical Christianity itself, especially in those Christian orientations connected to personhood, relationality and sociality. We could perhaps call this 'the structure of the *disjuncture*'. Similar to what Deng (1988: 169) argued occurred among Dinka, what happened with the Christianisation of Pajok is that 'their values were so deeply rooted and resilient that they persisted [despite] missionary intervention'. Additionally, these values were so significant to everyday orientations, relations and worldviews that they actually forced change within the colonising system itself. Thus, although evangelical Christianity is largely a hegemonic cosmological and cultural system demanding the adherent's complete obedience, it is hegemonic only insofar as the transformations it demands can be reasonably incorporated within converts' lives and lifeworlds. After all, as Deng (1988) and Lienhardt (1982) both noted, instead of early Christianity in Sudan leading to simplistic continuity or rupture scenarios, 'Dinka reaction to the Christian mission was a complex process in which parallels, contrasts, acceptance and rejection were all intertwined' (Deng 1988: 157).

Although the global and globalising meta-cosmology of evangelical Christianity will always require and enforce radical transformations to contexts in which it becomes embedded (as has been well established in research conducted over the last half-century), it should be no surprise that the specific localities it engages with likewise require some transformation within evangelical Christianity itself (if for no reason other than simply to fit the lives, lifeworlds and worldviews of the people of those locales). This has also been well established for those other processes of contemporary global interconnectivity that are often glossed as modernity, and it seems increasingly true for evangelical

Christianity also.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, there is no reason to think such localising tendencies would be different in the structure of conjuncture between customary and Christian cosmologies than that in the meeting between any other systems. After all, as Sahlins (1987: 144, emphasis in original) has argued, 'culture functions as a *synthesis* of stability and change, past and present, diachrony and synchrony'. The cultural is therefore always transformative just as there is always transformations taking place within the cultural: just as there are multiple, competing and contradictory modernities and globalisation, so too there are multiple competing and contradictory Christianities. The sheer complexity of human life virtually demands it.

I have demonstrated that just as the entanglements taking place within contemporary religious fields in Pajok mean the globalising hegemony of evangelical Christianity is transforming local manifestations of morality and moral power, so too indigenous sociocultural and religious life require quite radical reconfigurations of evangelical personhood: although 'in all cultures... there exist both individual and dividual modalities or aspects of personhood' (LiPuma 1998: 56), just as with the sacred (Ruel 1998: 113) specific impulses toward these variant modalities are not everywhere the same. And although Christians in most places are said to value hierarchical encompassments and tend toward individual modalities of personhood (see, for example, Dumont [1980, 1992]; Robbins [2015]), in Acholi South Sudan (and seemingly elsewhere in Africa: Daswani [2011]; Piot [1999]; Werbner [2011]) the everyday demands of embedded sociality mean these same impulses strongly manifest relational modes of personhood.

As demonstrated in the concluding section of Chapter 5, evangelical personhood as manifest in Pajok is explicitly relational in focus. It is determined by and dependent upon shared relationships with God, Christ and other True Christians such that human lives and sin are detached from themselves and placed within Christ who, simultaneously, is a partible component of the tripartite Godhead detached and placed within the human believer. God, Christ and the human believer thus all partly compose each other. This is surely not a great leap of logic nor a difficult requirement for a believer or an analyst to understand given that one significant basis of Christian doctrine is the specifically collapsed and consubstantial nature of the tripartite God-Christ-Holy Spirit person Himself: One God in three Divine Persons (Morris 2006).

Importantly, the specific form of Christian personhood manifest is initiated by God and, more significantly, this personhood is at least relational and perhaps even ideologically dividuated or partible in character. The implications of this should not be understated. I am about to make a bold assertion, but one which comes directly from the sermons presented in the conclusion to Chapter 5 and which

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<sup>273</sup> For example, see the articles in *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (1) (2015).

were given by two different evangelical missionaries from vastly different cultural and experiential backgrounds.<sup>274</sup> The bold assertion is this: if we to really take the radically empirical step of privileging the lives, lifeworlds, and conceptual frameworks of our interlocutors, then according to the logics of evangelicals themselves, it is possible that *all* Christian relations and persons are at least *ideally* dividual forms of relational personhood. This is because such forms of personhood are those which are not only inspired but actually privileged by the divine Himself. In other words, according to evangelical understandings of Biblical Truths, God chose a dividual form of relationality as His *preferred* form of personhood, not only for His believers but also for Himself and Christ. And, after all, God is infallible. Therefore, according to an interpretation of evangelical personhood which attends primarily to how evangelicals themselves comprehend and discursively construct their understandings of self and other, a dividual relational person is the only *truly Christian* – as in, truly conforming to the teachings of Christ – form of personhood and relationality.<sup>275</sup>

Consequently, as the individual impulses towards which Christianity is said to tend are not the Divine's preferred form of personhood and relationality, they must be explained. Is it a case of analytic error, of putting theory and abstraction ahead of data? Is it the result of human imperfection, of human nature and experience perverting the Divine ideal? Is it the work of demons and the satanic, another manifestation of the many ways in which the eternal war between good and evil has taken place through humankind? Indeed, it may be any one or combination of these. Or, as I am thinking, is it an example of the inherent heteroglossia and multiplicity of all global experiences, forms and processes – Cannell's (2006a, 2006b) 'many Christianities' – a demonstration of the tendency toward bifurcation, divergence and mutation within centrifugal historical developments? If so, then not only does this process need explaining but so do the ways in which similar cosmological and cultural logics can simultaneously occur in eastern Africa and the eastern seaboard of the USA, especially, as we are led to believe, if these logics occur only infrequently elsewhere. This is one of the major substantive findings of this research and, I think, should indicate further directions for much needed future research along similar lines, not only of specific evangelical communities (both within different

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<sup>274</sup> This in itself virtually requires much further comparative research to be undertaken on this issue, work happily already underway in large part thanks to the Mosko-Robbins debate (2010 - ongoing) and of which the authors in *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (1) (2015) provide an excellent example.

<sup>275</sup> I want to highlight here that I in no way think that this is a Christianity which is straightforwardly focused on what might be called either partibility or dividual ideas of relationality or personhood. As I have mentioned throughout (see for example, Chapter Two) – and as I reiterate again above – although I understand personhood in Acholi to be strongly relational in character, it is, I think, rarely if ever *truly* dividual (in a Melanesian sense). In other words, it is comprehended and constructed through relations *with* persons rather than through the incorporation of parts of them. Rather, what I mean here is that, despite any individualising tendencies at the level of practice, evangelical Christianity as a cosmo-ontological and ideological system may possibly idealise and privilege a specifically dividual form of personhood almost as a Weberian 'ideal type'.

churches in the same locale as well as along transnational trajectories within the same church denomination) but also decidedly comparative in nature.

### Concluding thoughts: Ontologies of experience, moralities of scale

Understanding both systems as primarily about the differential orientation of moral power helps answer questions like, ‘what does Christianity do, not do, change, provide, or replace, such that its adoption becomes an important or necessary change, especially if local cosmologies do not cover these things?’ The answer to questions such as these is that Christianity speaks about issues of morality and moral power *vis a vis* modernity.<sup>276</sup> After all, as Piot (1999: 173) has argued, ‘modernity should be seen as less a historical condition than a political project, whose aim has always been to centre the West and marginalise the rest’. In this way, Christianity may be particularly well-suited for issues of morality and moral transgression resulting from engagements with wider global political-economic processes such as capital, colonialism, money, the state, and so on. Being from the same world as these global processes – locally as well as ontologically speaking – it speaks the same language and therefore addresses similar issues and experiences: alienation, greed, oppression, poverty, tyranny. Indeed, as scholars have argued about intersections between cosmologies and modernities elsewhere in Africa (Ashforth 2000, 2005; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1999; Niehaus 2005; Piot 1999), Christianity is powerful and salient specifically *because* it directly addresses these things *as* problems. That is, Christianity in contemporary Africa is a cosmology relating to the morality of modernity (Geschiere 1997, 2013). As Bonhomme (2012: 226), citing White (2000: 22) has cogently argued, these are ‘not only new imaginings for new times, but also more precisely “new imaginings for new relationships”’, relationships oriented directly toward the oppressive and marginalising processes of modern life.

Nonetheless, although Christianity addresses the difficulties and experiences of modernity, these do not determine all aspects of life in contemporary Pajok or even South Sudan. This is especially true, for example, for issues of moral power embedded in local kinship or (re)productive relations, or in connection to the land (as *lobo* or *ngom*), nature (*piny*),<sup>277</sup> or the bush (*lum*) and the wild (*tim*). And it

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<sup>276</sup> Note here that this is where my analysis differs in essential ways from that of Horton (1971, 1975a, 1975b): while the generalised comparisons of Horton focus on the importance of systems of ‘explanation-prediction-control’ (Horton 1971: 97), my emphasis of the role and significance of morality and moral power emerges directly from the primacy of these realms of experience within a particular ethnographic context.

<sup>277</sup> There is not really an Acholi term for the English word ‘nature’, nature being associated with all the terms and concepts connected to *tim* (the wild, see Chapter 3) and, therefore, all that which is not the social world of humans. Although I have given the word ‘*piny*’, this term can mean all of: 1) climate, environment, surroundings, weather; 2) down, ground; 3) abdomen, stomach. See Adong and Lakareber (2009: 98) and Finnström (2008).

is precisely such everyday realities that customary cosmologies address and are oriented towards. Local systems are therefore about a structured orientation toward such things as an annual cycle of productivity and fertility (harvests, the seasons, the provision of rain, and so on), or the definition, demarcation and disciplining of community insiders (as a form of almost-functionalist social cohesion). These are systems which ensure continuation through performances of moral power such that entities or actions which may upset social, structural, or cosmological balance or order are defined as immoral and addressed through ritual rebalancing (O’Byrne 2015d).

In summary, in Pajok there are two systems of moral power that work at, towards and upon different scales of orientation and existence, scales which map onto different cosmological processes. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, one of these (the Acholi) is a locally bounded and focused cosmology of moral power, while the other (the evangelical) is a moral cosmology of the global or even the infinite (as it must with the coherency of its integrative structure, the place of God as its integrating entity, its universal temporal linearity, and its eschatological teleology promising the replacement of earthly sin with everlasting life in Heaven). Such a delineation helps answer questions like ‘how and why people can engage with both systems? What is specifically required for local moral ordering such that what is independently required for ordering global, universal, or infinite systems not only does *not* match up but may indeed be in direct conflict or contradiction?’ I am thinking especially of the actions and work of the powerful meta-persons I described in Chapters 4 and 6, particularly *jogi* and *kwaro*, who are specifically oriented toward local lives and lifeworlds and together providing the fundamental basis of Acholi cosmology. This delineation also explains the endurance of both systems: as has been discovered in the evangelical-indigenous encounter elsewhere, rather than Christianity’s total cosmological replacement of the local, important indigenous meta-persons are incorporated (even if demonised) within the universal. The transformations and tensions involved therefore lead – at least sometimes – to questions of competing moralities involving the hierarchical prioritisation of different meta-persons, powers or experiences.

Finally, one wonders what would happen if the local moral cosmo-ontological system were to be entirely replaced or destroyed. Would the seasons and harvests falter and people die from sickness or possession by evil spirits? Would community and kin be torn asunder by infighting or the malice of slighted ancestors? Or, as Robbins (2005a, 2005b) has asked for the Urapmin, if, in such an entanglement, nothing at all happened, would Christianity expand to fill the gap, thus proving the ultimate power of the infinite and global over the finite, bounded and local? Such an area of inquiry

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Further, see Piot (1999: 189), who notes that ‘the Kabre do not have a category of that which is “natural”. Indeed, the most apparently natural of processes... are thought to be dependent on the operations of spirits and on processes that are social and cultural through and through’.

seems an interesting line of flight for future research to explore. After all, as the Comaroffs have argued, 'the dialectics of encounter [are] far from straightforward' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 277).

## APPENDIX ONE: FIGURES

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Fig. 1: Saint Cecilia's Roman Catholic Chapel, Lawaci Boma, December 2013



Fig. 2: The front entrance of the Church of Christ church in Lagi Boma, November 2013



Fig. 3: King George being presented some chickens by a woman in Palotaka, June 2014



Fig. 4: The African Inland Church (AIC) in Lagi Boma, Christmas morning 2013



Fig. 5: The Atebi River from the south side of the river during the wet season, May 2014



Fig 6: The bridge across the River Atebi. A new bridge has since been built and then destroyed by flooding. Note the MTN Communications tower in background, November 2013



Fig. 7: Ocen Augustine Gideon, *Rwot Kwaro pa Ywaya* (hereditary chief of Pajok) wearing the *jami ker* (royal things) of his position (ostrich feather headdress, leopard skin cloak, wooden shield, royal spear) with his wife in the background, November 2014



Fig. 8: Remnants of building in Lagi *Boma* destroyed during the SPLA attack in 1989, February 2014



Fig. 9: Obwoya (on the right) with a group of women during an interview, Pajok *Boma*, March 2014



Fig. 10: Abuba Angela, with David and Grace's new baby, Aleng Sunday, November 2013



Fig 11: Our host and brother, David, with Aleng one year later, Lawaci Boma, November 2014



Fig. 12: Abednego Obedmot, as I remember him best: smiling and curious, Caigon *Boma*, July 2014



Fig. 13: The sign at the roadside in front of Abednego's home, Caigon *Boma*, March 2014



Fig 14: Attendees at the missionary training workshop, Lawaci *Boma*. Christine is standing third from the right at the front, August 2014



Fig. 15: The flood which destroyed the Atebi bridge, September 2014



Fig 16: Bobi lineage elder, John Odoic, at a meeting of the *Kal Kwaro* (council of elders), July 2014



Fig. 17: The author with Kaliman Toyi, *lagwoko* or guardian of the Bobi *kac* or lineal shrine. The shrine can be seen behind us (Fig. 18), November 2014. Photo by Obwoya Patrick Mariako Paul



Fig. 18: *Kac* (lineal shrine) with *Ot Jogi* (*jok* houses) of the Bobi lineage, Lawaci *Boma*, November 2014



Fig. 19: The Legion of Mary begin the dancing at the *lyel* (funeral) in Chapter 5, September 2014



Fig. 20: The main church choir leads worship during Christmas Day service, AIC Lagi, December 2013



Fig. 21: Burial taking place during a Church of Christ led funeral service, Pajok Boma, July 2014



Fig. 22: A sermon taking place at a Catholic church led burial, Lawaci Boma, July 2014



Fig 23: Jerrycans of *kwete* (sorghum beer) and bottles of *aregi* (cassava or maize spirit) ready to be given to the assembled mourners after an African Inland Church funeral, Caigon Boma, June 2014



Fig. 24: Detail of the print on the headscarves of the Legion of Mary, September 2014



Fig. 25: Anek, foreground, leads the singing during a Church of Christ burial, Pajok Boma, July 2014



Fig. 26: A selection of *adungu*, Pajok Payam, June 2014



Fig. 27: St Andrews, AIC Caigon. The old church (right) was destroyed in Anyanya II, August 2014



Fig. 28: Pastor Charles Nyeko of AIC Caigon leading prayer during a funeral, Caigon *Boma*, June 2014



Fig, 29: 'Home', God's Tender Mercy. This is the living compound during a children's lesson part of a wider Bible workshop. Marie is standing to the right with Jeff in front, Lawaci *Boma*, October 2013



Fig. 30: God's Tender Mercy nursery school compound, Lawaci *Boma*, October 2014



Fig. 31: The just-completed GTM church building, during the GTM Bible workshop, October 2014



Fig. 32: The 2014 GTM Bible workshop team and family members, Lawaci *Boma*, October 2014



Fig. 33: Christine leads the women in song, GTM Bible workshop, Lawaci *Boma*, October 2014

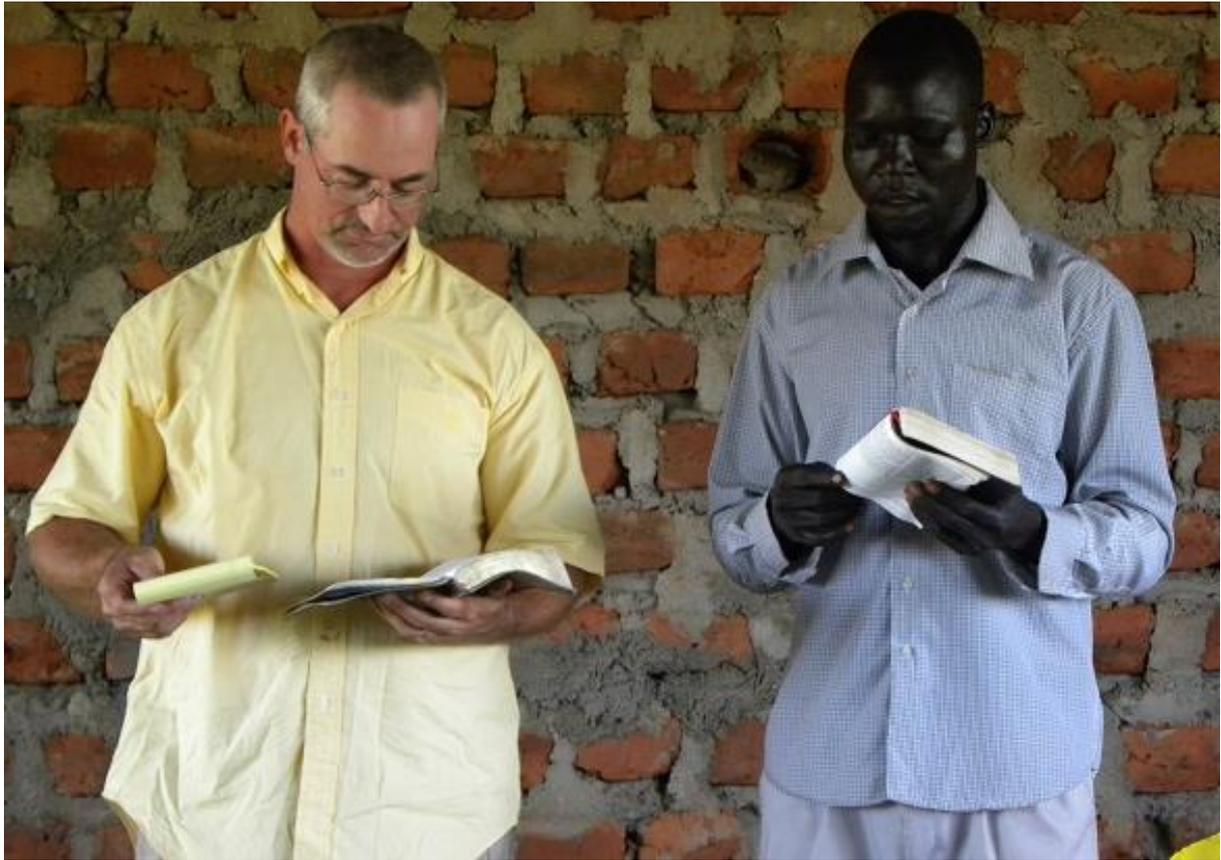


Fig. 34: Russell (left) teaching Colossians 3 while David translates, GTM workshop, Lawaci, Oct. 2014



Fig. 35: Big George in mid-flow, GTM Bible workshop, Lawaci *Boma*, October 2014



Fig. 36: 'Omworogwana', elder of the Kapa lineage, at home in Lawaci *Boma*, May 2014



Fig. 37: Batista Ocuki, elder of the Bura lineage, at home in Lagi *Boma*, March 2014



Fig. 38: Constantino Otim in conversation during a meeting of the *Kal Kwaro* (council of elders), Lawaci *Boma*, February 2014

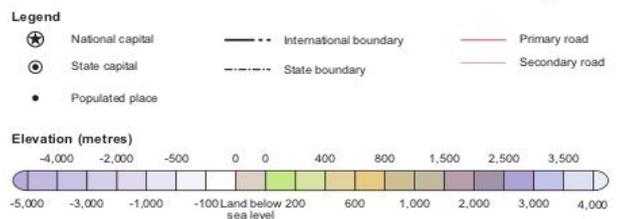
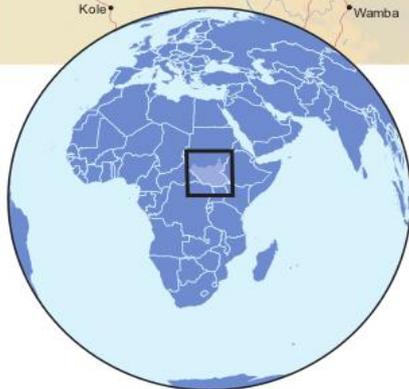
## APPENDIX TWO: MAPS

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Map 1: South Sudan in relation to other African countries

# SOUTH SUDAN - Reference Map



Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Map data sources: CIA/US, United Nations Cartographic Section, ESRI, Europa Technologies, UNMAS. Date: 19 May 2011.

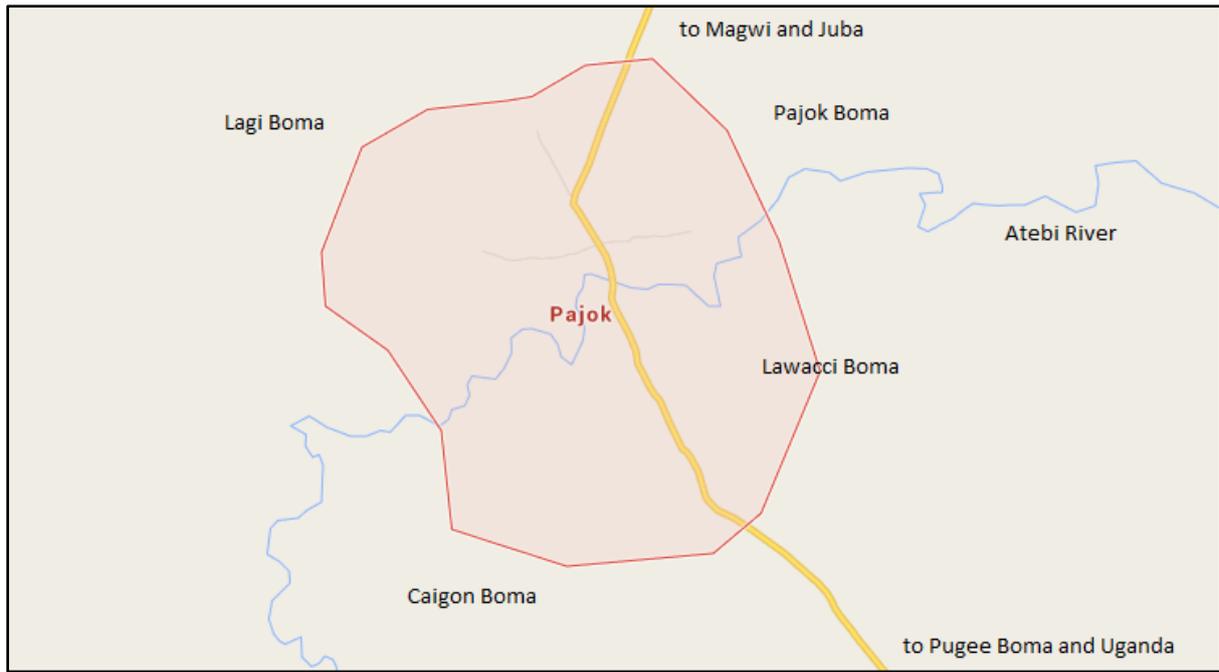
Map 2: South Sudan reference map, showing major South Sudanese and surrounding communities. Note Pajok (south of Magwi) is missing (map by Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).



Map 3: Pajok (A) in South Sudan



Map 4: Pajok in relation to surrounding communities and countries



Map 5: Map of Pajok centre, indicating *Bomas*

## APPENDIX THREE: NARRATING THE HISTORY OF PAJOK

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Although the passing of time and the effects of war have led to a significant decline in the quality of early histories available to the oral historian in Pajok, as well as the number of people who can give any form of authoritative account of these histories, what follows is the attempted aggregation of the various narratives about the different people and lineages of contemporary Pajok, tracing the historical direction and time period at which they entered into different sections of their migration journey, and particularly how they arrived at their current location with their present demographic composition. Due to research limitations, what is presented might be considered the minimal possible reconstruction of these migrations, and bears many of the usual problems associated with using oral traditions as narratives (Allen 1991a; Campbell 2006).<sup>278</sup> Nonetheless, as Vansina (1971: 458, 464; see also Atkinson 2010; Vansina 1980, 1985) has argued, 'it is therefore no longer a question of whether oral traditions should be used. They are. ... Much of what they have to say no other voice can tell'.

Because of these research limitations, the account presented is still unnecessarily monologic in character, bearing all the hallmarks of a legitimating narrative (Feierman 1974) for the royal Ywaya group of lineages. This is the unfortunate effect of Pajok's recent troubled history as well as the social, cultural and political ramifications of coming of stranger-kings (Sahlins 1987) in its deeper historical past. Nonetheless, the account given still adds an important layer and direction to the historical record of the peoples, communities, clans and movements of this region. It is also the first step in a promise I made the community of Pajok, a promise to record, write, and publish their history, so that 'the youth and children of Pajok' will come to know their history better. After all, many of the elders who narrated these stories said they will soon be dead, and then it will be much more difficult to reconstruct Pajok's early history.

In many ways, what follows builds off Ron Atkinson's (1989; 2010) work on the origins of Acholi ethnicity by expanding the dominant components of Atkinson's Ugandan Acholi analyses into the Acholi of South Sudan, research Atkinson always meant to undertake but was unable to begin due to the various wars in the region (Atkinson, pers. comm.). Thus, I hope this is also a tentative first step towards the beginnings of a more complete and encompassing understanding of Acholi history.

Therefore, although what follows is a brief if singular and monologic Pajok migration narrative – what Marc Bloch (1954: 61) might call a 'narrative tradition consciously intended to inform' – I have tried

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<sup>278</sup> For the differences between oral history as a series of first-hand recollections and oral tradition as 'narratives and descriptions of people and events in the past which have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations' (Tosh 1984: 172), see Atkinson (2010), Cohen (1989), Tosh (1984) and Vansina (1980, 1985).

to do due diligence to the necessarily heterogeneous nature of the early coming of people into the area which is now known as Pajok by also attempting to give the following information: which areas different groups might have come through; who they might have interacted with on the way; and when and how they came to 'own' (guard or protect might be better words) the local landscape. Further, I provide lists indicating the various interpretations I received about the following: which lineages came from where and were in which areas first; which lineages were already around the Pajok area when the main migration arrived; and who the *logwoko* (guardians) of various *jogi* or *tim* (hunting land) are considered to be. Taken together, these go some way towards providing an account of recent history in the area, as well as the first step towards a more accurate depiction of a deeper, less well known history. These accounts have been compiled from a selection of over twenty semi-structured interviews with more than 30 elderly men and women in Pajok, in which over two thirds of Pajok's twenty three lineages were represented.

The narrative evidence suggests there are three basic levels of historical accuracy in the accounts given. The first I call the 'deep mythological past', where no real evidence seems to connect people in Pajok to the places mentioned. While not saying these narratives are untrue, they are certainly the stuff of myth and legend rather than history *per se*. It is within this period that the origin narrative of Pajok is always placed (see Chapter 3). Second I call 'likely ancestral movements'. To some extent, this narrative level does connect with places which actually exist, with those connections being more specific (both in time and place, as well as intergroup interaction) than the previous level. Many accounts of this period are still hazy or contradictory, but with aggregation a certain coherency can be found. Third, is the 'remembered past'. This is the past that can be almost certainly be accounted for. Most elderly people have no problem giving a coherent and consistent historical narrative of these events and peoples, and can sometimes give dates or link them to persons, events, or lineage interactions.

Following is my reconstruction of Pajok's past, in chronological order from the depths of history to the present:

### The 'deep mythological past'

#### Anuak/Shilluk/Lokoro/Lafun

Almost all accounts say Pajok originated in Anuak, with some moving on to Shilluk or Lokoro. The accounts which do not trace origin to Anuak place the origin in Lokoro itself. Only some few accounts specifically mention Lafun, with some of these calling the place Lokoro/Lafun.

I am unsure how much reality these locations hold. Although Anuak (or Shilluk, which is sometimes given instead) is commonly given as the origin point for the Luo migration in many academic sources (Allen 1987, 1991a; Atkinson 2010; Campbell 2006; Crazzolaro 1938, 1950; Onyango-Odongo & Webster 1976a, 1976b; Ogot 1967; Pellegrini 1963), beyond this basic level it simply seems speculation. Moreover, as the majority of the lineages who now comprise the wider Acholi were of Central Sudanic or Eastern Nilotic rather than Luo origin, such a beginning point begs the question of where the non-Luo (and non-political elite) majority originate. In Pajok, such narratives may simply be a means of relating the validity and legitimacy of the ruling Ywaya lineages. In its present orientation, it certainly seems that the name Anuak/Shilluk is politically-legitimizing for the Ywaya/Luo chiefdom. Interestingly, some people also say Ywaya were the first people in Pajok, which is almost certainly untrue. However, everyone saying this is from Ywaya.

### Uganda

Uganda is always mentioned, but rarely are specific places given for earlier migrations. If a place is named, it tends to be Soroti or Lake Victoria, likely linking the Pajok-Acholi-Luo with the Kenyan Luo, *a la* Crazzolaro (1950), Onyango-Odongo and Webster (1976a, 1976b), Ogot (1967) and Pellegrini (1963). Allen (1991a) has also previously noted the tendency for educated Acholi to reproduce the well-known lineages and histories of early historians of Acholi.

### Likely ancestral movements

#### First layer

Berlobo, Apul, Ayoka, Nyimur, Padwanya, Loremu, Got Alingwari, Got Adodi, Lotutu, Olima, Awenolwey, Tyendyong, Nyamacora, Apuk

As presented above, these places are given in the usual order in which they are provided by my interlocutors (none of whom related them all, and many of which are contradictory and fragmented). They are all places mentioned as being part of the migration tradition of Pajok through northern Uganda before the Pajok people 'turned back north to Sudan', the variation in which could be accounted for by one of several factors: 1) they are different names for the same places, a common enough occurrence in Acholi. This could be due to different lineages giving these places different names (either because Acholi names are generally event specific or because they were named by before different lineages amalgamated). Likewise, it may reflect the different linguistic origins of

different lineages (i.e. Luo, Nilotic, Sudanic); 2) They may be different places entirely, reflecting the pre-amalgamation histories and migrations of different lineages; 3) They may be somewhat fictional, reflecting different narrative traditions, especially as relating to famous or important lineage leaders.

#### Got Agu, Got Akwera, and Got Lalak

After this first layer of Ugandan movements, a long but confusing list of northern Ugandan mountains (*Got*), the migration narrative finally reaches a place I might be tempted to call ‘the nearly very real’. These are three mountains in the Agoro ranges in northern Uganda, very close to the location which Atkinson (2010: 184) determines to be ‘the area of the emergence of the northernmost Acholi chiefdom of Pajok’ in the ‘late seventeenth century’, and are therefore probably close to the last places the Pajok chiefdom settled in Uganda before returning north. Or, perhaps more likely, somewhere among these places is probably where the confluence of various lineages came together under the Luo-speaking Ywaya to form the beginnings of a new polity that later came to be known as Pajok. Indeed, Crazzolara (1950: 80-81, emphasis in original) notes that when the *La Mwoo* people arrived in the area of Pajok around 1760, ‘they found there the *Jo-Pagaya* with other groups at *got Agu*’.<sup>279</sup> As with any chronology of events at this time, the details and dates of such occurrences should be treated with caution.

One thing which does seem important, however, is the locations themselves. As Southall noted in reference to the oral traditions of two other Luo-speaking peoples, the Alur of western Uganda and the Kenyan Luo, ‘their recollections of the past take on a quite different quality with reference to events which occurred before and after the moment when they passed some striking physical barrier or landmark and entered their present territory’ (Southall 2004: 148). Thus, although some narratives change the order around, these feature are all mentioned by the vast majority of respondents, with at least one of them being mentioned by everyone.

These mountains are the point where the likely ancestral past becomes the remembered past. This is indicated by the fact that many people can trace *Rwot Anyoda* (see Appendix 3) to one or more of these places, and especially to the final movement of Pajok from Ugandan into Sudanese territory. They are also places where several people say some of Pajok’s lineages actually originate from, potentially indicating the pre-amalgamation origins of these lineages, or at least a Sudanic or Eastern Nilotic rather than Luo origin. Finally, they are also places where ancestors are often said to have lived

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<sup>279</sup> It should be noted that, as well as the specific clan itself, Crazzolara (1950) generally refers to the entire area of Acholi South Sudan by the term *Pajook/Pa-Jook*, including the now-independent clans of Agooro, Amica, Lobone, Lomarati, Magwii Obbo, Omeeo, Paloaar, and Panyikwara (all sic).

or came from, and towards which some Pajok lineages continue to have *lagwoko* status toward the *tim* or particular *jogi* who live there, likely indicating their status as *wegi ngom* or ‘fathers of the soil’ of these areas. This seems to agree with the observations of Grove (1919: 172), who states that among Sudanese Acholi in the early twentieth century, the chief was

The master of the people and the rain and the leader in war, but he is not the owner of the land. In all villages there is as well as the chief the *wum ngom* [sic] or owner of the land, who has no authority but has to be consulted in all questions... and who is responsible for propitiating the various spirits of the country. He is probably the last survival of the original inhabitants from whom the country was conquered.

Interestingly, a *ladit* who the community views as very reliable mentions the reason people left this area was the arrival of many Ugandans. It is not known whether or not there was warfare between them. However, it could very well be that, as Atkinson (2010) suggests, the expanding Padibe chiefdom arrived in this area in the early 19th Century, forcing the smaller Pajok chiefdom northwards.

### Limu

Limu is an unknown and perhaps seasonal river, possibly the Nyimur, and is regarded by the Pajok community as the ‘real’ border between Ugandan and South Sudanese Acholi communities, as well as the ‘real’ southern limit of Pajok’s hunting and cultivating land.

## The ‘remembered past’

### Ololweny

A mountain near the Atebi but to the west of the current location of Pajok, the exact circumstances of Pajok’s arrival in and claims of ownership over Ololweny are somewhat incoherent and contradictory. Nonetheless, all accounts are certain that this was the first ‘proper’ location of a named and known Pajok clan residing somewhere near their present position and, seemingly, may have been their last and preferred settling place if they had not been forced to move by the British around 1910 (see below).

Some people say Obbo gave Ololweny to Pajok as compensation for help in a war. The opponents on this war have been variously referred to as ‘Pajule’, ‘people from Uganda’, ‘Iriwe’, and ‘Imurok’ (a people apparently from near Lotuko). Others say Obbo gave the area to Pajok as blood payment for a conflict perhaps around 1820, and others that although the land did once belong to Obbo, it now

belongs to Pajok because they have lived there for nearly 100 years. Such an estimate would roughly approximate with the dates of both wars with Obbo: that in 1820 as well as that leading to Pajok's removal from Ololweny in 1910.

It is unlikely Obbo would have given Pajok full ownership rights to Ololweny for their help in some conflict, although temporary cultivation, hunting, or settlement rights seem reasonable. One reason such an exchange seems unlikely is that the Pajok community disputes Ugandan claims to the land between the border and the Nyimur river over the fact the Lokung community say they were given that land as reparation for a hunting-related death. However, people in Pajok argue that such land is inalienable and 'cannot just be given away', especially not for a blood debt. Nonetheless, it may be that Obbo either gave Pajok temporary rights over Ololweny upon their arrival around 1820, or that Pajok took those rights by force. Either way, it seems reasonable to suggest that the feelings of animosity this created between the two Chiefdoms led, over time, to Pajok's second war with Obbo in 1909 (Allen 1991a).

Further, although there is disagreement over whether Anyoda or his son Oceng Lokwo was *Rwot* when Pajok settled at Ololweny, everyone was certain it was Oceng who was *Rwot* during the 1909 war. If so, and if Pajok did arrive somewhere in the first half of the 19th Century as seems most likely, it seems improbable that Oceng was *Rwot* at the time of arrival. Therefore I propose Anyoda was *Rwot* at the time Pajok arrived in Ololweny. This not only agrees with the estimation that Anyoda was *Rwot* while Pajok was still in the northern Ugandan hills, but also suggests Anyoda was probably the *Rwot* around whom the very first incipient Pajok Chiefdom arose in its (mostly) current form. If so, I believe that this emergent Pajok chiefdom could well be dated to the last decade of the 1700s or first two decades of the 1800s, perhaps coinciding with the famine/drought which is mythologised in the legend of Pajok's origin (Chapter 3).

### Got Polila

The movement from Ololweny to Polila was almost certainly the result of punitive sanctions imposed by the British after the 1909 war between Pajok and Obbo (Allen 1991a). Almost everyone I spoke with, particularly the oldest men, noted 'the British forced us to move to Polila as a punishment'. If so, Pajok seems to have arrived at Got Polila around 1910, agreeing with most estimates that the community spent twenty years in Polila before moving on again. For the purposes of heuristic simplification, this reference to Polila includes the places 'Loti' and 'Lawinyodong' also mentioned by some people, which are very definitely different areas on Got Polila cultivated by different lineages at this time.

### Ayaci

Seemingly originally owned by the Koyo lineage of Obbo, Pajok moved from Got Polila to Ayaci sometime between 1928 and 1932. It is generally accepted that Pajok lived in Ayaci for seven to ten years before moving again, this time to the banks of the Atebi. This movement was due to a combination of a lack of water and an outbreak of *ayoo* (measles).

### Atebi

The community arrived in their current location in 1939/40 (although two people say 1942). Originally called 'Awilokilee', and now simply referred to as 'Pajok'. It seems the name of the present site, like many in Acholi in general, reflects the chiefdom who owns the area rather than the name of the place itself. The community's arrival was seemingly 'helped by the British', and the current site has been termed 'the last home of the people of Pajok'. It is also virtually certain that Oceng Lokwo was still the Rwot at this time.

## Lineages of Pajok, and their possible origins

This appendix provides some basic information relating to the original groups living in and around the plains and hills on the south bank of the Atebi when the main Ywaya-led migration to the region arrived. It is the amalgamation of these original inhabitants with the incoming people which led to the current demographic configuration of Pajok. Some information is also provided info about where the different lineages are said to have originated from or where their 'traditional lands' are located. The twenty-three lineages are:

1. Ayu
2. Biti
3. Bobi
4. Bura
5. Kapa
6. Kwacanyoro
7. Lamogi
8. Obwoltoo
9. Oyeri
10. Pagaya
11. Paliyo

12. Palyec
13. Pamuda
14. Panto
15. Panyigiri
16. Patanga
17. Patenge
18. Patoko
19. Toro
20. Ywaya bel Maja
21. Ywaya Katum
22. Ywaya La Moo
23. Ywaya pa Rwot

When asked who the first people in Pajok were, those respondents who claimed to know said:

- Ayu (4 times), Biti (7 times), Bobi (7 times), Kapa (3 times), Pagaya (6 times), Paliyo (3 times), Palyec (once), Panto (3 times), Patenge (twice), and Ywaya (3 times, but all by Ywaya people).

Further, the following lineages are said to come from the following places (all in Uganda unless otherwise noted):

- Ayu from Palabek;
- Biti from Got Apuk (in the Agoro/Imatong range) or Uganda;
- Bobi from Logot (the source of the Atebi);
- Bura from Pakwa, Cura or Paiyere;
- Kapa from Palabek or Paiyere;
- Pagaya from Got Akwera;
- Paliyo from Got Akwera;
- Ywaya from Lokoro near Anuak or Shilluk.

These came as part of the following lists (all but two by different people):

- An elder of Patanga noted the following were the original migrants in the eastern Luo stream: Biti, Bobi, Pagaya, Paliyo, Patanga.

- An Ayu elder said Ayu, Biti, Pagaya, Panto 'have always been here' (nearby Pajok's current location).
- An Obwoltoo elder said Biti, Kapa, Pagaya, Paliyo were 'found' when 'the others' (likely the Ywaya-led migration) came to the area.
- A Panto elder said Ayu, Biti, Bobi, Kapa, Pagaya, Patenge, Palyec, Panto were already in the area around Pajok already when the Ywaya-led migration arrived.
- An elder of Bura said that Biti, Bobi, Kapa, Paliyo, Panto were 'living away from the others' (i.e. not part of the main Pajok community) when Langalanga (Delme-Radcliffe) arrived in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- This same elder noted that Biti, Bura, Pagaya, Paliyo, Patenge all lost land when the current international border between South Sudan and Uganda was demarcated, indicating they were probably settled further south of their current location.
- Moreover, the land called Bore (the south bank of the river Atebi) was called the *tim* of Bobi by five people and specifically contrasted with the north side of the river which belonged to the Obbo lineage, Koyo.

## APPENDIX FOUR: *RWOT* LIST FOR PAJOK

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What follows is the likely list of known and nameable hereditary and government chiefs in Pajok's recent past. These chiefs have given separate lists as it is my contention that the 1909/10 imprisonment of Oceng led to an important divergence in the position of the Chiefship, not only weakening the power of the *Rwot* but also leading to a differentiation in ritual (hereditary chief) and administrative and judicial (government chief) roles. In what seems a classic example of colonial British divide-and-conquer manoeuvrings, this was achieved by briefly removing Oceng and replacing him with his brother Jakaliya, effectively splitting the lines of hereditary and government chief along different (lineal) branches of the royal Ywaya *dogola*. Government chiefs are only given up until the outbreak of the Second Sudanese War, when the chronology not only becomes confused, but, with the refugee experience of the majority of community residents at that time, their roles became negligible.

### Likely List of 'traditional' or 'ancestral' *Rwodi*:

#### Anyoda

Earliest still-known and named *Rwot*. Is largely felt to be responsible for the Ywaya-led movement from Uganda to Ololweny and thus perhaps the originator of the Pajok chiefdom as it is currently known. No one seems to be able to name his father or predecessor. It is likely he died in the last two decades of 1800s.

#### Oceng Lokwo

The son of Anyoda. A strong and important chief and powerful rainmaker (*Rwot Kot*). He is the first name mentioned by anyone talking about Pajok *Rwodi*. He is also the first *Rwot* many of Pajok's oldest people have memories of actually seeing. Responsible for the 1909 war with Obbo, after which he was imprisoned by the British and replaced with his brother, Jakaliya/Jakariya, who was likely the first government appointed chief (*Rwot pa Gamente*, see below). After his return from prison, he claimed the *Rwotship* back, although perhaps only through violence, after which he and his brother were said to hate each other and 'refused to live together'. He remained *Rwot* until the people of Pajok moved to their current location on the Atebi. A date of late 1940s is given for his death, but, although not impossible, this seems quite late.

### Gideon Ogwok

Son of Oceng Lokwo, probable father of Lobokey and Oceng Augustine (the current *Rwot*, below). Not much is known or remembered about him except he continued the tradition of also being *Rwot Kot* and he may have been a weak or disappointing chief. Some people associate problems with his rule as the reason the British systematised the position of Head Chief in 1944, thus officially replacing the traditional and hereditary chiefly system with a colonial administration-appointed system. However, this was almost certainly a local understanding of a wider Condominium decision which, in Pajok, probably simply rationalised the already extant government chief as institution (see above). He is said to have been the *Rwot* throughout the majority of the First Sudanese War (1955-1972).

### Opio Lobokey

Also known as Tangaro/Olaa/Oceng, but in such a way that the variation in names points to the same individual (i.e. Lobokey Tangaro, Oceng Lobokey, Oceng Tangaro *et cetera*). Died in early 2013. He was the older brother of Oceng Augustine, the current *Rwot*, and probably son of Gideon Ogwok. Generally accepted as being *Rwot* during Second Sudanese War (1982-2005). A powerful *Rwot Kot*.

### Oceng Augustine Gideon

The current *Rwot* and brother of Lobokey. Together the brothers jointly held *Rwodi* positions after their return from exile in 2008, with Ocen acting as ritual and judicial *Rwot Kwaro* (head of the *Kal Kwaro*, or council of elders), while Lobokey remained *Rwot Kot* until his death in 2013, after which time Ocen took over this position also.

## Likely list of 'government' or 'head' chiefs up to the Second Sudanese War

### Jakaliya

The son of Anyoda and brother of Oceng Lokwo, becoming '*Rwot*' with Oceng's 1909 imprisonment following war with Obbo. He was explicitly never a rain chief and some people definitively call him a government chief. Almost certainly removed from at least some of his powers with Oceng's release from prison (date unknown), although it is likely that chiefly authority was split along the lines suggested above. More likely is that there was a community-wide disagreement over who should be *Rwot*, which Oceng won, perhaps based on principles of legitimacy, perhaps because Jakaliya is said to be a thoroughly unpleasant man (although this could be a post-facto assessment), perhaps because

of Jakaliya's government ties. Following this disagreement, Jakaliya and his supporters settled north of the river, which until that point was used only for cultivation.

#### Owit

The first 'official' government chief, appointed in 1944. A former policeman from Juba, Owit was given the post after his retirement. Owit is the first government chief most people remember.

#### Obwoya Lakul

The son of Jakaliya and the beginning of a hereditary government chief position, one which cements the alternate Ywaya lineage as a 20th century power in Pajok.

#### Severino

Although not a government chief in Pajok, he was apparently appointed Paramount Chief in Magwi in the early 1950s. Brother of Obwoya Lakul, above, Severino was also the son of Jakaliya.

#### Dorteyo

Son of Severino, he was Head Chief following Obwoya and then removed to Magwi to take over the position of Paramount Chief following Severino's death. He died in Juba in the mid-1980s.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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African Inland Church	AIC
African Inland Mission	AIM
Church of Christ	COC
Comprehensive Peace Agreement	CPA
Eastern Equatoria State	EES
Evangelical Free Church	EFC
Evangelical Lutheran Church	ELC
God's Tender Mercy	GTM
Justice and Security Research Programme	JSRP
Living Christ Ministries	LCM
Lord's Resistance Army	LRA
Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic Christian(ity)	PECC
Seventh Day Adventist	SDA
Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army	SPLA
Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army	SPLM/A
Ugandan Peoples' Defence Force	UPDF

## GLOSSARY

Abila	Ancestral shrine; similar to <i>kac</i>
Abuba	Grandmother or old woman in 'Juba Arabic'
Adaa	Grandmother
Adungu	Traditional Acholi stringed instrument
Ajaya	Gourd rattle used by <i>ajwaki</i> to 'call' <i>jogi</i>
Ajwaka (sing.)/Ajwaki (pl.)	Diviner, spirit medium, witchdoctor
Anyim pe Gene	Lit. 'Do not trust what is ahead, do not trust in tomorrow'
Apwoyo Rubanga	Thank you God
Aregi	Cassava-based distilled spirit
Atimo pe Akaka	Doing something without intention
Awola	Poison
Ayoo	Measles
Ayweya	Troublesome spirits usually connected to environmental features
Bal	Lit. 'spoil', connotes sin, wrongdoing of a personal nature
Bed	Rest, stay, sit
Bin	Come
Bodaboda	Motorcycle
<i>Boma</i>	The level of government between a village and a <i>Payam</i>
Bor	Long, far, distant
Catan (sing.)/Catani (pl.)	Demon, devil. Obvious indigenisation of Christian 'Satan'
Cek Acholi Macon	Lit. 'the laws, rules or regulations of the Acholi of long ago'
Cen	Vengeance ghost
Ceng	Sun, also day
Cwii	Wet season
Cwiny	Lit. 'liver' although usually translated 'heart', the site of emotion
Cwiny Macol	A 'black or dark liver/heart'
Cwiny Marac	A 'bad or wicked liver/heart'
Dano	People
Dano ma Loki	Shapechangers, shapeshifters
Diki	Tomorrow

Dini	Religion, or more accurately, monotheistic religion
Diro	Powers, skills, talents
Dogola	Lineage/lineage
Dwe	Moon
Gang	Family, home, village
Got	Mountain
Gum Marac	Bad luck
Jami Ker	Things/Symbols of authority of a Rwot
Jok (sing.)/Jogi (pl.)	God, power, spirit; often connected to particular places or people
Jok Malo	'Jok Who Is Up'
Jok Polo	'Jok of the Sky/Heaven'
Kabedo i Jogi	'The places where the jogi stay', <i>ot jogi</i>
Kac	Lineal shrine; similar to <i>abila</i>
Kaka	Clan
Kal Kwaro	Ancestral council/Council of elders/Traditional council
Kanista	Church, as in congregation
Kare ki Kwero	'time of celebration' or customary ritual
Kare Kwaro Macon	'The time of the ancestors of long ago'
Kare Macon	Time of long ago, Olden days, the Acholi 'Golden Age'
Katoli	Roman Catholic
Kelo Otoo	Bring death
Kiir	Taboo, wrongdoing of a social or relational nature
Kiro	Lit. 'Spraying', scattering sacrificial remains around a ritual site
Kom	Body, also chair
Kombedi	Now
Kongo	Beer
Kot	Rain, rainstone
Kulu	River
Kwang	Curse of a general nature using moral power
Kwaro	Ancestor, elder, grandfather
Kwer	Lineal food taboo
Kwero	Celebrate, conduct ritual. Similar to <i>pako</i>
Kwete	Sorghum beer

Kweyo	Sand
Kwo Manyen	Lit. 'new life', a Born Again
La-	The personification of an attribute (so <i>dit</i> , 'big', becomes ' <i>ladit</i> ')
Laa	Saliva
Ladit (sing.)/Lodito (pl.)	Big man, elder, old man/Big men, elders
Lagam Aadaa	'True' or real answers, the truth
Lagwoko (sing.)/logwoko (pl.)	Guardian of a <i>jok</i> , shrine or tradition
Lajok (sing.)/Lojok (pl.)	Witch or wizard
Lam	Curse from a socially close person using moral power
Lapoya	Lit. 'a mad person', someone suffering a mental illness
Latal (sing.)/Lotal (pl.)	Nightdancer
Latin (sing.)/Lotino (pl.)	Child/children, baby/babies
Layat (sing.)/Loyat (pl.)	Poisoner or sorcerer
Lega	Prayer
Lobo	Earth, ground, connotes 'place'
Lobo Catani	Land of Demons
Lobo Dano	Place of people
Lobo Mokene	Lit. 'The other place', connotes the place where other people live
Lobong	Lineage (in Uganda). Potentially 'slave' in South Sudan
Lok	Words, speaking
Lok Anii	Gossip or rumours
Lok Goba	Lies
Lok Maleng/Maber	Holy or good words, the Word of God
Lok Macol/Marac	Dark or bad words, demonic words
Lok Yoo	'Words of the road', an everyday term for gossip or rumour
Lubo	Tracing or following
Luk	Preliminary marriage transactions
Lum	Bush, grass
Lworo	Fear
Lyel	Funeral
Macol	Black, dark, connotes bad or evil
Mako	To catch something (like when fishing)
Malo	Up, above

Malo Lobo	Above the earth, the sky or heavens
Marac	Bad, evil, wicked
Maro	Mother-in-law
Matatu	Minivan taxi
Mato Oput	'To drink the bitter root', a form of reconciliation ritual
Mego (sing.)/Megi (pl.)	Old woman/women
Min	Mother
Miyo Goyo Laa	Lit. 'beat you with saliva', give a blessing
Munu (sing.)/Muni (pl.)	White person/white people
Mwoc	Praise name
Mwony Laa	Swallow saliva
Myel	Dance/dancing
Ngom	Soil
Ngweng	Flying ant, a type of termite which swarms around April
Nyeko	Envy, jealousy
Nyelo	Python
Omera	Brother
Oro	Dry season
Ot (sing.)/Odi (pl.)	Hut, generally made of mudbrick and grass thatch
Ot Jok (sing.)/Jogi (pl.)	House of <i>jok</i> , place where <i>jok</i> comes to eat
Ot Lum	Grass-roofed hut
Otoli	Warrior dance
Otum	Ended, finished, connotes spiritual death
Oyoo	Field rat
Pako	Worship. Similar to <i>kwero</i>
<i>Payam</i>	The level of government between a <i>Boma</i> and a County
Pe Atir	'not right/true'
Peny Matek	Difficult questions
Pii	Water, also small river or stream
Piny	Climate, environment, surroundings; down, ground; abdomen
Polo	Sky, Heaven
Posho	Maize-flour bread
Poyo	Remember

Rac	Bad, wrong
Rogo	Magical acts, similar to a curse
Rubanga	God
Rwot	Chief, King
Rwot Jok Madit	Demon King, Biggest Chief of Jogi
Rwot Kot	Rain Chief
Rwot Kot Madit	'Big Rainmaker' or 'Chief of the Rainmakers'
Rwot Kwaro	Hereditary chief
Rwot pa Gamente	Government appointed chief
Te Pii	Underwater, the demon realm, see lobo catani
Tek Kwaro	Ancestral custom or tradition
Tek Kwaro me Acholi	The ancestral traditions of the Acholi
Tic Acholi	Acholi work or ritual
Tipu	Ghost, shade, shadow, spirit, soul
Tipu pa Dano	Spirits or ghosts of people generally
Tipu pa Kwaro	Spirits or ghosts of lineal ancestors
Tipu pa Woro	Spirits needing respect, connotes <i>kwaro</i>
Tim	Wild, wilderness, hunting area
Too/Otoo	Death, die
Twol	Snake
Wan Myero Loki ki Rubanga	Lit. 'you must talk with God', the need for daily prayer
Wang Jok	Lit. 'Eyes of Jok', shrine or place of sacrifice and residence for <i>jogi</i>
Wegi Ngom	'Fathers of the soil', lineage deemed 'owner of the land'
Weng	Weng
Wi	Head, top, above, over
Wilobo	Above earth, heaven, the firmament, the cosmos
Wilobo Weng	All the things of the cosmos
Woka	Outside
Woka Lobo	Lit. 'Outside the Earth', connotes outside the cosmos/human world
Woro	Greed, selfishness
Woro	Respect
Yamo	Wind
Yat	Tree, wood; Drug, medicine, poison

Yat Munu	Foreign medicine
Yat Twol	Snake medicine
Yee	Lit. 'agree' but often translated as 'believe'
Yel/o	Disturb
Yesu Kristo	Jesus Christ
Yesu Tye	Jesus is there
Yir	Bewitchment arising from jealousy or greed

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